AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Title: Voices of CALYX: Narratives of Feminist Publishing Activism, 1976-2006

Abstract approved:

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This thesis examines the nature of publishing as a political endeavor through a detailed investigation of the feminist publishing movement in the U.S. since the 1970s. Feminist publishers emerged from an activist context of feminist struggle, and they evolved within changing political and social climates, facing ideological and economic challenges that led to their widespread demise. This project specifically traces the emergence and development of CALYX, a feminist literary publisher founded in 1976 in Corvallis, Oregon, and its relationship with the feminist movement. In-depth personal interviews with CALYX editors provide a narrative portrait of CALYX’s history in a feminist context and offer a detailed, personal account of feminist publishing activism.

Using feminist research methodologies, this project highlights the participants’ narratives and focuses on the meanings they give to their experiences. A multi-vocal narrative format allows participants’ stories to be told in their own words and in their unique voices. Their stories give richness and depth to an analysis of CALYX’s feminist mission, accomplishments, and struggles as a feminist publisher.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Feminist Narrative Project</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Position as Feminist Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Feminist Theoretical Paradigm</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHY STUDY FEMINIST PUBLISHING?</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism, Women’s Studies, and Feminist Publishing</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Studies and Feminist Publishing</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Future of Feminism</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEMINISM AND PUBLISHING ACTIVISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Consciousness in Writing and Print</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexism and Discrimination in the Literary World</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of a Feminist Press Movement</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to Feminist Publishing</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Incomplete Feminist Press Record</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH METHODS</strong></td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives on Feminist Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Interviewing and Participatory Research</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOICES OF CALYX: NARRATIVES OF FEMINIST PUBLISHING ACTIVISM</strong></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of CALYX: 1976 to Present</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Literary Lives: Personal Histories of CALYX Editors</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives of CALYX: Achieving a Feminist Publishing Mission</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALYX’s Feminist Publishing Mission</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Publishing Achievements</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling against the Odds: A Feminist Publisher Survives</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Continuing Need for Feminist Publishing</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSIONS</strong></td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDICES</strong></td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Contributors’ Notes</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Interview Questions</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

A Feminist Narrative Project

This project examines the emergence and development of CALYX, a nonprofit feminist literary publisher in Corvallis, Oregon, in relation to the feminist movement contemporary with it. Founded in 1976, CALYX joined an emerging feminist press movement that paralleled feminism’s social and political movements of the time. As one of very few feminist publishers from the 1970s still operating today, CALYX at its thirtieth anniversary embodies a unique moment in feminist publishing history. This project traces CALYX and its relationship with feminism, as both CALYX and the feminist movement evolved, through narratives told by CALYX founders and editors. These narratives emerge from in-depth interviews with some of the founders and editors who helped shape CALYX’s feminist literary mission and publishing accomplishments. Through the stories of their experiences, this project narrates CALYX’s role in feminist publishing history in the voices of the women who made it happen.

CALYX, Inc. is a small, independent publisher of women’s literature, poetry, and art. Physically as well as literarily, CALYX creates a “space” for women’s art and writing to flourish. From the tiny, cramped office in downtown Corvallis, Oregon, each year the organization publishes two issues of its literary journal, *CALYX: A Journal of Art*

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1 Throughout this paper, I use “CALYX” to refer to the publisher as an organization and “CALYX” to refer to the literary journal of the same name, following the publisher’s own format.
and Literature by Women, and, in recent years, one book. Most of the forty books CALYX has published are collections of poetry, but their catalogue also contains novels, short story collections, and creative nonfiction. In both its book publishing and its literary journal, CALYX provides “a forum for all women’s voices,” including “diverse styles, images, issues, and themes which women writers and artists are exploring” (Reaman et al. 176). Books published by CALYX include a statement of the editors’ commitment “to producing books of literary, social, and feminist integrity” (Reaman et al. 176).

Feminism clearly informs CALYX’s literary mission to publish new and diverse women writers, but feminism also shapes the publisher’s organizational structure and day-to-day business practices. CALYX’s collective editorial decision-making process, its extensive community of volunteers, and its culture of caring and cooperation are all manifestations of feminist principles upon which this independent publisher was founded. Working or volunteering with CALYX can be seen as feminist activism in promoting women’s creative efforts that sustain feminist visions for social change. Unfortunately, the publisher’s existence is tenuous due to many ongoing challenges, including cutbacks in federal and state grant money for the arts and widespread changes in the publishing industry. CALYX’s independent, nonprofit, collective business model, dedicated primarily to women’s literary and artistic expression, has been difficult to maintain in a changing publishing world. This project aims to provide a deeper understanding of feminist publishing work and a greater visibility and appreciation of the efforts of feminist publishers like CALYX in order to advocate for their continuing survival.
Questions addressed here explore how CALYX emerged from a feminist context and how the women of CALYX imagined their roles in publishing women’s literature and art in keeping with a feminist vision. Stories told by founders and long-time editors, some of whom also acted as board members and held other positions in the organization, provide “snapshots” that reveal CALYX’s complex and shifting relationship with feminism and with changing political, social, and economic realities. These women’s portrayals of their efforts and successes also provide a vivid account of CALYX’s contributions to literature and art as well as an understanding of how women’s diverse voices can act on our society, culture, and world. This project is not intended as a comprehensive narrative history of CALYX or of feminist publishing since the 1970s, but instead seeks to listen to and share the stories the women of CALYX want to tell.

Many questions remain about how CALYX will adapt further to a changing society and literary economy. This project, by examining and legitimizing moments in CALYX’s past, can perhaps help us come to a better understanding of what the future of feminist publishing may bring.

Using a feminist narrative approach, this project deliberately places at the center of the inquiry the voices and experiences of women who have helped shape CALYX. Although as a writer I retain control over the presentation and analysis of these stories, I offer many of the stories word-for-word in the language of the speakers, to allow their voices to be “heard” by the reader. Analysis of published and unpublished documents by or about CALYX supplements the interviews, in order to provide a richer and more layered account of the work CALYX has done and the ways CALYX has portrayed itself to the public.
I use the terms “feminist publisher” and “feminist press” interchangeably throughout the text to refer to a publishing house that exhibits a political alignment with feminism in its mission and publishing practices. A “women’s publisher” is a feminist publisher that specifically publishes only women’s work. A “radical publisher” or “activist publisher” (or press) refers to a publishing house with a stated mission to promote social change and to challenge the dominant social order through its publishing efforts; these presses may or may not embrace feminist politics. My use of the term “publisher” or “press” furthermore does not distinguish between publishers of periodicals and publishers of books; for my purposes here these two types of publishers can be considered one group. Another term with multiple variations is “the feminist movement.” Although some of my sources use the terms “the women’s movement” or “women’s liberation,” I generally refer to the political and social movement to end sexist discrimination against women as “the feminist movement.” While not always specified as the “second-wave feminist movement,” the feminist movement discussed in this project emerged along with civil rights activism in the U.S. in the 1960s and is distinct from previous feminist movements such as the campaign for women’s suffrage.

**My Position as Feminist Researcher**

Having worked with CALYX since 2003 as an intern, volunteer, and member of the editorial collective (since 2004), I am deeply committed to CALYX’s continuing success. While this project will not directly contribute to CALYX’s material success, I hope that the stories contained here will serve as a tribute to the wonderful work CALYX has produced over the years. This project emerges from my strong identification with
CALYX’s feminist mission and my personal dedication to advocating for women’s literature as an editor, teacher, student, and reader. With this in mind, I envision this project as my way of honoring the women of CALYX, past and present, by giving to them what they have given to so many women writers—a place to tell their stories. This work is heartfelt, and I hope to convey the deepest respect and admiration for these women who have come before me, both as editors and as feminists.

As other editors at CALYX pointed out to me, the women who were involved with CALYX in the early years are not getting any younger. Linda Varsell Smith, an editorial collective member, literally had me by the shoulders one day, saying in her characteristically blunt manner, “We won’t be around forever. You’ve got to get these stories before they’re gone!” The conception of this project, then, is collaborative in that it has developed from many conversations with CALYX editors and with my advisors at Oregon State University. It follows and expands on the thesis Beverly McFarland, now Senior Editor at CALYX, completed in 1989 tracing CALYX’s first twelve years. Beverly’s thesis, “A Portrait of CALYX,” is intended as a history of the early years of CALYX and focuses on documenting CALYX’s organizational practices, editorial process, and publishing achievements.² My project instead focuses on the perspectives and experiences of women who have been involved with CALYX and seeks to hear the meaning they give to those experiences, especially in terms of feminism.

My own feminist development was, as for many of the CALYX editors I talked with, intertwined with my emerging literary sensibilities. As a child I read fiction voraciously, and studying literature in college seemed like a natural extension of that

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² The only publicly available copy of Beverly McFarland’s “A Portrait of CALYX” resides in the Special Collections and University Archives in the Knight Library at the University of Oregon.
passion. I only later became conscious of a lack of feminist role models in my undergraduate education at the University of Puget Sound, since at the time I did not have a consciously articulated feminist viewpoint. Looking back on it, the privilege that surrounded and sheltered me through childhood and college left me minimally inspired to seek out an education in social justice issues. Coming from a highly educated, white, middle-class family and attending a small, elite, and predominately white liberal arts college, I went about my (largely canonical) literary studies with interest and dedication but also with a growing sense of not knowing why I was studying literature. I loved literature—but was that a good enough reason to study it?

One day, a publisher’s note in the back of an assigned book, Daughters of Copper Woman by Anne Cameron, caught my attention. The note reads (I still have it), “Press Gang Publishers is a feminist collective. We publish non-fiction and fiction that challenges traditional assumptions about women in society.” Suddenly, my viewpoint expanded—there was more to the world of literature than I had realized. I was curious to learn more, so I wrote a letter to the address listed, asking for their free catalogue. Weeks later my letter came back to me, undelivered. My tentative web searches turned up nothing about Press Gang’s continuing existence, and I threw the letter away. The disappointment I felt at this experience—a disappointment I still feel—was, I believe, the beginning of my ambition to become a feminist and an editor.

Years later, renewed thoughts of literary editing and of graduate school arose after a series of corporate writing and editing jobs, and I researched internship positions with small literary presses in the Northwest. In a July 2002 application letter I sent to Beverly McFarland, I wrote: “My aspirations are to become a literary editor and I am very
interested in working in a feminist environment.” Up to that point, I had not been part of any feminist groups or even thought of myself as a feminist. I held an internship with CALYX the following spring and began volunteering more extensively that fall when I moved to Corvallis. I helped out in the office, carried boxes of books up and down the stairs, sold books at various events, assisted with fundraising and book promotion, and, the following year, joined the editorial collective. After three years on the editorial collective, I find that immersion in a feminist environment has indeed been as rewarding and enriching as I had hoped. The collective’s weekly communion with each other and with the work of living women writers affirmed my desire to dedicate myself to women’s literature—envisioning “literature” as an inclusive term that includes many non-traditional, non-canonical, and experimental forms of expression. Reading feminist literature, poetry, and theory extensively for the past few years has also radicalized my outlook and has led me to seek more ways to be involved in feminist activism.

As part of a new generation of feminist editors, I am invested in the continuance of feminist publishing and want to advocate for increased success of feminist presses and feminist bookselling. I seek to do justice to the work CALYX has accomplished and to help further their vision in any way I can. While researching and writing this paper, I met with the editorial collective to discuss the year’s poetry and prose submissions and to choose the material for the next set of journals. The work that CALYX produces continues to inspire me with its beauty, originality, and relevance to women’s lives.

Because of my involvement with CALYX, I was able to adopt a role of “insider” when talking with the other CALYX editors and relate to them based on this shared experience. However, as a relative newcomer to CALYX, I had much less experience
with feminist publishing and less knowledge about CALYX’s history than the other editors. In conducting the research for this project, I assumed a sympathetic and friendly role in relation to the participants and to the subject matter. I found that the other editors and I generally shared a dedication to feminism and women’s literature, a belief in the importance of small press activist publishing, and a dislike for large corporate publishing conglomerates.

In addition to my role as a part of CALYX, my academic roles influenced my approach to this project. As a graduate student, I had a more academic and less personal perspective toward this subject than the other editors who are included in this project. As a feminist researcher, I sought to include the participants in the project in as many ways as possible and to be sensitive to their desires for the outcome of the project. As a teacher and student of English, I envisioned this project as adding to other ongoing efforts to transform the traditional literary canon and the teaching of literature to include a more diverse range of voices and perspectives. By aiming for increased awareness and appreciation of feminist publishing and women’s literature in literature classrooms, I argue for making room for the vibrancy and unpredictability of contemporary, living literature such as the poetry and prose in CALYX Journal.

A Feminist Theoretical Paradigm

Feminist theory guides this project in terms of its content, form, and method. I must immediately note that there are many feminisms, and there have been significant changes in feminist theorizing and activism since the mid-1970s. These changes impact this project in that the feminist theory I have access to now, in 2007, is vastly different
from the feminist theory that was being written at the time CALYX was founded and was establishing its reputation. The significant changes that have occurred in feminism since 1976 have also impacted CALYX’s operation and publishing achievements and complicate our understanding of these achievements. This thesis explores in detail the feminist context around the rise of feminist presses like CALYX and the atmosphere of sexism and discrimination in the literary world that gave impetus to their work.

Recognizing that women’s voices have systematically been marginalized or silenced within patriarchal structures, a feminist paradigm privileges the unique knowledge that emerges from women’s lived experiences and material realities. Listening to women’s stories is a radical and political act, as feminist theorists Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman claim: “There are not just epistemological, but moral and political reasons for demanding that the woman’s voice be heard, after centuries of androcentric din” (574). Although feminism as a social and political movement encompasses many various agendas for change, this project focuses on feminism as a movement to break the oppressive silencing or exclusion of women in “what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world” (Lugones and Spelman 573). CALYX offers this feminist vision in its mission to publish “work by women from many walks of life, including women of color, lesbians, older women, working class women, and others whose voices are no longer silent” (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 3).

Establishing voice is a strongly feminist and liberating idea. Feminist theorist bell hooks explains, “the feminist focus on coming to voice—on moving from silence into speech as revolutionary gesture… As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice”
This personal voice in writing can be seen as an affirmation of one’s identity and worth in a society where the marginalized and oppressed are rarely acknowledged or listened to by those in power. Writing from personal experience and with genuineness is important for women in establishing their voices; as hooks says, “much that is private… must be openly shared, if we are to heal our wounds… if we are to recover and realize ourselves” (*Talking Back* 3). If we adopt the feminist maxim that “the personal is political,” there is a clear connection between women’s narratives and the larger public sphere where policy, economy, and culture are played out. The work CALYX has produced as a publisher of women’s writing has done much to break the systemic silencing of women, allowing many women’s voices to be “heard” in print. As the CALYX website asserts, “We at CALYX are activists, and we believe in the power of the written word” (“CALYX Books”). The political power of women’s words gives force to the feminist publishing movement of which CALYX is a part.

Although we might assume that we can easily talk about *silence* and *voice* in referring to published texts, feminist researchers Marjorie DeVault and Chrys Ingraham complicate the understanding that “women have been silenced; feminism opposes the silencing of women” (DeVault 176) by illuminating the many ways that silence and voice operate metaphorically in Western feminist theory. Their essay problematizes these two metaphors, allowing for a more thorough analysis of the ways these metaphors have been used strategically by feminist writers and theorists. Thus, according to DeVault, being silent can mean “not talking” but also can mean:

- not being present; not participating; not writing; talking (or writing), but not being heard; talking (or writing), but being ignored, ridiculed, etc.; talking (or writing), but without confidence; talking (or writing), but without authority; talking (or
writing), but inauthentically; talking (or writing), but only in limited ways: only on particular topics, or only in particular places, genres, times, situations; talking (or writing), but only ephemerally. (177)

The act of “silencing” is also used metaphorically to refer to “quieting, but also to censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion, ghettoization, and other forms of discounting” (177). Generally silencing is equated with exclusion of some kind, and voice with inclusion.³

DeVault points out that the metaphors of silencing and voice “may be differentially available” (181) and may be used “more comfortabl[y] perhaps [by] middle-class or white women, for example, who have some kinds of privilege” (182). She warns that not fully analyzing feminist use of metaphors of silence and speech can lead to oversight when examining women’s inclusion in or exclusion from discourses, even within feminism. Some forms of speech can also be seen as forms of silence if the speech (or the speaker) is ignored or not taken seriously. Since silencing and voice are central concepts for my analysis of CALYX and its feminist vision, a more complex understanding of these metaphors is useful in examining the multiple meanings each term can hold, in different situations and for various speakers.

Voice can also be a problematic concept when presented as a single, authentic representation of one’s true or essential self, or as a representation of a group, such as “women.” Just as Lugones and Spelman challenge the existence of an essential, unified “woman’s voice” (574), this project also emphasizes the need to hear from a multiplicity of voices that demonstrate the diversity and complexity of women’s many perspectives. There is no longer a stable category of people called “women” that is defensible based

³ These metaphors operate within a particularly Western context and do not seem to recognize the wide cultural variations in constructing various meanings from silence.
solely on a set of characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, or experiences. At the same time, people who live their lives as women accumulate a unique set of experiences and perspectives that are based partly in their social position as members of an oppressed group. Postmodern feminist theory encourages a celebration of women’s “condition of otherness” as members of a marginal or peripheral group, “allowing for openness, plurality, diversity, and difference” (Tong 195). The celebration of women’s artistic expression in CALYX showcases the many ways women can generate creative work that springs from their particular perspectives and lived experiences. In this project, I also seek to recognize the many various perspectives of the women who participated in this research and to include their unique voices intact without homogenizing them.

Postmodern feminist theorists also express a suspicion of language as a masculine domain but have experimented with ways to create feminine writing or feminine language (writers such as Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray). Postcolonial feminists have explored ways to write from the borderlands between cultures, genders, races, and identities (for example, Gloria Anzaldúa). At the beginning of the second wave of feminism, attitudes about women’s voices or women’s writing were often essentialized and overgeneralized as many feminists sought to create a separate, women-only sphere for feminist expression. We now recognize, however, that there is nothing inherently feminist about women’s writing or women’s words. With our understanding of gender complicated and destabilized by theorists such as Judith Butler who emphasize the ever-shifting performative nature of gender, we can no longer rely on a theory of an essentialized “woman’s voice” as the anti-patriarchal voice of rebellion.
While second-wave feminists argue for women’s right to have a voice, bell hooks asserts, “It is important that we speak. What we speak about is more important” (*Talking Back* 18). She argues passionately that voices from the margins of a society that is still plagued by oppression of all kinds are important sources of the “liberatory voice [that] will necessarily confront, disturb, demand that listeners even alter ways of hearing and being” (*Talking Back* 16). However, hooks makes it clear that this liberatory voice is not inborn, natural, or inherent in any group of people but instead requires consciousness and intentional action to “make a new language… create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice” (*Talking Back* 29). This liberatory voice comes about when one “talks back” to those with authority and power; for the oppressed or marginalized, “coming to voice is an act of resistance” (*Talking Back* 12). Thus, a liberatory feminist voice, not a “woman’s voice,” is a radical, political weapon against systems of oppression, and feminist narratives can offer resistance to domination.

CALYX emerged into a feminist press movement that widely embraced the notion that women’s voices were a wellspring for feminist thought and action. Most feminist publications in the 1970s were women-only spaces where women shared ideas and experiences in a consciousness-raising effort to increase awareness among women of their oppression under a capitalist patriarchy. CALYX, in defining its mission to “nurture women’s creativity by publishing fine literature and art by women” (“Mission”), adopted a more literary and artistic approach to feminism than many of the other feminist publications of the time. While risking essentializing women to some extent by focusing on women’s literature and art, CALYX emphasized that the creativity of women—as writers and artists who had faced extensive discrimination—needed a safe and
encouraging venue in order to blossom. In this project I conceive of women’s creative work as springing from women’s unique perspectives and lived experiences that are not inherent to all female humans but are products of the social construction of womanhood.

I have chosen to use a feminist narrative approach in this project, because, as Lugones and Spelman argue, stories matter in women’s lives: “It matters to us what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said: having the opportunity to talk about one’s life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it” (573). The power of self-representation is here equated with gaining power and agency in one’s life, of becoming an active subject rather than a passive object. As bell hooks puts it, “Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others” (Talking Back 12). Narrating one’s own experiences is more than just an act of speaking or writing—“We can’t separate lives from the accounts given of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our experience” (Lugones and Spelman 574). It is a recognition of the power of telling our own stories that led to the creation of CALYX as a women’s publisher dedicated to providing literary space for underrepresented voices. This project continues this mission, turning CALYX’s purpose on itself by asking the women who kept CALYX’s vision alive to tell their stories, giving space for their voices to be heard.

The next chapter offers an extended answer to the question: Why study feminist publishing? In exploring this question from several angles, I seek to resolve some of the mysteries and misunderstandings about feminist publishing and its relationship to the academic fields of women’s studies and literary studies in particular. The third chapter, “Feminism and Publishing Activism: A Literature Review,” examines the literature on
feminist publishing and the contexts out of which the feminist presses arose in the 1970s, while looking closely at feminist publishing as an activist endeavor that continues today. The fourth chapter, “Research Methods,” describes the research strategies and the specific methods used in this research project. The many-voiced narratives detailing CALYX’s feminist mission and achievements make up the fifth chapter, “Voices of CALYX: Narratives of Feminist Publishing Activism.” Then, the final chapter draws conclusions and presents ideas for the future of feminist publishing.
WHY STUDY FEMINIST PUBLISHING?

As I read through the existing research on feminist publishing, I noticed that a large number of the authors devoted significant space in their work to justifying and explaining their research. Each author provided compelling reasons why a detailed investigation and analysis of feminist publishing, past and present, is a worthwhile enterprise. While at first I was surprised that nearly all the serious scholars of feminist publishing felt that they had to provide extensive justification for their research and their methodologies, I soon began to think that I too should explain my reasons for doing this project. In conversations with colleagues, I discovered that many people did not understand the importance or relevance of my research to the disciplines we work within, and others were confused about my choice of methods and use of theory. This project is intentionally interdisciplinary and uses methods and theories borrowed from several disciplines. To eliminate confusion about my multi-disciplinary approach or about the relevance of feminist publishing studies to several academic fields, I offer here some of my own reasons for pursuing this research, in conversation with other published scholars. This chapter addresses the overall lack of academic research on feminist publishing and provides several answers to the question: Why study feminist publishing?

When I began thinking deeply about my motivations to do this project, I encountered many disturbing questions. Why doesn’t the field of literature—which concerns itself with texts, authors, and readers—look to publishing as another important topic in its domain? Why doesn’t the field of women’s studies, already interdisciplinary, recognize the discursive power of feminist publishing as a subject worthy of study? Why
would academics in English and Women’s Studies departments alike think that publishing politics is a marginal topic of only minor interest or relevance? Why is so little academic research done on publishing? Why are feminist presses perceived by so many academics as non-influential, low quality, or passé?

In this chapter and in this project as a whole, I argue in favor of interdisciplinary feminist research and the breaking down of boundaries and canons that keep hierarchies in place in the academy. To provide some answers to why studying feminist publishing is indeed important and relevant, I consider three areas that are applicable to my own work here: feminism and women’s studies, literary and cultural studies, and the future of feminist publishing. First, I argue that the discipline of women’s studies needs to examine feminist publishing as part of its own feminist history and future. Second, studies of literature and culture need to recognize the role feminist publishers have played in creating progressive literary and cultural change. Third, all of us who are invested in a continuing feminist movement and the continued availability of women’s literature and theory need to acknowledge the force of feminist publishing and ensure that feminist publishers can remain viable. As writers, teachers, scholars, activists, and editors, we can shape the future of feminist publishing.

Another, simpler response to the question is: It hasn’t been done. In pursuing this research, I was surprised by the absence of scholarly literature on the many feminist publishers that made such a remarkable impact on the feminist movement and on women’s literary heritage. Many gaps remain to be filled. I am inspired by the words of Mary Eagleton who writes in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*:
The full story of the last twenty [now thirty] years of feminist publishing is still to be told. Publishing companies, presses, writing groups, magazines have come and gone... little is written down in terms of policy, mission statements, selection criteria, editorial guidelines; certainly nobody doing the job has time to write the history. Most analysis has appeared in valuable, but short, journal and magazine articles. One hopes, though, that someone, somewhere is writing a thesis on this aspect of feminist literary production since much knowledge and experience will otherwise be lost. (71)

I hope that my work on this small piece of feminist publishing history can inspire further research into the amazing, vibrant realm of feminist publishing activism.

**Feminism, Women’s Studies, and Feminist Publishing**

First, feminist scholars should recognize the role that feminist publishing has played in feminist history and in the establishment and growth of women’s studies as a discipline. Feminism as a movement and women’s studies as a discipline both owe a debt to feminist publishers for making their work possible and sharing their ideas with large audiences. As Simone Murray argues in the introduction to her book *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*:

> the “explosion” of feminist knowledge over the last 30 years rests upon the substratum of the feminist presses, which both republished out-of-print texts with which feminism archaeologically unearthed its own history, and made available to women the works of contemporary feminist thinkers. (7)

Without feminist presses, much feminist discourse could not have come into being at a time when the male-dominated publishing industry actively barred women from publishing, as discussed in detail in the next chapter. Feminist presses also could not have existed without the political activism of the feminist movement that opened a door for the feminist press movement. Thus feminist publishers created, recreated, and reflected feminist thought in print in an interdependent relationship with feminist
activists. Since the feminist movement and feminist publishing are so interdependent, any study of feminist history and feminist activism must include a consideration of feminist publishing as an integral part of the feminist movement, just as a study of feminist publishing like this one needs to consider the context of the feminist movement that allowed feminist publishers to emerge and succeed.

Other authors note the relationship that feminist publishers had with the feminist movement. Paula Kassell, in her article on the history of a feminist newspaper, *New Directions for Women*, states, “Throughout its life, the paper acted as a consciousness-raising conduit to the women’s movement” (202). Her term “conduit” effectively provides an image of a structure (such as a pipe or wire) that delivers information to people who need it. In the statement of purpose for *New Directions for Women*, the newspaper is described as “a consciousness-raising organ published to inform women about equal rights… directed to all women, not just feminists,” in the hopes that “when women understand sex discrimination, they will reach for the tools to combat it” (qtd. in Kassell 200). This newspaper’s publishing goals are, in themselves, feminist goals for social change. Hundreds of other feminist publishers (of both books and periodicals) that emerged in the 1970s expressed their own particular feminist goals across a wide spectrum of concerns and perspectives. These feminist publishers often saw themselves as providing an outlet, or conduit, for feminist consciousness while also acting as an organ to generate and create those very ideas that stimulated consciousness.

Although feminist periodicals such as magazines, newspapers, and journals often have a more overt political or social agenda than their counterparts in the book world, feminist book publishers also often see their work as entwined with feminist activism.
For example, Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin, editors for Persephone, a feminist publisher, said in an interview, “Publishing books is an invaluable tool for organizing. We see the books as a means to promote ideas and challenges.” Their goals in publishing included “publish[ing] work that excites us: innovative and provocative writing to move people to change” (Greenfield and McGloin 106). As Celeste West notes regarding this publisher’s influence,

Persephone was one of the giants, a radical, lesbian-feminist press with thirteen titles. Among them, still in print but available elsewhere, are such widely acclaimed books as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*… and Audre Lorde’s autobiography, *Zami*. (104)

Although Persephone closed in 1983 and its titles were bought by other presses, clearly even a small, early feminist press like this one has lasting influence on the feminist movement through the significant works it brought to life. Indeed, without the exceptional efforts of feminist publishers, we would have very few radical feminist texts that “move people to change.” Through these publishers’ risk-taking work, feminist ideas exploded in print and were made accessible to public audiences.

Feminists such as Greenfield and McGloin performed activism by being feminist publishers; feminist editors and publishers often risked their careers, reputations, life savings, and personal relationships in the act of publishing new, innovative, challenging work by radical women writers. For example, when Persephone went bankrupt in 1983, these two editors had their own personal financial crises, as they explained: “Since we worked below minimum wage without the benefits of unemployment insurance, we are faced with finding immediate employment. We are both working as temporary typists now” (Greenfield and McGloin 112). Although influential early feminist texts such as
This Bridge Called My Back are well known and widely taught in women’s studies classes, feminist scholars and students are usually unaware of the hidden fates of the publishers that produced the books. More attention to the fate of publishers like Persephone will help scholars appreciate the contributions that feminist editors and publishers have made to feminism’s achievements while mourning with them the losses they have suffered.

Feminist scholars must recognize that their own success and that of their colleagues can rest upon their relationships with feminist or other radical presses. Feminists who write radical or groundbreaking work know all too well the struggles involved in getting published. One example of a feminist writer who has benefited from a relationship with a radical press is bell hooks, who wrote her first book of feminist theory, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, as an undergraduate and spent a difficult ten years trying to get it published. When describing her motivation for writing and publishing her book, hooks says, “Initially, I received no money for writing this first book. It was not written for money or fame. It was a pure and passionate expression of my longing to create a space within feminist movement for the voices and visions of black women” (“Intellectual” 26). Finally, hooks found a publisher with South End Press, a radical activist press founded in 1977 that describes its mission “to give expression to a wide diversity of democratic social movements and to provide an alternative to the products of corporate publishing” (South End Press). As hooks notes, publishing with a small activist press had advantages and disadvantages. She explains her choice to publish with South End Press in ideological terms:
In keeping with my politics, I published my books at South End Press… instead of seeking a larger corporate press that would have given advances and paid royalties consistently, because the women and men at SEP were committed to feminist movement, to ending domination in all its forms—racism, classism, imperialism, etc. None of us made a lot of money. (“Intellectual” 26)

For hooks and for the activists at South End Press, the commitment to feminist politics was more important than money:

South End Press was and remains committed to publishing progressive ideas that advance the cause of justice. In the early days, the issue was rarely whether a book would sell but whether it would advance a meaningful cause. This was the perfect union of politics and vocation. (“Intellectual” 26)

By the efforts of radical presses like South End Press, feminist writers like hooks have been able to establish successful careers and bring recognition to feminist causes.

Although the temptation is great for authors to seek more money and wider audiences by moving on to larger, mainstream publishers, the relationship that authors can form with small, activist publishers can be intensely rewarding for both author and publisher.

Another striking example of a feminist author with an ongoing relationship with a feminist press is Gloria Anzaldúa. In an interview, Anzaldúa recalls how her highly influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a cornerstone of feminist theory today, was published by Aunt Lute in 1987. She describes being approached by an editor from Aunt Lute:

So here was a white feminist operating a small press who wanted to promote my work. Thus far Chicano presses had refused to publish me, mainly, I think, because I was a lesbian. The people who have supported me have been feminists—Jews, white lesbians, and feminists-of-color… after *Borderlands* came out, I got deluged with offers from other publishers, university and mainstream. But I stuck with Aunt Lute because Joan was there for me and because she listened to my ideas. (Anzaldúa, Interview 37)
A successful book like *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a big deal, not just for an author, but for a small press as well. In some cases, a book like this one will keep a publisher afloat. Anzaldúa notes that two of her books, “*Borderlands* and *Haciendo Caras* provide about 75 percent of their income” (Interview 37). She admits that by staying with the small press, she foregoes “big advances and mainstream readership.” But, she says, “the fact is that I’m sensitive to the publishing history of dykes and women of color. It was women who put my work in print and I’m not going to turn my back on them” (Interview 37). Feminists can support feminist publishing by continuing to seek publication with feminist presses, even after the mainstream presses start making offers. Anzaldúa stresses, “One of the reasons that I think it’s important that feminists, lesbians, and women of color publish with small presses is that it keeps the presses alive. They’re constantly on the edge of bankruptcy” (Interview 38). Without small feminist presses to provide the first publication for feminist writers, many feminists might never get published at all.

Though perhaps it seems obvious that studies of feminist publishing should be a vital part of women’s studies as a discipline, there is a noticeable lack of scholarly attention to publishing in women’s studies, as well as in the fields of literary and cultural studies. Simone Murray notes this “manifest absence of work on feminist publishing” (*Mixed* 18) as providing the context for her own research. This absence also serves as a backdrop to my work here and gives more urgency to the question I asked above: Why study feminist publishing? Florence Howe, one of the most renowned feminist publishers in the United States who has written widely about women’s writing and literary scholarship, observes that the
brief and continuing history [of feminist presses] testifies to their power to leverage change on behalf of women writers both living and dead, and with regard to subjects hitherto ignored or taboo. The history is national and international. *No one has tried to write it down*, at least in part because it continues to function responsively and in relation to a still volatile and changing women’s movement, itself fluid and increasingly international. (“Feminist” 130, my emphasis)

That feminist publishing is in a dynamic relationship with an ever-changing women’s movement is no reason for scholars of women’s studies to avoid studying it. Feminist scholars are accustomed to complexity and postmodern ambiguity, and current feminist theory embraces these qualities as marks of good research that does not try to artificially simplify or eliminate contradictions in the subject of study, but rather allows this complexity to enrich and deepen our understanding of the world. Murray herself successfully approaches feminist publishing as a problematic subject, stating that “no single unifying factor, aside perhaps from complexity itself, adequately encapsulates the feminist publishing experience” (*Mixed* 4). One of the central claims of Murray’s book is that there is a “profound ambivalence at the heart of feminist publishing,” in that “feminist presses must walk an impossible line between political authenticity and commercial viability” (*Mixed* 26). In other words, the activist agenda held by many feminist publishers often seems to be in direct conflict with capitalist profit making; this ambivalence is a theme that Murray seeks to investigate but not resolve.

Feminist publishing’s conflicted recent past reveals the ongoing, irresolvable nature of this ambivalence and leaves many questions still unanswered regarding the disturbing “precariousness of feminist publishing” (Murray, *Mixed* 26). Scarcely a handful of feminist publishers are left from the feminist publishing boom of the 1970s when hundreds of feminist publishers emerged. However, it is too simple just to state
that their dedication and loyalty to feminist principles rather than the almighty dollar was the cause of so many feminist publishers’ closure in the last decades. It is also too simple to use the reductionist capitalist logic that they must have failed because their books didn’t sell. Feminist publishing’s downturn is a complex story with many interlacing variables. So as not to reduce this complexity and in order to honor the feminist publishing ventures that have not survived to today, feminist scholars need to support and pursue more research into feminist publishing history.

Murray notes the same lack of study of feminist publishing as Howe, but from an academic standpoint. She asks “why a sphere of media activity so successfully breached by feminism and about which so much first-hand knowledge exists should have been relegated to academic oblivion” (Mixed 9). Scholars have generally left this history unexplored in fields where one would expect to find studies of feminist publishing: history of the book, women’s studies, media studies, cultural studies, and literary studies. Even a cursory look at journals and anthologies in these fields reveals a glaring absence of the subject of publishing. As Murray explains, “feminist publishing studies has fallen between academic stools: too literary in its associations to be annexed to feminist cultural studies; and too tainted with commercialism to fall within the purview of literary criticism” (Mixed 18). Sadly, these disciplines, while sometimes seeking multi-disciplinary perspectives, still seem to regard publishing as outside of their area of concern. When media are studied in these academic fields, the focus tends to be on more “popular” forms of media than the book.

Though clearly several disciplines could usefully expand to include publishing studies, the inclusion is especially needed in women’s studies, where there exists a
theoretical framework and an expectation that scholarship be conscious of the means and methods of its own construction. Thus, Murray points out,

> It is exceptional that a field such as women’s studies, which has paid rigorous attention to the means by which academic disciplines are constructed and imbued with intellectual authority, should have failed to address in-depth attention to the political and commercial realities underpinning its own development. ([Mixed] 7)

In claiming to be a self-conscious discipline, then, Murray argues, “on the basis of intellectual consistency alone, feminism is obliged to explore the political ramifications of its own control over the printed word” ([Mixed] 8). In this way, the field of women’s studies could not only examine the challenges feminism has made to the dominant publishing industry but could also take a critical look at ways that feminist publishers have created their own systems of inclusion and exclusion based on identity politics and power struggles within feminism.

As a feminist practice, feminist publishing provides to women’s studies “a rich source of potential theorizing on its own doorstep” ([Murray, Mixed] 8-9). Feminist theory emerges from its dialectical relationship with feminist practice, and the practice of feminist publishing is thus far a relatively untapped resource for developing theory. Feminist theory often examines the politics—or dynamics of power—in societal structures and institutions as well as in our personal lives and actions. Any scholarly analysis of feminist publishing must, as Murray notes, ascribe to the “central perception with which feminist publishing originates: that production of the printed word and its interpretation constitute forms of political power” ([Mixed] 27, original emphasis). Thus, examining the nature and history of feminist publishing allows feminist scholars another insight into the power dynamics of cultural production. In Murray’s study, though the
presses she researched varied “enormously,” they were all “united in their perception that
the act of publishing is, because of its role in determining the parameters of public
debate, an inherently political act” (Mixed 2).

Stacey Young, in her book Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the
Feminist Movement, agrees that feminist publishing is a form of political activism, but
adds that the work and achievements of feminist publishers should be seen as “discursive
struggle.” Young argues that feminist publishing activism and the feminist movement in
general are founded in language and discourse, as she explains:

Lasting social change is made possible by changes in how people understand their
situations and how they perceive their options for altering those situations. This
book argues that progressive changes in consciousness come about through
discourses that challenge oppressive constructions of social phenomena.
Language acts—including published writings—can play a crucial part in bringing
about individual and collective social change. (25)

Feminist researchers who recognize the centrality of discourse to feminist goals and
methods and who seek to better understand the politics of feminist discourse should
acknowledge Young’s assertion:

Feminist presses exemplify the institutionalization and the practice of a theory of
power as dispersed throughout all levels of society, and an approach to activism in
which discursive struggle is central. Therefore, a look at feminist presses reveals
much about discursive politics. (26)

Young adds, echoing Murray’s concerns about the absence of studies of feminist
publishing, that discursive politics “is central to the women’s movement but is thus far
marginal to (or absent from) studies of the movement” (26). Women’s studies as a
discipline must recognize that “[feminist] presses’ political analyses, goals and work
strategies, and their relationship to the women’s movement and to feminist social change
makes exploring them as feminist institutions critical to studying the women’s movement” (Young 26).

In her study of feminist academic journals, Patrice McDermott also asks research questions that clearly reveal the threads that link politics and power with publishing. She asks: How do feminist journals critique and challenge a patriarchal system while operating within it and using its resources and infrastructure? How do politics and scholarship converge in feminist journals? How do feminist journals “contribute to the construction, negotiation, and legitimation of feminist discourse in the academy, the contemporary women’s movement, and the larger society?” (McDermott 2). Although McDermott’s study focuses on feminist academic journals, her themes of power and tensions within publishing and the process of creating feminist discourse apply to other feminist publishers, including literary publishers, which are my main concern here.

Scholars of feminism have yet another, more pressing reason to pay heed to feminist publishing: feminism’s continued existence and success as a movement may well depend on feminist publishers. Although feminism and women’s writing have been mainstreamed to some extent today, mainstream commercial publishers will never take the kinds of risks that small, independent feminist publishers have taken in publishing edgy, challenging, radical writing by women and others who have historically been marginalized in society and in the publishing world. Murray demands that today’s feminist scholars “becom[e] cognizant that the visibility of the entire academic field [of women’s studies] may be further dependent on the fluctuating fortunes of contemporary feminist publishers (“The Cuala” 504). Obviously women’s studies’ ongoing reliance on feminist publishers is “a sobering realisation” (Murray, “The Cuala” 504) when we begin
to notice the marginal status of feminist publishing, not only within the mainstream publishing industry, but even within disciplines that owe a large debt to feminist publishers: women’s studies, literary studies, and cultural studies.

**Literary Studies and Feminist Publishing**

The academic field of literary studies pays a surprisingly small amount of attention to publishing as a stage in the production of literature. Although the study of literature has changed somewhat in recent years, faced with an ongoing challenge to the traditional Western white male canon, to include a more diverse curriculum, the discipline of literature does not acknowledge its debt to feminist and other radical publishers who made these diverse literatures available for study. Feminist publishers from the 1970s to today have spent vast amounts of time, effort, and money to recover and republish “lost” historical works by women and also to provide a forum for diverse, new, radical, and innovative writers who are typically not published by mainstream publishers. Without the new works that independent feminist publishers have made available, literary studies would not have had new material with which to challenge the traditional canon. In acknowledgement of the extraordinary contributions feminist publishers have made to transform the study of literature, and in recognition of the political and ideological nature of publishing, the discipline of literary studies (and the related and overlapping field of cultural studies) has an obligation to study, theorize, and teach publishing as an important material element of literature.

One might argue that the academic demand for women’s literary texts spurred publishers to begin producing women’s writing to fulfill that demand. In actuality, some
feminist literary publishers did emerge in relationship with feminist academics who were seeking women authors, but largely the increased demand for literature by white women, women of color, and non-Western writers was created by the daring efforts of the feminist publishers themselves. Before feminist publishers proved them wrong, the widely held viewpoint of (male) literature scholars and professors was that “there were no women writers” and that there “never had been any published” (Howe, “Feminist” 131). Howe counters this assumption by pointing out that most of the “lost” women writers published by The Feminist Press, founded in 1970, “had been published, often to wide acclaim in their own day” (“Feminist” 131).

We must not forget the hostile climate for women in academia that today seems shocking to look back on. The National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year reported on the dismal state of college English programs in 1978: “Women are 70 percent of the undergraduates majoring in English but are only seven percent of the English professors” (National Commission 18). Although women had long been interested in writing and studying literature, sexist power structures in the academy prevented women from holding professional positions in the field. As in other academic fields, those few women employed in English departments were “concentrated in lower ranking, untenured posts” (National Commission 18). Clearly a forceful challenge to the male-centered curriculum and to dominant white male perspectives on literature could not spring solely from within the academy, when women were such a marginalized minority in this field. Instead, it was largely the work of feminist publishers like The Feminist Press that led to women’s literature becoming available to be included in the academic study of literature and to gain a rightful place in classrooms.
The Feminist Press, one of the earliest and most successful feminist publishers in the United States, considered its “prime work” to be “to discover and republish the ‘lost’ literature and history of women the world over” (Howe, “From Race” 117). Also included in its mission was the purpose to “supply the classroom with literary volumes by women that should always have been there” (Howe, “From Race” 132). The Feminist Press was able to establish itself by doing what no traditional (male-run) publishers would do—publish women’s literature, both contemporary and historical. Howe remembers the standard response from male publishers upon receiving a proposal to publish women’s literature: “It’s a great idea, but there’s no money in it” (Howe, “From Race” 131). She notes that, from the beginning, “the Feminist Press needed to do what trade and university presses would not… [and address] a denied and invisible element in publishing” (Howe, “From Race” 133). Lest we forget just how “denied and invisible” women’s literature was at the time, Howe reminds us of the extent of this invisibility:

In 1970, one could not find a paperback copy of *Mrs. Dalloway* on the shelves of any bookstore, nor a novel by Edith Wharton or Willa Cather. There was no collection of Kate Chopin’s short fiction. Sara Orne Jewett, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and a host of others had virtually disappeared. One can now name a hundred other U.S. writers whose names were then unknown, including… Zora Neale Hurston. (“Feminist” 130)

Although feminist academics in women’s studies and in literary and cultural studies were instigating a challenge to male-centered theories and curricula during this time, the assault on the Western white male literary canon could not have occurred without the intervention of activist feminist publishers like The Feminist Press that provided new material on women for the academy to adopt. Again, just as the feminist movement and the emerging feminist presses were dependent upon each other for their existence and
growth, the shifting curriculum in literary studies (as in other fields) was mutually
dependent upon the innovative work done by feminist publishers and editors.

Women’s literature as we know it today would not exist without feminist
publishing efforts. Although today it may seem that women’s literature is largely
mainstreamed, in the beginning this market was left “largely to the burgeoning feminist
presses,” as the “trade and university press publishing took a decade to respond” to the
new demand for women’s writing (Howe, “Feminist” 132). In their 1978 survey of
feminist publishers, Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman celebrate their observation that
“women’s publishing has accomplished in a very short ten years what the male norm in
publishing has always maintained couldn’t be done” (Joan and Chesman 110).

Even today, mainstream publishers tend only to publish work that has clear
marketability (as in mass-market fiction) and seldom publish new authors or radical,
innovative writing. Small, independent presses have long filled a niche that larger
publishers avoid and “insist on publishing what is not thought of as financially feasible
by the commercial stone houses of our day” (Henderson 326). Editors at small presses
retain a passion for literature that Bill Henderson recognizes as sacred: “Words are too
important to be left to the corporate and political moneymongers” (329). More
significantly, he points out, “when commerce or politics censors literature, small presses
joyously publish what needs to be published” (Henderson 323). Clearly, the feminist
publishing movement represents a unique subset of small press publishing, with feminist
publishers usually being more politically aligned than the average small press. For many
feminist publishers, turning a profit is less important than engaging in feminist activism,
and therefore they publish books that larger, profit-oriented publishers will not consider.
The economic and political challenges feminist publishers faced in bringing women’s writing to the public eye should not go unappreciated by scholars of literature. Feminist editors staked their reputations, savings, time, and livelihoods on producing women’s writing in print. Activist publishers faced arson, attack, public ridicule, and professional stigma to bring radical books into print. In case this sounds like sensationalizing, here is one example from the many “casualties” in feminist publishing: “Diana Press, a very early lesbian press begun in Baltimore in 1972, was burned out; it then moved to Oakland, California, in 1977, was vandalized, and did not endure” (Howe, “Feminist” 137). How can it be that in the study of literature, systems of prejudice and oppression that can destroy writers and publishers go unnoticed, even while students read and analyze the literature that is the product of these systems? It is a tragic insult to the dedicated efforts of feminist publishers to provide literature students with women’s writing that classes in and studies of women’s literature generally ignore the material conditions in which this writing was produced and distributed as a published book.

The failure to address the nature of publishing as political and ideological is an unforgivable oversight in current literary studies. Literature classes and literary theory alike treat books as messages that come directly from the author to the reader. Meaning is understood to be constructed from literature in various ways using various interpretive theories. For example, the author’s life and cultural context is frequently a topic of discussion, as is the context of our own lives as readers; however, the publishing process remains invisible. As Murray notes, there is “a curious analytical hiatus when considering the processes by which individual authorial impulse is transformed into publicly available text” (Mixed 6). An author’s genius is never transmitted directly to us
as readers through the text of a published book—the editors and publishers always intervene in making the decision to publish a manuscript, how to edit it, how to package and market it, and how to distribute it so that we can hold it in our hands. Each of these decisions carries political and ideological weight.

As a stage in the production of an author’s manuscript into a printed book, one that can be bought and read, publishing is anything but a neutral process. Murray remarks on this problematic assumption in literary studies:

The absence of extended discussion about feminist publishing makes itself felt in a variety of ways. Frequently the subject is simply omitted entirely from discussions of women and literature, or, equally problematically, where publishing is referred to it is assumed to constitute a neutral link in the communications chain. (Mixed 6)

A study of feminist publishing such as Murray’s acknowledges first and foremost the political nature of publishing—that is, its entrapment within dynamics of power in our society. By studying publishing as part of our study of literature, we reveal the hidden power tied up in the making of books (the production of culture and knowledge), including in the roles of editors, publishers, and reviewers in the creation, promotion, distribution, and reception of books. These processes are not neutral at all, but are charged with ideology and power and play a role in the maintenance of cultural hegemony and the dominance of some groups in society over others. Publishers are called “gatekeepers” precisely because they function to allow some people or ideas “in” to the sanctioned sphere and serve to keep others out. All too often, these “others” are people marginalized by virtue of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, or other characteristic seen as differing from the “norm.” The Western white male perspective is
portrayed as and still widely understood to be “universal”; all other perspectives are seen as too narrow and specific to be of much importance.

I cannot, however, place the blame for failing to notice this gatekeeping aspect of publishing entirely on the shoulders of academics and scholars of literature. Publishers themselves have long operated under a shroud of secrecy and have cultivated their own invisibility from the public eye. Their gatekeeping is all the more effective when people are unaware that it is happening, and I believe many publishers have wanted things to remain this way. Few books exist that actually go into detail about the process or practice of publishing. Lynne Spender is a feminist writer who attempts to challenge this invisibility in publishing by calling attention to the gatekeeping practices of the male-dominated presses. In her book *Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women’s Unpublished Heritage*, in a chapter called “Gatekeeping,” Spender observes, “With the focus now on publishers as guardians, we realize that approval for women’s actions and women’s written words has not been forthcoming—especially when those words and actions have challenged men’s interests in a significant way” (13). But, she adds, “knowledge about gatekeeping techniques provides us with an opportunity to deconstruct the controls that men have been using within publishing” (13) and thereby challenge their power to determine solely which voices will be heard in print. Along with writers like Spender, feminist publishers began the process of identifying publishers’ gatekeeping practices and challenging their hegemonic stranglehold on the publishing industry. Literary scholars need to continue the effort to expose gatekeeping practices—for instance, by challenging claims to “universality” made by writers from a dominant or privileged group and by recognizing the inherently ideological and political nature of the publishing process.
Literary and cultural studies will benefit in many ways from an enriched look at the production of literature from a publishing perspective. No one who studies literature needs to be told that books are important to our lives, but studying books from the perspective of feminist publishing reveals more facets to the value of literature in our society. Feminist publishers recognize that literature can help create personal connection, growth, and even survival. As Florence Howe states in a reflective essay on her publishing life, feminist books “give voice and form to otherwise devalued and erased lives. [These books] salvage lives not unlike my mother’s and grandmother’s, and not unlike mine” (“From Race” 135). In salvaging women’s “devalued and erased lives,” women’s literature offers hope and affirmation for readers who have never felt themselves represented in canonical literature. Additionally, Leigh Felesky believes that the power of books resides in their ability to “represent an intimate understanding of that which is not ourselves” (Felesky 46), thereby teaching us about the world and giving us a way of relating to others. As Anne Deeter says, “Books change the course of people’s lives” (qtd. in Felesky 46). Women’s literature thus has the power to change women’s lives and consciousness, transforming individuals and even societies.

If scholars of literary and cultural studies want to maintain a relationship with new emerging writers from the margins, they need to support the study of feminist publishing as a vital element of progressive literary study. Works of literature that challenge the traditional canonical value systems and push our understanding of the relationships between literature and culture appear only when publishers are willing to produce them. Looking into the future, scholars of literature can provide more concrete support for feminist publishing by acknowledging their reliance on independent
publishers for new and vibrant works that transcend boundaries and expand the canon. The forms this support could take include not only using small press texts in literature classes, but also teaching literature classes with an awareness of the process of publishing, calling students’ attention to the politics of publishing as part of our literary heritage, and conducting research and writing articles on aspects of the publishing world in relation to literary studies.

The Future of Feminism

A third and final response to my earlier question is that by studying and appreciating feminist publishing, we can help assure its ongoing influence and success into the future. A large majority of the feminist publishers that were founded in the 1970s have now disappeared, and even though some new feminist publishing ventures have emerged in recent years, observers of the independent publishing world have talked about feminist publishing’s “demise.” There are many reasons we should be invested in the future of feminist publishing. As scholars of women’s studies and women’s literature, the academic realms we inhabit would be infinitely more confined and stale without the work that feminist publishers bring to us. As feminists, we might fear for the future of feminism without feminist publishers to produce and distribute the movement’s challenging, new, and radical texts and keep available its classic, historical texts. And as feminist writers, editors, and teachers, we seek ways to carry on the legacy of feminist publishing into the next generation. Studies of feminist publishing can directly impact the future of feminist publishing by allowing us to learn from past successes and failures,
by spreading appreciation of and enthusiasm for feminist publishing, and by inspiring
future feminist publishing work.

This is a perfect moment to learn from the feminist publishers who precede us.
Many of the editors and publishers who were involved in feminist presses in the 1970s
are now of retirement age, and the feminist presses that are still in existence are looking
back at 25, 30, or more years in publishing. Paula Kassell writes in her history of New
Directions for Women:

We offer, to those who come after us, this detailed history of why we started and
how we learned to become the most successful feminist newspaper in the
country… Just as important to understand are the factors that thwarted us
throughout our long history and that ultimately led to our demise as a publishing
venture. (207)

Both successes and failures present us with opportunities to learn, and by studying the
experiences of the feminist publishers of the second wave, perhaps third wave feminists
can achieve as much or more in our publishing ventures. Some editors are looking back
and recognizing those predecessors from whom they learned, while hoping to pass some
knowledge along to the future. The editors at Persephone write that they “hope that other
women can learn from both our mistakes and successes. We certainly gained from the
pioneering work of earlier lesbian and feminist publishers, specifically Diana Press and
the Women’s Press Collective” (Greenfield and McGloin 107). After Persephone’s
bankruptcy in 1983, the editors reflected: “One important lesson the movement can learn
from Persephone’s demise is that we are all vulnerable, and that none of us can survive
without carefully nurtured support systems” (Greenfield and McGloin 111). These
lessons offered by three decades or more of feminist publishing experience are too
valuable to allow to disappear.
By learning from the experiences of feminist editors and publishers, we can find inspiration and develop a passion for feminist publishing. Since working with CALYX on the editorial collective and in doing this research project, my passion and commitment to feminist publishing have deepened significantly. I feel now that feminist publishing will be an ongoing commitment of mine, if not a potential career. In sharing the history she experienced, Paula Kassell expressed a wish: “We hope that others will be inspired by the idealism that inspired us” (207). In looking at the incredible scope of the impact made by feminist publishers on society, the academy, and on women’s lives, we can be inspired to work for feminist change; if they made such a difference, so can we. Studying the history of feminist publishing will also better equip those of us working in publishing today to maintain the small press legacy that has been handed down to us by second-wave feminists.

Ultimately, just studying publishing is not enough: we must demonstrate loyalty to independent feminist publishers and we must ourselves work to keep feminist publishing viable by buying books, volunteering, or submitting our writing. We must also start our own feminist presses and invent new methods for feminist publishing that fit with new technologies and new markets. The Internet provides a new venue for feminist discourse and its impact on feminist publishing is not yet fully understood. This is a pivotal moment, when the leaders of the second-wave feminist publishing boom are retiring. In 1995 Florence Howe noted, “Before the next decade is out, a second generation of leaders will need to be defining the future of feminist publishing” (“Feminist” 136). Although some have talked about the “demise” of feminist publishing, many of us feel hope that feminist publishing will continue, though in new and changing
forms, throughout our lifetimes. Leigh Felesky leaves us with an optimistic view of continuing feminist publishing efforts:

In the ever changing publishing industry and feminist landscape, there will never be a final chapter. Whether it’s through volunteer hours, buying books, or writing, supporting feminist publishing is one of the most important ways to expand the influence of feminism in the world. (46)

It is in this spirit that I conduct this research and offer these narratives as a glimpse into the richness and beauty of feminist publishing efforts that still strive onward toward a better future, book by book, poem by poem.
Feminism and Publishing Activism: A Literature Review

Despite a lack of published academic research on feminist publishing, I was able to find an overwhelming amount of material on feminist publishers and the contexts they emerged from and operated within. Multitudes of primary sources on feminist publishers exist, including mission statements, catalogues and websites, interviews, archival materials, and the feminist publications they produced. Few of these primary sources have been converted into secondary academic studies. For this reason, my research on feminist publishing is somewhat unconventional.

Simone Murray explains in her introduction to Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics, “The current paucity of book-length research on the subject of feminist publishing prompts this volume to militate simultaneously in three directions” (27). She presents her study as a bibliography of material on feminist publishing, as a proposed theoretical framework for studying feminist publishing, and as a model of how to apply the theoretical framework to primary source material (27). My study, while narrower in scope than Murray’s, incorporates a variety of types of primary sources, including my own interview research, and may function as a model for the kind of research that can be fruitful when investigating feminist publishing. To portray in detail the impact feminist publishers have had and the contexts in which they existed, I sought out statements directly from publishers, statements from authors and editors about their experiences in publishing, statistics about women in publishing or literature, resources and guides to publishing for women, and popular press coverage of feminist publishers.
Archival materials and unpublished theses or dissertations were potentially rich sources of material that I was unfortunately not able to consult extensively.

In this chapter, I review some of the literature, both primary and secondary, on feminist publishing and its political, social, and literary contexts. By first examining the second-wave feminist movement’s emerging awareness of writing, representation, and voice as feminist issues with implications for social change, I set the background for feminist publishing’s rise in the 1970s. Growing consciousness of and outrage at the climate of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination in the literary and publishing worlds gave further impetus to the growth of feminist and other activist presses. Sources documenting the emergence of feminist presses in response to the very real needs of women writers reveal a wide variety of methods that the presses engaged and a diverse range of publishing priorities. Most current work on feminist publishing also addresses the struggles and threats feminist publishers have faced and look to the future to identify a glimmer of hope for the continuation of feminist publishing efforts.

It is beyond the scope of this project to include a thorough history of publishing in the United States or to consider women’s publishing efforts before the early 1970s. This review of feminist publishers and their contexts is not comprehensive but provides representative examples of some of the main themes that emerge in the literature. I am interested in detailing the connections between feminism’s second wave and the “post-1970 feminist publishing boom” (Murray, *Mixed* 493) as well as in documenting the incredible contributions to the feminist movement accomplished by these small presses, of which CALYX is just one of many.
Feminist Consciousness in Writing and Print

Feminism has often been described as the breaking of women’s silence. In a speech first given in 1971 entitled “One Out of Twelve: Women Who Are Writers in Our Century,” Tillie Olsen refers to the “countless centuries of the silence of women” (23) that had only just begun to be broken by the increasing representation of women in print. Olsen’s memorable phrase, “one out of twelve” refers to the proportion of published women writers to men, even in this apparently more equitable time, the 1970s. Olsen’s later book, entitled Silences, deals with what Olsen called the unnatural silences—those that result from “circumstances” of being born into the wrong class, race, or sex, being denied education, becoming numbed by economic struggle, muffled by censorship, or distracted or impeded by the demands of nurturing. (Hedges and Fishkin 3)

More than twenty years after Olsen gave her talk “One Out of Twelve,” Shelley Fisher Fishkin notes that these many silences of censorship, exclusion, and oppression “are, unfortunately, still very much with us” (34).

Our awareness of such silences was initiated by authors like Olsen, whose Silences had immense impact on an academic and literary establishment that had not yet seen in-depth inquiry into questions of domination and exclusion in literature. A writer but not an academic herself, Olsen conducted her own “crude sampling” into discrimination against women in the literary world, “without benefit of research assistants, secretary, studies (nobody’s made them), or computer” (24). Studies of sexism in literature or publishing did not yet exist, and there was no widespread acknowledgement of discrimination against women in the academic world. Tillie Olsen offered Silences as a guiding metaphor for the emerging feminist consciousness of
women’s exclusion from public cultural forums, including literature. As Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin write in their collection of critical essays on Olsen’s work:

> At a time when feminists in the academy were just beginning to recognize the pervasive absence of women writers from literary histories, textbooks, and courses—indeed, the absence of women or the study of women from all academic disciplines—[“One Out of Twelve”] immediately struck a responsive chord. It put the subject of silence at the center of the feminist literary critical map. (4)

As many feminists have noted, especially in reference to women’s writing and publishing, in this first decade of the second wave of feminism, “we were determined to reclaim a history, a feminism and a literature which had been lost or neglected” (Owen 92). Reclaiming silenced voices from the past and making sure that contemporary voices were heard (and respected) were both at the top of the feminist literary agenda as the movement entered into public discourse through an emerging feminist press network. In her essay on feminist publishing, Ursula Owen notes that feminist publishers like the one she worked for “came out of the early years of a women’s movement which concerned itself with silences, invisibility, the denial or marginalizing of women’s experiences in a male-dominated culture. Writing became one weapon to break that silence, to reveal and celebrate women’s lives” (88).

A common understanding in the male-dominated academic literary world of the time was that women writers did not exist, surely were not any good, and definitely were not published. Dale Spender, in her book *The Writing or the Sex? Or Why You Don’t Have to Read Women’s Writing to Know It’s No Good*, explains that “one of the reasons that women have been discouraged from writing—and that their writing has been dismissed—is that the woman writer has presented an alternative world” (194) to the
patriarchal one we have been born into, making women’s writing almost inherently subversive.

Dale Spender collected hallway comments from male academics during the 1980s to reveal how pervasive this dismissal still was. “None of the women writers of the eighteenth century were of any significance,” says one male academic (195). “Even if there were more women novelists in the nineteenth century, and I have no reason to believe that to be the case, they wrote about domestic matters, not about the human condition,” says another (196). One argues, “There are no women writers [in] the contemporary course because we want to study the best writers. It’s got nothing to do with sex.” He continues, “We’d have to put two of the men out to put [two women writers] on, that that wouldn’t be justified” (196). One male academic explains that he doesn’t read women’s writing because “there isn’t the time to go into anything that isn’t absolutely first rate” (196). A recurring excuse for excluding women writers from academic courses is “women’s writing just isn’t universal the way men’s writing is” (198).

This question of “universality” also appears in Lynne Spender’s inflammatory Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women’s Unpublished Heritage. Her work calls attention to the gatekeeping role that publishers have played and the way that “publishers have managed to project men’s truths as universal truths. Women’s lives and truths have acquired only marginal status and significance” (L. Spender x). Because of this dominance of the male perspective in published work, “the knowledge encoded in the printed word and in our published heritage is frequently not true for women. Such knowledge does not incorporate female experiences from a female point of view and does
not value them” (L. Spender x). Far from claiming universality in their literature or theories, feminists claim the right of women and other oppressed or marginal groups to tell their own stories, to use their own language, and to demand a voice, to be heard. Furthermore, feminists challenge the whole notion of a “universal” human in Western literature, politics, anthropology, philosophy, and so on—a universal that, they argue, has always been male (and generally white, middle to upper class, heterosexual, able bodied, etc.). Instead of being universally true, the privileged perspective of the dominant group is merely one of a multitude of perspectives that arise from various social positions in a hierarchical society.

Not only has the privileged Western white male perspective been projected as universal through centuries of published writing and research, but also those with power over the printed word have worked actively to prevent other, alternative perspectives from being heard or recognized. The feminist movement and the emerging feminist press movement in the 1970s worked to challenge publishing’s gatekeeping function as it has disadvantaged and excluded women. As Simone Murray notes in *Mixed Media: Feminist Presses and Publishing Politics*, a “newly revitalized feminist movement” in the 1970s raised people’s awareness that the written word was subject to political control. One result… was a powerful critique of the contemporary publishing industry. Literary and commercial presses did not, feminists argued, occupy the role of benevolent men of letters, graciously eschewing base commercial motives in their crusade to disseminate culturally improving titles. Rather, such presses acted as gatekeepers for public discourse. By bestowing or withholding the crucial imprimatur of publication, presses furthered specifically ideological ends. (66)

The ideology served by the projection of a white male “universal” and a female or non-white “Other” ensured the continuance of white supremacy and male dominance in the
institutions of the West that were and are founded on structures of domination. It is both the structures of domination and the ideologies that uphold them that feminist movements seek to dismantle and destroy.

Feminist organizations like Women in Publishing began doing their own studies to uncover the ways this male “universal” has excluded and demeaned women. In their study of sexism in the reviewing process, *Reviewing the Reviews: A Woman’s Place on the Book Page*, they wrote that “women’s books are continually in danger of being marginalized… in theory, the national press caters for a general readership, but in practice, ‘general’ seems to mean ‘male’” (Women in Publishing 48). In book reviews, the claim to universality was clearly in operation: “The ‘asexual’ reader is a man. Seen in this light, everything else falls into place” (Women in Publishing 60). Clearly when the qualifications for being “mainstream” or “universal” as a writer included maleness (as well as whiteness and heterosexuality), women writers of all races and sexualities stand at a significant disadvantage. For example, in the foreword to one of the first books published by CALYX, *The Riverhouse Stories*, a whimsical lesbian love story by Andrea Carlisle, Joyce Thompson reveals that a New York editor who saw the stories declined to publish them, saying, “Who would read them?” The editor added that “if [Carlisle] ever writes anything normal, I’d be delighted to see it” (Carlisle, no page). Unlike mainstream publishers who are very much still in the gatekeeping business, CALYX as a feminist press does not intend to publish only “normal” (read: heterosexual) work but rather seeks to publish new, emerging authors and to give space to underrepresented voices and feminist visions for change.
Even language itself was examined as a source of male bias during the second wave of feminism, and feminist writers of all genres challenged the presumed universality of language and began writing as women, rejecting masculine standards of what constituted good writing and embracing a feminine aesthetic. Experimentation with language and the recognition that “language is not neutral, but loaded with the biases of sex, race and class… [have] led to important explorations toward the invention of language more expressive of experiences of marginalized groups” (Scheier 237-238). Male-dominated language, literature, and theory have historically ensured that women had little to no role in the public creation of culture through such representational forms as literature.

As women’s writing became more available with the emergence of feminist publishing in the 1970s, it became even more evident that women’s representations of themselves differed widely from men’s representations of women in literature as seen over the past several millennia. Libby Scheier, a feminist author, reflects on what she sees as the influence of feminism on writing:

Early feminist literary criticism targeted male-defined images of women as sexual objects, domestic fixtures… and, above all, as auxiliaries to the main action…. It was time to create alternative images: woman as subject, not object; woman in many roles, not just domestic; woman as every bit as good as, or better than, man in mind and spirit; woman at the centre of the action. (231)

Feminist writers sometimes wrote intentionally to combat male-defined images of women, but often these new representations of women arose spontaneously as more women began to write and read each other’s writing, gaining confidence and assurance as women’s writing found wide public recognition through the efforts of feminist
publishers. Author Susan Crean also reflects on the way feminism has affected our language, literature, and culture:

It has named, described and given voice to many silences, and because it has changed the way women think and perceive the world, it has changed the way we write. In the beginning there were no words for women, only borrowed words; now we are making them over to suit our bodies and sensibilities; now we are writing in our own image. (89-90)

In this new surge of women’s writing, not only the use of language and imagery challenged the norms of men’s literature, but topics and themes also shifted, as women finally began to feel freer to explore subject matter previously seen as unacceptable for works of literature. As Margaret Atwood remembers,

Looking back on the women’s movement in the early and mid-seventies, I remember a grand fermentation of ideas, an exuberance in writing, a joy in uncovering taboos and in breaking them, a willingness to explore new channels of thought and feeling… Doors were being opened. Language was being changed. Territory was being claimed. The unsaid was being said. Forms were fluid, genres were no longer locked boxes. There was a vitality, an urgency, in writing by women that surpassed anything men as a group were coming up with at the time. (20)

This experience was heady and its “exuberance” was felt widely by Western feminists who gathered in consciousness-raising sessions, writing groups, and action committees. Feminism was truly a grassroots movement that grew from the participation of thousands of women; as Libby Scheier points out, “this renaissance of woman-centred subject matter in writing would never have occurred without women’s own voices speaking” (232). Their voices would not have been heard, however, without feminist publishers promoting women’s writing and bringing their writing to a larger public reading audience.
Feminist writers recognize the power that words can have to change people’s lives, especially focusing on the concept of consciousness as the most basic feminist tool for change. Stacey Young in her study of feminist discourse, *Changing the Wor(l)d: Discourse, Politics, and the Feminist Movement*, notes that activism through language and writing is central to maintaining or transforming women’s social, political, and economic positions. Radical feminism, for example, has consistently emphasized the ways in which women’s subordination is secured through language and media images… Feminist publications seek to effect social change through propagating feminist discourses. (12)

Thus feminist activism has relied heavily on discourse, both written and spoken, to achieve its goals: “In keeping with the women’s movement’s emphasis on consciousness and language, much feminist activism concentrates on changing how people think about gender, power, self-determination, and so on” (Young 12). Changing how people think, or raising consciousness, was and is feminism’s most powerful strategy for change, and this is why feminist writers and publishers “have focused specifically on the power of women telling their stories, and placing their experiences within political contexts, in order to help other women to imagine and act on options they did not previously realize existed” (Young 12).

Feminist theorists Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman also focus on the power of words and on the potential of self-representation to empower women:

Feminism is, among other things, a response to the fact that women either have been left out of, or included in demeaning and disfiguring ways in what has been an almost exclusively male account of the world. And so while part of what feminists want and demand for women is the right to move and to act in accordance with our own wills and not against them, another part is the desire and insistence that we give our *own* accounts of these movements and actions. (573)
They claim that one’s representation of one’s own life is almost as important as actually living it: “having the opportunity to talk about one’s life, to give an account of it, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it; hence our distrust of the male monopoly over accounts of women’s lives.” They continue by saying that “we can be sure that being silenced in one’s own account of one’s life is a kind of amputation that signals oppression” (Lugones and Spelman 573).

Silence, and its accompanying metaphor, voice, is still central to feminist work on literature, language, writing, and culture. Feminist cultural theorist bell hooks writes extensively about the revolutionary quality of a feminist voice or a voice from the margins, what she calls the “liberatory voice.” “Coming to voice is an act of resistance… and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to subject,” hooks asserts; “Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others” (Talking Back 12). Moving from object to subject is the way hooks describes the same idea that Lugones and Spelman discussed of leading one’s own life, “rather than being led through it” (573)—the feminist ideal of self-determination for all people. In feminist politics, this kind of liberation is radical, especially for groups who have been marginalized. As hooks writes,

coming to voice… moving from silence into speech [is a] revolutionary gesture. Once again, the idea of finding one’s voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk, discourse, writing, and action. As metaphor for self-transformation, it has been especially relevant for groups of women who have previously never had a public voice. (Talking Back 12)

Feminist presses, which often focused their efforts on bringing previously unpublished perspectives into the public realm, adopted these feminist metaphors of silence and voice in their publishing missions.
The feminist movement itself has been very much a print movement, relying on written discourse to further its objectives. Many observers of feminist publishing have noted a connection with feminist discursive activism, as Ursula Owen states, “The women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s was, to a remarkable degree, a writers’ movement” (86). “More than any other movement in history, Feminism had been identified with publishing,” argue Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman in their 1978 book *Guide to Women’s Publishing* (3). Barbara Grier, publisher with Naiad Press, likewise observes, “The feminist and lesbian movement in this country is a print media movement… We actually influence people’s lives… with what we put on the printed page… That’s really the most important political tool I think there is, and that’s what we’re all doing” (qtd. in Young 25). Feminist publishers are the institutional form of the feminist effort to take the political tool of print into their own hands.

Feminist publishing is not only a tool for spreading a feminist message. Much important work for change can be achieved on the level of language and discourse, challenging traditional ideas about knowledge, communication, and thought itself. Feminist writing has changed society’s notions about writing and literature, demanding that words be recognized as political and ideological. In traditional literary circles, literature and poetry were considered—as art—to be above and removed from any political agenda. Politics were believed to contaminate art and leave its quality suspect. Feminism’s political investment in language is especially striking in the realm of poetry, as Joan and Chesman explain:

In the early sixties, poets were among the first artists to integrate their writing with a conscious feminist politic… As the personal aspects of life came to be recognized as political choices, writing poetry became a political act. Obviously
there was no place for this politically charged writing in male-controlled literary establishments. Women began publishing their own magazines. (7)

Feminist publishing can be seen as an organized expression of feminists’ new awareness of the power of women’s language, experiences, and stories as political forces. Simone Murray claims that the recognition that

the commercial book trade operated… according to capitalistic, masculinist interests potentially in conflict with the second-wave feminist agenda was the primary understanding on which feminist publishing practice was based. Recognising that publishing was inherently ideological, the women’s movement vowed to appropriate such practice for specifically women-centred political ends. (Mixed 66)

Operating in the realm of ideology and culture, feminist publishing drew on the revolutionary capacity of words. As bell hooks describes: “Our words are not without meaning. They are an action—a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle” (Talking Back 28). Or in the words of feminist poet Muriel Rukeyser: “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? / The world would split open” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 7). Feminist editor Ruth Gundle asserts, “Feminist poets have been the visionaries, really, of the feminist movement, and its most important theorists as well. Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde. Judy Grahn” (118). Women’s words held power precisely because they had not previously been spoken; their revolutionary potential arose from the climate of sexism and discrimination facing women of all races, sexualities, and abilities during this time when feminist publishing was just beginning to emerge.
Sexism and Discrimination in the Literary World

Stories of discrimination faced by women writers are plentiful. A few anecdotes can perhaps give a sense of the kind of discrimination women writers faced in their attempts to be published in a male-dominated industry, in a time when an anthology entitled *Publishers on Publishing* (1961) contained in its table of contents 36 essays by male publishers and zero entries by or about women. Editor Gerald Gross explains in his introduction that his purpose is to “present a series of professional self-portraits of the great publishers… [that] attempted to reveal the publisher as a man—and as a man of business” (*Publishers* xi). The publisher is indeed revealed to be a man, and there is no hint of irony in Gross’s words. A similar volume, *Editors on Editing* (1962), also edited by Gross, contains five essays by women editors, one listed as “Anonymous” by virtue of her being extremely “candid” (xiv)—the other twenty essays are by men.

A striking example of the sexist discrimination women writers routinely faced comes from an article on the 20th anniversary of *Kalliope*, a feminist literary journal:

Before her career took off, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Maxine Kumin was desperate to get in print, sending out sheaves of her work to numerous publishers. Nearly everyone turned her down. One man even sent a rejection letter that read: “We love your poetry. We’d love to publish it. But we just published a woman last month.” (Wright 10)

Author Meridel Le Sueur told this story at a poetry reading in 1983:

I never had a woman editor until the Feminist Press. And as I say, [male editors] were always telling me what to do… the editor of Harper’s or Scribner’s—I guess it was Scribner’s, I had a couple of stories in Scribner’s—and I sent in my story about the birth of a child, called “Annunciation,” which later became quite a famous reprinted story, and he wrote back, this young man, and said, “You have such a lyrical and beautiful style,” which to me was an insult. It was like saying, “You’re a pretty girl,” you know… [chuckles]
“But,” he said, “you write about such funny subjects. Birth? [chuckles] Scribner’s? Writing a story about birth?” Then he said, “Well I think you should write more like Hemingway.” Here I was, holed up with two little babies in a Kansas roominghouse. So I wrote back and said, “You know I really can’t consider writing like Hemingway. I don’t exactly have the same experience. Fishing, fucking, and fighting are not my major interests.” (Le Sueur 18)

Le Sueur also recalls being told by another male editor that “I didn’t know anything about women” and that “I’d better just stop writing… I didn’t have any talent, and I’d better just get a good job and support my children. Of course people were always telling me that” (Le Sueur 18). Countless numbers of women authors experienced the same treatment when they sent their writing to male editors. Many who later published successfully have written or spoken about their experiences in memoirs or in interviews, but many have remained silent. Many others have never had the chance to be heard at all. These are the kinds of silences that Tillie Olsen filled a book and a career with: “the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot” (6).

Through stories such as these, and through the emergence of feminist publishers, there was a growing awareness of sexism and discrimination in the publishing industry. When two librarians conducted a survey of newly-formed feminist publishers in 1976, Aphra and other publishers reported that “they found women subject to censorship due to the male position of power in the publishing field. This was a recurring theme” (Feinberg and Vaughn 1263). In her handbook on women’s publishing resources called Words in Our Pockets, Celeste West argues against the patriarchal capitalist publishing industry, asserting, “Corporate media, valuing profit-before-people, will never back ongoing resistance to the inherent abuses of the profit system, among which women’s exploitation is primary” (West 7). Mainstream corporate presses would not, by definition, publish
radical work that threatened the status quo upon which their livelihood depended. Only through the efforts of feminist publishers, writers, and scholars was the truth becoming known about “exactly how women’s voices have been silenced, twisted, and trivialized through the ages” (West 10).

In 1978, the National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year published their *Official Report to the President, the Congress, and the People of the United States*, which details the professional, political, and social status of women in the United States. The report observes, “in spite of their deep involvement in the arts, women are conspicuously absent from the ranks of artists who have won recognition and acclaim.” Furthermore, “though women do better in literature, they account for only 21 percent of the listings in the 1977 Directory of Poets and Writers” (National Commission 17). Countering the common argument that women writers and artists lack the talent or dedication to succeed, the report shows,

There is ample evidence that our institutions of support, as well as education, in the arts continue to discriminate against women, denying them the opportunities they need to nurture their talents. Continuing attitudes that women are second-rate artists also inhibit women into suppressing their gifts. (National Commission 17)

One study cited by the report provided evidence that “experiments in blind judging have demonstrated that the wide discrimination against women in the arts has nothing to do with their ability” (National Commission 19). When names were concealed, women benefited significantly in every competition, audition, review process, or judged show. For instance, when scholarly papers were submitted for publication through a blind review process, “the proportion of papers accepted from women tripled” (National Commission 19). These kinds of studies began to challenge the long-held assumption of
women’s inferiority as writers and scholars and to expose the sexist power structures that prevented women’s work from being recognized or valued.

In mass media also, women have faced discrimination in an industry that has “historically been male-dominated, particularly in positions of power” (National Commission 67). In her article about a feminist periodical, Paula Kassell explained that “issues that concern women [are] rarely found in the standard press” (200) and that the male-dominated press has distorted and manipulated women’s issues that have received coverage. For example, Kassell claims, “Since its beginning in the mid-1960s, the feminist movement has suffered from inadequate and inaccurate reporting and false interpretation by the standard media” (200). Like the mass media, “establishment presses have been nonresponsive to the needs of women”; the solution that feminist publishers of books and periodicals envisioned was “joining with other women to increase their control of their medium” (Feinberg and Vaughn 1263).

Women in Publishing is one group that actively pursued the problem of sexism in the publishing industry, focusing their book Reviewing the Reviews: A Woman’s Place on the Book Page (1987) specifically on one aspect of publishing, the reviewing process. The group surveyed over five thousand book reviews to establish their claim that there are “clearly defined overall patterns of sex bias [in] most publications” (38) that disadvantaged women writers. The Women in Publishing group began their investigation with a question: Do women writers “enjoy unbiased treatment on the book review pages?” (1). Their motivation was based on a discrepancy they noticed between “apparent interest in women’s books and the actual notice they receive in the press” (1). They took it upon themselves to conduct this research since no other in-depth study had
been done of the treatment of women’s writing in reviews. Their results are summed up succinctly: “Our research shows that the number of books by women reviewed… does not necessarily reflect the percentage of books written by women published, that books by women are treated erratically… and that they are not subject to the same criteria for evaluation as books by men” (Women in Publishing 49).

The Women in Publishing group did little qualitative evaluation of the reviews they surveyed, but they did report a few blatant cases of sexist content in reviews. One criterion they observed that was commonly used to evaluate women’s writing was the sexual attractiveness of the author as determined by the (male) reviewer looking at her jacket photo. They provide a quote from one particularly harsh review that employs this criterion exclusively:

From the photograph supplied of [two women authors], I should judge that neither was sexually very attractive… A sense of grievance can often bring out the worst in people, and there is no reason to extend our sympathy where the motives of these disgruntled feminist agitators is simply to make a nuisance of themselves. This would appear to be the inspiration behind [their book]. (qtd. in Women in Publishing 3)

Many women writers, including Margaret Atwood, have similarly reported judgments being made of their writing based solely on their personal appearance.

In addition to the measurable discrimination against women that Women in Publishing observed in the reviewing process, they also noted a sometimes surprising lack of awareness or recognition by male editors that any discriminatory practices were occurring. Thus they describe the bizarre equation that “the further down the scale in terms of balance [between men and women] the journal was, the less aware of a problem the literary editor seemed to be” (Women in Publishing 57). Some examples of this
reveal a widespread head-in-the-sand attitude. One male editor at a journal (that included 17% women writers in its reviews and employed 28% women reviewers) responded to Women in Publishing, “Discrimination positive or negative plays no part” (57). At another journal (with 18% women writers and 18% women reviewers) the editor said, “The sex of the reviewer is not an issue” (57). At a newspaper (with 21% women reviewers) an editor said, “At a guess I should have thought I use as many men as women reviewers… but I am certainly not going to bother to count” (58). In response to this apparent invisibility of discrimination against women to the men running these publications, Women in Publishing argue, “Change can only occur if there is an awareness of the need for change” (91). They offer their research as a means to raise that awareness.

Individual authors have also written about their experiences of sexism at the hands of editors, publishers, and reviewers in order to speak out against discrimination and raise awareness of how deeply it runs in the literary world. Margaret Atwood, in an essay “If You Can’t Say Something Nice, Don’t Say Anything At All,” emphasizes that despite “extra handicaps” of being a woman, “I was writing anyway, I was writing nevertheless, I was writing despite” (17). She remembers the negative qualities that were ascribed to writing by women when she began her career as an author: “it was weak, vapid and pastel… it was too subjective, solipsistic, narcissistic, autobiographical and confessional… limited in scope, petty, domestic and trivial… good female writers transcended their gender; [and] bad ones embodied it” (18). Atwood kept writing despite, since “the alternative was silence” (18).
Though Atwood claims that she did not face sexist discrimination from editors and publishers she worked with, she admitted that she would be quite happy to line up for a group spit on sexist reviewers, since over the years I’ve been on the receiving end of every bias in the book. She writes like a man… She writes like a housewife. Witch, man-hater, man-freezing Medusa, man-devouring monster. The Ice Goddess, the Snow Queen. (20)

Other authors recall an even more damaging sexism from editors and publishers that limited their writing accomplishments. Susan Crean recalls in her essay “Writing Along Gender Lines” that when she began writing in 1973, “pretty quickly I noticed that beside underground papers… there were few venues for writers of my bent—young, female, feminist and politically engaged… In 1973 I was not even getting my letters-to-the-editors of Toronto newspapers published” (84). When she began submitting her writing with only her initials instead of her full name attached, editorial response suddenly changed; when editors assumed she was a man, her work became widely published. These authors are thankfully now able to write and publish essays like these after successfully breaking through the barrier of discrimination that has kept voices like theirs from being heard by the wider reading public. Imagine how many women writers and writers of color were not able to breach that wall and finally gave up from the pain, frustration, and indignity of such experiences.

Those who did not give up kept writing or started publishing efforts of their own. Margaret Atwood noted this connection between struggling writers and the emerging radical presses: “Finding that they were too new, offbeat or weird for what little ‘mainstream’ publishing there was, many writers of my generation started their own presses and magazines. This is hard work… but for writers who feel excluded, it may be
the only way to develop an audience” (19). Susan Crean also described the presses emerging to fill a need: “The dissidents, the cultural and racial minorities who are customarily left out of history and everything else (and are, in actual fact, the majority), simply went out and set up their own presses, seized the word as they say in Quebec, and broke the silence” (87). What Marlene Nourbese Philip calls “the explosion in feminist publishing… has resulted in women writing and publishing their own stories, about themselves and for themselves” (212).

Clearly the emergence of feminist publishing ventures arose from the atmosphere of sexism in publishing and the growing awareness of such discrimination. Women who wanted to see increased representation of women writers in published literature “decided that the only way out was to set up their own publishing ventures, where they would have total control over working relationships and the product: these are the women’s presses” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 27). However, even ten years after the proclaimed beginning of the women’s movement in Britain, Cadman, Chester, and Pivot write that “publishing remains a male bastion” (19). In their 1981 book Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers, and Distributors, these authors examine women’s roles in publishing and report that women “have managed to insert themselves on the editorial side, but they have made few inroads into management and finances.” They also note that women tend to take the “caring” jobs that reward “feminine” qualities, such as editorial, art, publicity, and, of course, secretarial work—jobs that make up the “base of the pyramid” of the publishing hierarchy and that offer generally low pay and sometimes low satisfaction (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 19).
In the new realm of feminist presses, some of these ancient and longstanding hierarchies began to be challenged and overturned. As Celeste West notes, feminist presses allowed women freedoms they had not previously experienced: “Women need such open, uncensored places to be totally themselves, to talk with each other. The feminist press is a safehouse, a place where truth is created” (8). At the same time, feminist presses sometimes set up hierarchies of their own or reproduced structures of oppression that they were trying to escape. By the 1980s, according to Ursula Owen, “feminism, by other names, is a growth industry. But still the more radical and exploratory texts are ignored by the media—a powerful form of censorship. And still the ethnic minorities are hugely under-represented in publishing” (100). Feminist publishing, like feminist theory, was too often dominated by middle-class white women, and despite their feminist ideals of liberation for all women, white feminist publishers often failed to recognize differences among women and to listen to women’s voices speaking from positions different than their own.

Feminist publishers never fully escaped from the capitalist, patriarchal, white-supremacist structures of society that they were trying to challenge through their publishing efforts. However, as feminist institutions many feminist presses did advance the cause of feminism to end sexism and other forms of discrimination. As the wider feminist movement became increasingly conscious of its own classism, racism, and heterosexism, feminist publishing efforts also became more sensitive to difference and inclusive of work by women whose voices had been ignored by fellow feminists. Out of these struggles within the feminist movement, a wide variety of feminist publishers came into being—some devoted exclusively to work by lesbians, women of color, or working
class women. Feminist publishers, by opening a public forum for feminist discourse and debate, may also have helped instigate the challenge to a movement dominated by liberal white feminists and create a feminism that celebrated difference and diversity.

**Emergence of a Feminist Press Movement**

Feminist publishing is foremost a form of political activism that emerged within and alongside feminist movements. “Feminist publishing, almost without exception, and everywhere in the world, came about as a consequence of the women’s movement and in solidarity with it,” writes Ritu Menon in an article reflecting on feminist publishing’s international history (176). As feminism grew as a movement, there was a blossoming of feminist publications and periodicals such as pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, and manifestos. According to Ann Mather, between 1968 and 1973 “more than 500 feminist publications appeared in the United States alone” (qtd. in McDermott 27-28). Patrice McDermott says in her book *Politics and Scholarship*, “From the earliest days of contemporary feminist awareness, activists used publication as a primary political strategy” (28). For example, the feminist newspaper *off our backs* stated in its first issue of February 1970 its goal to be a resource for all women who are fighting for the liberation of their lives and we hope it will grow and expand to meet the needs of women from all backgrounds and classes… we are convinced that a woman speaking from the agony of her own struggle has a voice that can touch the experience of all women. (‘Mission,’ *off our backs*)

Still publishing today, *off our backs* is the “longest surviving feminist newspaper in the United States” (“About *off our backs*”). The editors maintain an activist mission to provide news and information about women’s lives and feminist activism; to educate the
public about the status of women around the world... and to seek social justice and equality for women worldwide” (“Mission,” *off our backs*).

Feminist book publishers emerged mostly during a peak period of feminist activism from the early 1970s to early 1980s. One author notes that feminist publishers emerged during a time when “feminism was being met with widespread resistance and women wanted to seize the means of production” (Brown 285) in order to better promote feminist agendas. This was during a time period when “many feminist writers... were engaged in a very political activity—that of working for social change. Feminist publishers and women’s presses were very much a part of that struggle” (Menon 176). Women’s voices in print gave women power “over their words and their lives” (L. Spender 109). For the first time in publishing history, women could “now speak for ourselves” (West 5), “define ourselves” (West 8) and “name ourselves and make our voices heard” (Findlen 32).

As Ruth Gundle and others have shown, feminist publishing provided a public forum and a sense of legitimacy to the feminist movement, allowing it to flourish: “The feminist movement has actually been sort of fueled and inspired and pushed along by the feminist print movement, which includes the publishers, magazines” (Gundle 118). This relationship between feminist publishers and a larger feminist movement was one of mutual reliance and reciprocal benefit: “[Feminist publications] have all helped women name ourselves and make our voices heard; their pages have reflected—and created—feminist revolution” (Findlen 32). Neither could survive without the other; as Celeste West states, “An independent publishing network is crucial to feminist power and
survival” (7). It is just as true that a vibrant and active feminist movement is crucial to the survival of feminist presses.

Feminist presses brought feminist ideas to a public readership and connected groups of activists with each other and with women who were not yet involved in the movement. Ritu Menon points out that “feminist publishers were the bridge between the movement and those to whom its messages were being directed” (176). Barbara Findlen adds that “our newspapers and magazines have connected us to each other. Feminists have been able to turn to our own media for support and validation as well as activism and resources” (32). Speaking about her work with feminist periodical *off our backs*, Karla Mantilla says in an interview, “We see ourselves as representing a forum for feminist thought where feminists can debate with one another” (Groves 448). Editors at Persephone state, “Publishing books is an invaluable tool for organizing” (Greenfield and McGloin 106). As the predominant means of feminist representation in print, “feminist presses are crucial to the women’s movement because they ensure that feminists can communicate with each other on more than a one-to-one basis and at the same time control the content of that communication” (Young 15-16).

Because of their political commitment to feminism, feminist publishers often operate quite differently from the traditional, corporate presses, whose priorities generally focus on monetary profit within a competitive, market-driven industry. In a business sense, feminist publishers may act less competitively with each other, since they often work together toward the same goals. Karla Mantilla from *off our backs* describes the publication’s cooperation with other feminist organizations: “We maintain quite a bit of contact with many different feminist publications, and we try to share information when
we can… When we’re moving in unison, we’re moving the best” (Groves 449). Rather than competing with each other for a share of the market, many feminist presses realized that a feminist publishing network could support and nurture many feminist presses (and bookstores) in cooperation with each other.

Feminist presses also organized as educational institutions committed to women’s personal and professional growth. Australian press Sybylla’s priorities as a “women’s press” were:

- to provide an inexpensive printing and publishing facility for the women’s movement;
- to teach women all the skills involved in the production of written materials, and to encourage the sharing of these skills with other women;
- to promote the publication of feminist leaflets, articles, fiction etc., both by supporting women in their self-publishing efforts and by taking publishing initiatives within the group. The collective also agreed not to print material that was “sexist, racist, or anti-working class.” (Brown 285-86)

Sybylla’s expression of their commitment to the feminist movement and to supporting women provides a portrait of feminist activism that recurs over and over in an examination of the political and social commitments of feminist presses from this period. Although many feminist presses also had high literary and aesthetic standards and promoted an artistic vision, for many of the presses their feminist political commitment came first. As Polly Joan and Andrea Chesman argue in their Guide to Women’s Publishing, “feminist publishing is also feminist politics. It is not an alternative to male publishing. It is a political act as creative and diverse as the Women’s Movement itself” (2).

Feminist political and social goals endorsed by feminist presses were many and diverse. According to Joan and Chesman who surveyed around 150 feminist publications and presses in 1978, “Women’s literary, art, cultural, and political journals run the gamut
of ideologies expressed in the Women’s Movement. Goals and interpretations of what Feminism means vary from publication to publication” (7).

Commitment to improving the social climate for women was a primary reason for their existence, which often took precedence over commercial success, as West asserts: “Women’s media exist to solve real needs, not to engineer consumer demand” (7-8). The presses’ mission often included an explicit embrace of feminist goals for change, though these particular goals varied. Feinberg and Vaughn contacted fifty feminist presses in 1976 to ask “how the presses view themselves in terms of the political currents of the last decade, particularly the Women’s Movement” (1263). Responses to their survey include: “Daughters began in 1972 ‘to participate in establishing a feminist culture.’ Majority Report was formed in 1971 ‘to meet the need for [a] feminist communication medium’ seeking ‘to attack sexism at its sources, to link women via a responsive medium’” (1263). Times Change Press, a nonprofit publisher in California, described its mission as “producing only books and posters that further social change and personal growth. Our goal is to help people create a utopia: an egalitarian, loving world” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 166). Seal Press, a highly successful feminist press that still operates today in Seattle, Washington, “founded in 1976, considers that its books ‘have helped… to sustain a strong feminist movement and a diverse literary culture. Many of them would not have been published elsewhere, particularly in this time of corporate merging and purging in the publishing industry’” (Howe, “Feminist” 134).

Many feminist publishers worked for social justice by publishing writing that challenged oppression of all kinds and created theory and strategies for action. Karla Mantilla says of *off our backs,*
We have always had an international focus, have always been a forum for a wide feminist perspective, and we have always been engaged in challenging race, class, and issues of sexuality within an international feminist framework. We have also always looked at feminism from a broad perspective that sees itself as offering a strong social justice perspective for a variety of oppressed groups. (Groves 449)

Mountain Moving, a feminist periodical, expressed its goal to “knock down some of the barriers that keep women and men from reaching their full potential as human beings” (Joan and Chesman 38). Feminist publishers also worked to challenge the status quo and to promote a climate of activism and change. Gail Cerridwen of Word Warriors exclaimed in an interview in 2004, “I want to bring to this generation just some of that sense we had in the ’70s that we could change things!” (Niemi 21).

Women’s liberation took many different forms and expressions in the feminist press movement. Second Wave in Massachusetts, calling itself a “magazine of the new Feminism,” “is both an alternative to and a confrontation with the political and cultural violence that descends on our heads every day; it is a tool with which we hammer at existing social and economic structures to open up new directions for a woman’s revolution” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 46). Another way the feminist presses offered a tool to the feminist movement was by raising consciousness through the printed word. As Cadman, Chester, and Pivot argue, feminist publishers must promote new kinds of material that are beneficial to women:

Feminists in publishing must fight for an improvement of what goes between the covers of a book, and indeed on the cover. The struggle should be to publish books on new areas, in new forms, which avoid sexist stereotyping and the use of derogatory language about women which help us to form a new image of ourselves and our society. (27)

As Minneapolis, Minnesota’s Vanilla Press, a collective publisher focusing on poetry, states, “We want to affect society… affect basic thinking and attitudes… change people’s
impressions of society. We’re supporting things beyond traditional literature” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 168).

By supporting non-traditional literature, feminist publishers sought to raise people’s consciousness about feminist issues by publishing alternative voices to those who have always had a public forum—voices from the margins. Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press was “founded in 1981 by Barbara Smith, with the support of Audre Lorde… [and] describes itself as ‘the only publisher in the U.S. committed to publishing and distributing the writing of Third World women of all racial/cultural heritages and sexualities’” (Howe, “Feminist” 134). Some feminist publishers, especially presses run by women of color, began to recognize more explicitly that even within the feminist movement there were some voices that were still not being heard. Lesbian-feminist and women of color presses focused their efforts on promoting work by previously unheard voices and perspectives. One such press, Violet Press in New York, “is a lesbian-feminist, politically-oriented poetry press (poetry exploring the connection between the personal and the political), started in 1971, hoping to contribute to the expanding feminist culture” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 173). Similarly, Sunbury Press in Bronx, New York, is “committed to bringing out the work of poets of intensity and excellence, who have not been given adequate voice elsewhere” (Joan and Chesman 165).

“With brilliant candor Shameless Hussy continues to print the unprintable” exclaim Joan and Chesman about Shameless Hussy Press in Berkeley, California (163). They continue with frank admiration of the editor’s publishing practices:

Alta’s philosophy was that the most important thing was freedom of the press for women… It was the kind of naked courage that helped many of us enter the fight for the right to be women writers and the right to start our own presses… Alta,
who calls herself the head honcho, is particularly interested in publishing creative work like Ntozake Shange’s that has found no other viable outlet. (164)

As a result of making alternative perspectives available in print, feminist knowledge and theory is broadened. As Ritu Menon explains about Kali for Women, a feminist publisher in India, “our objective is to provide a platform for women writers… [to] enable women’s voices to be heard, as far and as wide as we could manage. In the broader context, we wished to produce an alternative knowledge, from an alternative position” (177). Some editors believe that this alternative knowledge can only be expressed in a safe forum such as the one a feminist publisher creates for women, where women writers are offered a space to work without “men breathing down our necks” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 82). According to Onlywomen Press, “in order to create a Women’s Liberation Movement reality, we need discussion and the development of political analysis unhindered by patriarchal values. We need a means of establishing our own culture” (qtd. in Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 29). Feminist presses took this revolutionary responsibility quite seriously, though they varied in their approaches to creating this safe space for women.

One point of difference between feminist publishers was on the involvement of men in a feminist organization. Feminist presses disagreed over questions such as whether men should be able to work for a feminist press or be part of a feminist publishing collective, whether men’s writing should be published in a feminist publication, or even if men should be allowed to read certain feminist publications. Some feminist presses attempted to establish a positive environment for women and women’s writing without explicitly excluding men from any aspect of the publishing
process. Other presses refused to involve men in any way or at any stage in the publishing process, including the printing and distribution. In their *Guide to Women’s Publishing*, Joan and Chesman admit that it can be problematic to try to define “feminist” when attempting to categorize feminist publishers, since so many varying philosophies and approaches to feminism exist. They explain that in deciding which presses to include in their book, they assessed whether a press was “Feminist-oriented” (106) with a sincere commitment to feminist values, regardless of whether the press identified itself as feminist. Some of the presses they decided to include did publish writing by men or employ men in the organization. Although the presses in their book differ in their views about the role of men in feminist publishing, Joan and Chesman note that where the presses “all come together is as a space where women are free to express their thoughts, ideas, dreams, aspirations—creativity” (7).

Although a few feminist presses did publish writing by men, most feminist publishers of the 1970s and 1980s agreed “that politically there is no space in a feminist publication for writing by men” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 83). In *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers, and Distributors*, the authors state their opinion that “it seems unfortunate that [a feminist publication] is prepared to give any of its limited space to men” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 83). Creating a women-only space was an explicit mission of many feminist presses; in some cases, the idea of a separate sphere for women extended only to the publication itself. Other feminist presses sought to completely withdraw from contact with men in all aspects of the business. These separatist feminist organizations believed strongly that women had to take the means of print production into their own hands in order to secure women’s liberation. They also described a desire
to withdraw support from institutions that contributed to women’s oppression, which
included the capitalist economic system at large. Onlywomen Press, founded in Britain
in 1974, described its mission:

  to publish and print feminist books, pamphlets and posters, etc., with all the
  production carried out entirely by women. Being part of the Women’s Liberation
  Movement has meant to us not only recognizing our oppression, but resolving to
  overthrow it and, therefore, to withdraw support for any of its systems that we
  could by establishing our own. (qtd. in Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 33)

Feminist presses, whether adopting a separatist or inclusive version of feminism,
recognized the political implications of doing business. Many presses resolved not just to
publish feminist material but also to operate in alignment with feminist values.

  Feminist publishers attempted to dismantle hierarchical corporate structures by
  adopting new ways of working that embodied feminist principles of cooperation,
collaboration, care, mutual respect, egalitarianism, reciprocity, and heightened awareness
of power dynamics. Experimentation with non-hierarchical organizational strategies was
one widespread pattern in feminist publishing, especially among the more radical groups.
As Simone Murray explains,

  The central tenet of radical feminist publishing… is its conviction that women’s
  entry into the sphere of cultural production involves the complete transformation
  of process as much as it does of product. Radical women’s presses were
  characterized by non-hierarchical, collectivist structures, an emphasis on political
  engagement over profit generation, and a heightened self-consciousness of their
  position vis-à-vis the corporate mainstream. (Mixed 127)

Joan and Chesman also notice among the publishers they surveyed “experimentation with
organizational forms. The vast majority operate with some variety of collectivity. Women
have been on the bottom of too many hierarchical structures. Because of this there has
been a strong desire to make non-hierarchical structures work” (109). Even in Feinberg
and Vaughn’s smaller survey, they observe that “many of the concommitant aspects of feminism are at work in their business: cooperation, mutual respect, avoidance of rigid salaried hierarchies, etc.” (1263).

The *off our backs* collective offers this statement of how their organization exhibits feminist principles:

> We work in a collective because that type of organization seems most consistent with our politics. Self-affirmation is a touchstone of feminism—the belief that each and all of us are worthwhile beings with a contribution to make. The egalitarian structure of a collective translates this to practice. It also represents the alternative to hierarchy, the necessity of one being exploited so another can prosper. (*off our backs* collective 97)

In addition to rejecting a hierarchical mode of operating, some feminist presses attempted to challenge the values of a capitalist system that they felt was exploitative and oppressive. Sybylla expressed this anti-capitalist sentiment in its mission to publish “women’s writing from an avowedly feminist position, with a willful disrespect for the values of commercial publishing” (qtd. in Brown 288). The dilemma of trying to create an anti-capitalist enterprise within a capitalist system unfortunately had damaging effects on many feminist activist publishers. The next section offers more detail on the challenges and problems that feminist publishers faced in a competitive industry.

An aspect of feminist publishing activism that closely relates to CALYX is the promotion of a new aesthetic based in a celebration of women’s creative work that recognizes the political nature of literature and art. Art and politics are frequently described in binary terms where they occupy opposite ends of a spectrum. In feminist publishing, however, art is seen as inherently political. Artistic work by people who have previously been excluded from public cultural production often poses a challenge to
traditional assumptions, ideologies, and values. Art—including literature and poetry—is for many feminists another means of political expression. As Joan and Chesman explain, feminist publishers were unique in recognizing the political power of art:

Contrary to large commercial trade houses or academic publishers, women publishers see no need to separate art and politics; in fact, they see the interconnectedness of the two as vital. For a female artist to speak from the truth of her own wisdom is revolutionary, and therefore her work becomes political whether she wishes it or not. (197)

At the same time, while art and politics merged in much feminist creative work, most feminist publishers can be seen to lean toward one or the other in their priorities. Some feminist publishers considered the political or revolutionary value of the work as primary. In contrast, Joan and Chesman describe CALYX Journal, in only its second year of operation, as having a predominately literary and artistic emphasis: “part of the flowering of feminist literature… tightly crafted poetry and fiction characterize this publication where art ranks higher than politics” (18). Feminist literary publishers like CALYX, which saw its mission as primarily aesthetic, demonstrate a different kind of allegiance to feminism than the more overtly political publishers. Their goals included, as in CALYX’s mission statement: “to nurture women’s creativity though the publication and promotion of fine artistic and literary work” (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 3). A feminist political purpose is still present, yet subordinate to the stated aesthetic or literary mission.

Other feminist publishers expressed an aesthetic mission to enact feminist change through publishing literature or art. A feminist journal, Heresies in New York, said it is “devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art
and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role” (qtd. in Joan and Chesman 29). Ruth Gundle of Eighth Mountain Press explains that although “political tides come and go as to what’s considered acceptable or within the bounds of literary” (114), she remains committed to publishing books “that come out of a feminist sensibility, whether it’s literature or nonfiction” (117). Through providing a forum for women’s literary and artistic visions expressed with this feminist sensibility, CALYX and other feminist literary publishers achieved feminist goals while also publishing art and literature of enduring aesthetic value.

**Threats to Feminist Publishing**

Authors cited here often claim that the ideological work of feminist publishers is more important than money, and indeed seems to exist in conflict with the idea of making a profit. Diane Brown describes this ongoing problem for feminist publishers as “a conflict of interest between the bottom line and feminist politics” (292). Having to struggle to succeed in a competitive capitalist system is a fact of existence for any independent or small press. “How are we to judge success?” asks Jerome Gold, in his book of interviews with independent book publishers (14). This is an important question in considering what is often seen as the widespread failure of feminist publishing. Gold argues that criteria for publishing success could include: remaining in business for more than two years (better than average); losing money but contributing important works of literature; making money but sacrificing literary quality; providing good salaries and benefits for employees; or producing the highest quality books. As Gold acknowledges,
these goals “may be in opposition to each other. Every independent book publisher must consider at least some of these questions at some time” (15).

More than for other small independent publishers, however, for feminist publishers the struggle between political ideology and economic success is accentuated: “Feminist publishing… seems to epitomise most clearly the problems and choices which face feminists confronted with a society which is both patriarchal and capitalistic” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 29). Feminist publishers with ideological and political aspirations struggled with commercial viability when “publishing for social change” (Menon 182). Menon asserts, “The importance of being economically viable is not lost on feminist publishers, but because their objective is primarily to be true to their politics they walk a tightrope” (182). This conflict of interest between politics and profit is the most widely recognized source of tension for feminist publishers of this time period. In this regard, Murray points to the “profound ambivalence at the heart of feminist publishing” that arises when “feminist presses must walk an impossible line between political authenticity and commercial viability” (Mixed 26).

Many presses could not survive this impossible tension and folded for economic or other reasons. The editors at Persephone were left with questions and self-doubt when Persephone went under: “Persephone was not just a business; it used a business structure to achieve impact. The conflict between sound business decisions and effective political action deserves serious attention. Should we have worked with more professionalism and less idealism?” (Greenfield and McGloin 112). Cadman, Chester, and Pivot observe that “small houses whose commitment to literature was stronger than their commercial sense found that sooner or later they ran out of money, and they either went bankrupt or were
absorbed into a larger group” (Cadman, Chester, and Pivot 18). For some feminist publishers, getting bought by a larger publishing company and “absorbed” could be seen as success. For others, closing their doors after a few productive years rather than “selling out” might be seen as a measure of success. Some feminist publishers incorporated as nonprofit corporations, as CALYX did. As a nonprofit organization with an educational mission, CALYX was able to avoid the profit-or-politics dilemma that destroyed so many other feminist publishers, while encountering another whole set of difficulties with fundraising and grant seeking.

There are benefits as well as drawbacks to operating in opposition to the mainstream, corporate publishing industry. Often the feminist presses, like other small independent presses, were the only ones who would publish certain works that were “not thought of as financially feasible” (Henderson 326) by larger establishment publishers. Feminist presses published riskier, edgier, more innovative pieces or work by new, unknown authors: “because we were operating from the margins we could afford to experiment” (Menon 177). These experimentations in publishing led to much groundbreaking and exciting new work being promoted.

Being small had advantages as well. Many feminist publishers survived for many years because the labor was “done for very little money, mostly undertaken voluntarily. Often, the women who set up small presses or started a magazine had no previous publishing experience, and operated on very small budgets” (Menon 177). Feminist publishing was often a labor of love, and feminists donated their time and energy to the cause. Although many feminist publishers had little experience with producing and distributing books when they started, heartfelt effort and passionate dedication made up
the difference. Feminist publishers distributed books and journals by hand, driving carloads of books to feminist bookstores and conferences. Books were sold by word of mouth and an emerging network of feminist organizations gave the small publishers a supportive community of comrades. Reviews of feminist books were featured in feminist periodicals, and feminist presses “traded” advertising space with other feminist publications. This growing network allowed feminist publishing to flourish in a collective, mutually supportive system that was linked ideologically and politically and worked at odds with the dominant capitalist system.

Reflecting on the feminist press movement, Mary Eagleton describes it as “the often fraught attempts by feminists to control the printing, publishing and distribution of women’s writing and to establish a supportive infrastructure of magazines, journals, writing groups, networks, courses” (70). She explains further:

I term the situation “fraught” because of the enormity of the task women in literary production set themselves. An absence of funding, mainstream opposition, sometimes lack of necessary skills, political and aesthetic conflicts—the problems are many. (70)

Joan and Chesman also notice patterns of struggle in their analysis of feminist publishers: “Reasons for beginning, trying to stay alive, efforts to remain loving, supportive, honest, political, non-profit, this story of struggle repeats and repeats. It is the story behind feminist publishing” (112). Struggle and complexity may characterize the feminist publishing boom—and then collapse—but we must be careful to define what we mean by success or failure. As Joan and Chesman argue in defense of feminist publishing’s dynamic evolution: “I think the fact that women’s publishing is constantly changing is
one of its biggest strengths. What some would negatively term ‘erratic,’ I would applaud as the enviable ability to grow” (109).

Feminism has changed much since the 1970s and the publishing industry has changed significantly as well. In 2004, Leigh Felesky discusses some of these changes in an article, “Feminist Ink: Politics and Publishing in a Big Box World.” The “feminist landscape,” she says, has “shifted” and become more mainstreamed; there is now “a demand for more feminist texts and literature” partly because of the spread of women’s studies courses in universities. As a result, Felesky notes, “mainstream presses are publishing more feminist titles” (22). Some may applaud the mainstreaming of feminism and feminist texts as a measure of the movement’s success, but others worry about the cooption and commercialization that occurs when a radical movement is turned into a safely profitable enterprise. Felesky points out that “mainstream publishers don’t necessarily market new feminist authors” and that “feminist publishers tend to take larger risks” (22). Taking larger risks in publishing means publishing work that may not have a proven, pre-existing market or an obvious niche, which includes work by new authors and writing that challenges society in radical ways. In publishing feminist work, mainstream publishers also present market competition that the smaller independent feminist presses cannot stand up to. Sadly, says poet Betsy Warland, because “certain feminist writing has been mainstreamed” in recent years, “the feminist publishers lost some of their most viable market” (qtd. in Felesky 22).

Ritu Menon observes the same threat of cooption of feminist texts by the mainstream and the damage this institutionalization has done to independent feminist publishing. Although it is clear that “the number of books being written and published on
women, and by them” as well as the “proliferation of women’s studies and interdisciplinary courses” show that “publishers and bookstores are taking women seriously,” we see evidence that independent feminist publishing is, in Menon’s words, “in the doldrums” (181). With feminism widely mainstreamed, Menon notes that “publishing on gender is a far less economically risky business today than it ever was” and that feminist writing continues to be published widely and profitably. However, she points out that the success of feminist authors has sometimes come at the expense of feminist publishers—“who initially took the risk—relying… on ‘sweat-equity and tremendous word-of-mouth publicity’” and who now “find their very survival at stake” (Menon 182). One reason Menon finds for the collapse of feminist publishers is that “women writers—feminist, academic, activist, creative—did not continue to support them, to inform our practice with our politics” (183). Suddenly, the words that Celeste West wrote in 1985 now seem eerily prescient: “Women must continue to support our own media so they will still be here when the commercial publishers lose interest or become too threatened” (7).

Although we may not see obvious evidence that the mainstream publishers are losing interest in feminism or women’s writing, the commercial publishing industry is interested—and invested—in “‘movement as market,’ not movement as resistance” (Menon 182). Commercial publishers produce feminist work because—and only if—it sells and is profitable. The loss of feminist publishers means that fewer editors are producing feminist work because of a personal commitment to feminist political and social change. Without ideological alignment of publishers with the goals of the feminist movement, texts of interest to feminists and women become subject to the whims of the
market. Growth of the “big box” model of publishing, distribution, and bookselling in the last decade has replaced the feminist support network of ideologically linked, activist organizations with a competitive, capitalist, profit-driven book industry.

The “big box” trend impacts feminist publishing from many sides, including widespread loss of feminist or radically aligned bookstores that were a lifeline for small feminist publishers. Menon describes “the impact of bookstore chains on feminist bookstores” in the United States as “devastating” (182). Felesky compares the early days of feminist publishing with today:

Small bookstores, including women’s bookstores, used to buy and sell a handful of copies from publishers and return only a few. But many of these sellers have been taken over by heavyweights that have been known to buy a truckload of books to line their shelves, and then return many of them, unsold. The publisher is left with books that aren’t sellable and often has to pay the distributor for the returns. (21)

CALYX editors tell a similar story of struggle with changes in book distribution and bookselling. Small, independent distributors and bookstores have closed in droves in the past decade, leaving small presses essentially shut out of the large-scale competitive book market. Most feminist publishers have not survived these changes. Those that are still publishing face continued marginalization from the wider industry, including the reviewing industry. Two feminist editors stated in 2004: “It is difficult to penetrate the mainstream reviewing system… Without continuing and conscious support from feminist media… and a strong feminist readership, presses like ours and the issues they raise will continue to be marginalized” (qtd. in Felesky 23).

A changing economy has impacted feminist publishing also from the perspectives of the women whose labor has fueled the feminist press movement since the beginning.
What Felesky notes as “a change in attitudes toward volunteer work” (22), others observe as a decreasing ability of individuals to make a living by working only part time. In 2005, Karla Mantilla from *off our backs* notices that “since I joined the collective eleven years ago, my sense is that people have to work harder and longer than they used to at their paid jobs and thus they often don’t have the kind of time available for volunteering as they once had” (Groves 448). CALYX, like most feminist publishers, relies on an extensive network of volunteers who contribute thousands of hours a year to help run the organization. In a more competitive and stratified economy, in which real wages have gone down for many skilled professions since the 1970s, a business model based on volunteerism is now more difficult to sustain.

Feminist publishers can offer us a clear vision of why the work they do is still so important in today’s world of conglomerates and mass marketing. Joan Drury from Spinsters reminds us: “Look, *every* press is political. Small presses may be explicit about our agendas, [while] mainstream presses support the status quo. Right now, five houses control 80 percent of books published. That’s terrifying” (qtd. in Niemi 20). Only through the work of independent presses and independent media will we continue to be able to access a diverse spectrum of voices and perspectives in print. Ritu Menon offers a vision of solidarity as a hopeful message in looking toward the future of feminism:

If activism is indeed the third arm of education, and feminist publishing means working for social change, towards transforming the public, then women’s studies, feminist writers and presses and the women’s movement are all part of the same project, and the argument for… solidarity is even more persuasive. (183-184)

I offer my research here as an argument for solidarity among feminist writers, publishers, scholars, and activists. Only with cooperation and reciprocity among groups and
organizations committed to feminist change can such an idealistic phenomenon as feminist publishing survive and flourish.

An Incomplete Feminist Press Record

Feminist presses in the United States emerged in the 1970s within a context of political and social struggle, concurrent with the growing feminist movement. Feminist writers and publishers joined efforts to dismantle oppressive institutions and ideologies by using print as a political tool. Feminist presses were an institutional embodiment of the feminist challenge to the historical silencing and exclusion of women from public discourse and cultural production. By providing a forum for marginalized voices, feminist presses challenged the patriarchal objectification of women and “Others” and paved the way for new feminist theory to emerge. As a feminist press network grew in strength, the feminist presses significantly impacted the feminist movement and American literary and social history. In recent years, increasing commercialization and consolidation in the publishing industry have crushed feminist publishing’s growth, leaving us with questions about how publishers can maintain a social conscience in a competitive capitalist economy.

In the literature reviewed here, academic and primary source material work together to provide a portrait of the contexts around feminist publishing’s rise and recent decline. Sources of information on women’s publishing range from ethnography and history to biography and autobiography, cultural critique, and resources and advice. There is not much consistency of approach or continuity of coverage in the existing scholarly literature. Many authors stress the importance of studying feminist publishing,
but the documentation of feminist publishing history remains scattered and incomplete. Additional histories, ethnographies, and biographies of feminist presses and the women involved in their operation are necessary to better understand our feminist literary heritage and would have implications for the future of feminist publishing.

My own research on CALYX, based mainly on personal interviews, allows a closer look at the experiences of women involved in feminist publishing and a more personal account of the themes that arose from the literature in this chapter. CALYX shares feminist goals and visions, organizational strategies, aesthetic and political ideals, and problems and struggles with many of the feminist publishers described above. In presenting my research on CALYX in the next several chapters, I explore more fully the contexts that make feminist publishing a unique print movement.
RESEARCH METHODS

**Perspectives on Feminist Narrative Inquiry**

This project is centered on the stories and voices of women who have made significant contributions to CALYX’s feminist vision and literary accomplishments. Although it is beyond the scope of this project to include every individual who contributed significantly to CALYX over the years, I include a small but meaningful sample of women who have served CALYX in various capacities as founders, editors, board members, and volunteers. Unfortunately, I was not able to include in this project other important contributors such as CALYX authors, artists, interns, subscribers, donors, and other supporters. Though a wider variety of perspectives would have been valuable, the scope of this project focuses on the editorial perspective as the driving force for the feminist literary vision of CALYX. The stories that make up the substance of this project come from in-depth open-ended interviews with women who were closely involved with CALYX’s editorial and artistic mission at various times over the publisher’s history. Additional information about CALYX is gained from published and unpublished sources such as CALYX books, journals, and website, a master’s thesis on CALYX, and internal business documents.

Using a phenomenological approach to the stories the participants tell, I emphasize the perceptions these women have of their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to events as they tell their stories. As Michael Garko demonstrates in his article “Existential Phenomenology and Feminist Research,” phenomenology and feminist research have many commonalities—both approaches call for women to describe their
own experiences in their own voices, both are interested in the meaning of lived
experience “in the language of the experiencing person” (169), and both view research as
reciprocal and dialogic. Overall, Garko argues, “existential phenomenology is
axiologically in tune with the single most important criterion of a feminist approach to
research—valuing women’s lived experiences” (174).

A feminist phenomenology provides a theoretical foundation for research that is
ethically grounded in the personal and the subjective. Rosalind Edwards asserts:

A feminist methodology has at its base a critique of objectivity, of the supposedly
rational, detached, value-free research as traditionally espoused… This involves
breaking down the artificial subject/object split between the researcher and the
researched. (479)

In phenomenological theory, there is no “subject-object dichotomy” and therefore
phenomenology affirms the feminist perspective that “rejects the assumption that the
individual and the world, generally, and the subject and object of research, specifically,
are independent of one another” (Garko 170). Instead, feminist phenomenology assumes
that the researcher and the research participants are interdependent, that “there is
reciprocal influence and the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience,” and that the
research is “dialogically coconstituted” (Garko 170). A phenomenological approach to
research suggests that research participants (traditionally known as “subjects”) are
actually “coresearchers and the real experts of [the] investigation” (Garko 172).

In accordance with a feminist phenomenological research strategy, I approach the
participants in the project as experts and report their stories in their own words as much
as possible. Therefore my narrative—the analysis and discussion—is interspersed with
excerpts from the participants’ narratives in their own words. My close involvement with
CALYX and my personal relationships with many of the current editors, as well as my intentionally feminist methodology, minimize the subject/object divide between researcher and researched. Feminist researchers emphasize that feminist research needs to address “women’s lives… in their own terms,” but also “should not just be on women but for women” (Edwards 479). In that sense, in doing this project I seek to create something of value for the women of CALYX as well as for others with an interest in women’s literature and publishing.

To make the project as reciprocal and collaborative as possible, I sought input and feedback from participants at every stage of the research process, from initially conceiving of the project idea and setting up interviews, to modifying the interview questions, to seeking approval of the written transcripts. The current editors at CALYX worked with me to develop and shape the project and suggested names of people I could interview. Each participant also recommended other people I could talk to for further information and suggested titles of influential books or names of important authors who made an impact on feminist publishing. Additionally, the six participants had the opportunity to check over the transcripts of their interviews and edit them for clarity or emphasis. This “member-checking” stage was important, not only for clarifying the meaning of what was said in the interviews but also to assure the participants a measure of control over their words before they appeared publicly. Since the interviews are not presented anonymously, this process helped ensure that sensitive material would not be included without the participants’ permission. For all their thoughtful effort, sincere interest, and kind advice, I am indebted to the participants who helped me so much with
this project and without whom, of course, this project would not exist. I list these contributors’ names with brief biographies at the end of this paper.

Narrative theory also informs this project and contributes to its structure and form. Narrative inquiry as a research strategy involves recognizing narrative “as verbal action… when someone tells a story… she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality” (Chase 657). Thus, narrative is not understood in this project merely to be a mode of transmitting information, but is considered a way of creating knowledge and meaning. Chase describes narrative as “a distinct form of discourse” in which meaning is made through “the shaping or ordering of past experience” (656). When stories are told, reality is created and shaped, uniquely and subjectively in a particular moment in collaboration with an audience, “as [a] socially situated interactive performance” (Chase 657). As a research strategy, narrative theory places an emphasis on stories as constituting the primary “material that interviewers need if they are to understand how people create meaning out of events in their lives… interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own” (Chase 660). Adopting this approach for my research, I am treating narrative as a way of creating meaning and of communicating attitude, perspective and interpretation, as well as a means of communicating information. Narratives gathered in interviews constitute the bulk of the “data” that make up this research project and are valued in and of themselves as narratives and also as part of the larger narrative of the project as a whole.

Narrative theory shares with feminist research and phenomenology the recognition of the need for the researcher to be an explicit and reflexive part of the research. Narrative provides the content of the research but also offers a form and style
to the project. Chase points out that “narrative researchers, like many other contemporary qualitative researchers, view themselves as narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they studied” (657). Therefore my narrative approach in writing consists of a careful recognition of my role in this project as a narrator among other narrators, whose voices remain separate and distinct from mine and from each other’s. I use a narrative interpretive method as well, which “begin[s] with narrators’ voices and stories… This is a move away from a traditional theme-oriented method of analyzing qualitative material” (Chase 663).

My reporting of the interviews follows what Fontana and Frey call “polyphonic interviewing, where the voices of the respondents are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one” (709). I have allowed the multiple women’s voices to remain distinct as unique narratives that are separate from my own. This strategy “draws attention to the complexity within each woman’s voice… as well as to diversity among women’s voices because each woman’s narrative strategy is particular” (Chase 663).

A narrative research strategy has some elements in common with life history and oral history strategies. This project can be seen as an oral history in the sense that “historians use oral history to describe interviews in which the focus is not on historical events themselves… but rather on the meanings that events hold for those who lived through them” (Chase 652). However, the purpose of this project is not solely historical, but is also personal and experiential. Rather than seeking narratives in order to tell a history, I allow a history to arise thematically from the narratives. Oral history and
narrative inquiry often share the goals of “giving voice’ to marginalized people and ‘naming silenced lives’” (Chase 668) by documenting stories of people who have not been included in traditional written historical accounts for various reasons. My approach differs somewhat in this regard, since I am researching the stories of successful women who have contributed to an internationally known feminist publishing venture. However, the concept of “giving voice” is still relevant in researching the women who have shaped CALYX since there are many stories about the conception and the day-to-day realities of CALYX that they have not had a chance to share with a wide audience.

This project also contains some elements of grounded theory, which allows theory to emerge inductively from the data. Grounded theory shares with feminist research “an insistence that ours is interpretive work and… that interpretations must include the perspectives and voices of the people whom we study. Interpretations are sought for understanding the actions of individual or collective actors being studied” (Strauss and Corbin 160). I have allowed themes to emerge from the interviews based on patterns that I noticed emerging from the stories the participants told. However, this is a modified use of grounded theory, as I did go into the interviews with certain expectations and shaped the interviews around open-ended questions. For instance, I asked specific questions about the women’s experiences with feminism and about their significant memories of being involved with CALYX. Using grounded theory “force[s] researchers to question and skeptically review their own interpretations at every step of the inquiry itself. A major argument of this methodology is that multiple perspectives must be systematically sought during the research” (Strauss and Corbin 172).
A feminist phenomenological perspective, along with an inductive narrative approach, guides this project toward being as collaborative and inclusive as possible while focusing analysis closely on the narratives told by participants.

**Feminist Interviewing and Participatory Research**

The research methods used to collect and interpret data in this project are interviews, narrative inquiry, and textual analysis. Interviews were done as in-depth, semi-structured conversations with six CALYX founders and editors. A narrative strategy, as outlined above, gives value to the stories these women tell and suggests a narrative structure and form to the written project. Textual analysis consists of examination and synthesis of published and unpublished statements that describe CALYX’s mission, goals, and accomplishments as well as struggles over the years. Published texts include books and journals published by CALYX and online material from the CALYX website. Unpublished texts include Beverly McFarland’s master’s thesis from Oregon State University entitled “A Portrait of CALYX” (1989) and documents internal to CALYX, including versions of the organization’s long-range plan and marketing plan.

The questions that orient this research are: How did CALYX emerge from a feminist context? What were CALYX’s founding goals and how were their goals personal, political, social, literary, artistic, and cultural? What were the needs that CALYX wanted to address by publishing women’s literature? In what ways do the women involved in CALYX see their work as aligned with feminism? How has CALYX adapted to changing political, social, and economic contexts? How has CALYX’s
relationship with feminism changed and evolved, as feminism as a movement has also
 evolved? What are CALYX’s most important contributions to literature, art, feminism,
 and women’s lives? How do literature and art created from diverse perspectives act to
 change our society, culture, and world? While I did not ask these questions directly
during the interviews, these research questions guided my investigation. Specific
interview questions are provided in an appendix to this paper.

Interviews are the central and most important research method used in this
project. To find participants to interview for this project, I first asked current editors at
CALYX for their suggestions of possible contacts. After talking with Linda, Margarita,
and Beverly, I had an extensive list of names of current and former CALYX editors,
contributing editors, board members, volunteers, and designers. I decided to narrow my
scope to focus on the editorial aspect of CALYX in order to emphasize the publisher’s
literary vision. I sought a range of experiences within that editorial perspective, however,
such as a range in the time period when the editor was involved closely with CALYX or
a range in editorial position or role. CALYX operates with a small core of paid staff
managing a large number of volunteers who assist with the daily operation of the
organization and who also select and edit work for publication. A volunteer editorial
collective is responsible for selecting the prose and poetry for CALYX Journal, and
contributing editors also volunteer their expertise to the editing process.

I contacted seven current or former CALYX editors to ask if they were interested
in being part of this project. Of the women I contacted, only one declined to be involved.
Four of the six participants I knew personally from my involvement with CALYX. Two
of the participants are CALYX founders, and all six have been members of the journal
editorial collective. Several have been contributing editors, book collective members, book designers, or paid staff members at CALYX; a majority have also been members of the board. Their commitment to CALYX spans CALYX’s entire thirty-one year history, with a minimum of fifteen years involvement with the press. The participants began their involvement with CALYX in 1976 (the two founders), 1981, 1982, 1988, and 1992. Five of the six participants are still involved with CALYX in some capacity.

In conducting the interviews, I followed Fontana and Frey’s advice that feminist researchers “advocate a partnership between the researcher and respondents, who should work together to create a narrative—the interview—that could be beneficial to the group studied” (697). The interviews were semi-structured around several orienting questions, listed above, and generally followed the more specific interview questions but also freely led into other topics. As an interviewer, I took the feminist approach of seeking “collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied” (Denzin qtd. in Fontana and Frey 720). Each interview was conducted in person and in a convenient location selected by the participant. I approached the interview as a “conversation” and attempted to keep the conversation as natural and casual as possible, allowing the participant to speak freely and prompting for more information only when the conversation slowed.

In some cases this conversational approach was more successful than in others, depending on the surrounding environment, the number of interruptions, the time available, and the comfort level of the participant. Having a tape recorder on the table made the conversation a bit awkward in some instances, as some participants seemed more self-conscious of their words than they would have been if they were not being
recorded. In reporting and interpreting the interviews, I include some degree of analysis of the experience of the interview itself, since the setting, mood, and interaction between us could all have an impact on the "results" of the interview. Feminist research includes a need for the researcher to be reflexive about process as well as aware of interpersonal dynamics, body language, and nonverbal communication.

The interviews were recorded on a cassette recorder and then transcribed by the researcher into text format. In transcribing, my intent was to document the words on paper as closely as possible to the way they were spoken. Originally, I included pauses, "ums" and "you knows" as well as laughter. Although my initial transcripts as closely resembled the participants' spoken speech as I could achieve, the quotations from the transcripts that appear in the next chapter have been "cleaned up" and no longer show the pauses, breaks, and repetitions that sound so natural in spoken speech. Upon receiving the transcripts to look over, most of the participants responded immediately with, "Get rid of the ums and you knows!" One editor requested that she speak in complete sentences in her excerpts. In accordance with their wishes, I have made these changes.

In the interview excerpts included here, I try to convey some of the spoken emphasis by using italics to indicate a stressed word and capitalization to indicate a STRONGLY stressed or shouted word. Long dashes occasionally punctuate jumps in thought or breaks in syntax. Ellipses can indicate a trailing off of thought, but usually indicate places where something has been taken out of the dialogue. However, not all omissions are marked. I did not transcribe these interviews in their entirety but instead focused on the sections of the interviews that I felt were relevant and would supply useful material for this paper.
Textual analysis is used to supplement the interviews and provide background or context for information included in the interviews. I consulted published and unpublished material from CALYX in order to find written statements of the organization’s mission and literary and aesthetic goals, not so that I would have a “correct” version of these mission statements but so that I could have a fuller sense of CALYX’s stated mission over the years and how CALYX portrayed itself to the wider public. The written statements are not meant to be compared, favorably or unfavorably, with what was said in the interviews, but rather are included in order to offer another facet to our understanding of the impact CALYX has had on so many people—writers, readers, editors, feminists, and students. Texts consulted include many issues of *CALYX Journal*, including the recent 30th anniversary issue; many CALYX books; Beverly McFarland’s thesis “A Portrait of CALYX”; the CALYX website; and CALYX’s long-range plans and marketing plan.

**Limitations**

This study is limited, like so many others, by time and space available. This project could easily become a book if I had time and energy to contact more of the literally hundreds of people who have made important contributions to CALYX over the past thirty years. Sadly I feel that this project is severely limited by the extremely small sample of people I was able to contact and interview. Many valuable and unique perspectives are left out of this project, not because they were thought to be irrelevant, but because the scope of what I could accomplish here was so narrow compared to the
wide breadth of perspectives I had to draw on. It seems that what I have done here has merely scratched the surface of the amazing experiences that make up CALYX’s legacy.

Other stories are missing because the participants may not have been comfortable sharing them or may have only thought of them later, after the interview. Multiple interviews with each participant could have deepened the responses and filled in gaps in the narratives. As it was, a single interview with each participant did not always feel like enough, especially if the interview was somewhat awkward or rushed. Never having interviewed anyone before beginning this project, I am sure my skills as an interviewer could have been better. Although all the interviews were enjoyable for me and (I hope) for the participants, I often got the feeling that there was more that the participants could have said but that they were unwilling to say “on record.” Being recorded on audiotape seemed to make some participants especially conscious of their words and less able to speak freely. Observing this happening, but not knowing what to do to correct it, was frustrating for me. Some participants told me “off the record” what they did not want to say while the tape was running, and I characterize these statements in my analysis without including names or details.

The research process could have been much deeper and richer had I been able to use the extensive CALYX archives for this project. Circumstances prevented my accessing these archives, which are as yet unindexed and unorganized. With the wealth of historical information collected in the archives, there is a book (or more) just waiting to happen.

Because of limited space, my presentation of the interviews is much abridged and I have unfortunately had to leave out many interesting tidbits. Finally, and not least
importantly, I noticed for the first time in the transcribing process really how much is lost when spoken language is translated into words on paper. Not only the tone, accent, and emphasis of the words, but the pacing of phrases, the humor and drama of the stories, the emotion of memories recalled, and so many idiosyncrasies of speech are lost to the blank black-and-white typeset words on the page.

This loss is not insignificant. Readers of this text will not be able to hear Beverly’s soft Texas drawl, Marni’s rich, enveloping alto, Micki’s sweet giggly laugh, Margarita’s fiery passionate yell, Cheryl’s thoughtful, measured storytelling, or Linda’s intense, incontrovertible emphasis. These stories were told in fits and starts, with yells and pounded fists, with long pauses, and with laughter. Most of all, it is that laughter that I wish readers could experience, in all its varieties: the laughter of amazement and disbelief, the laugh of collusion, the laugh of discovery, the bitter and rueful laugh, the laughter of thanks and relief, the laughter after a good story, the laugh that says, “Now, isn’t that interesting.” Women’s laughter; women’s stories. Words on paper can never fully express the liveliness of what was said by the women here, but readers can use their imagination to try to hear these wonderful voices.
In this chapter, I present narratives of CALYX’s history as a feminist publisher based on interviews with six current or former CALYX editors. In the interviews, the editors shared stories about their involvement with CALYX and with feminism and reflected upon the significance of their experiences. Using a feminist phenomenological strategy in a narrative format, I keep as much of the material as possible in the participants’ own words and place their narratives at the center of this study, emphasizing their lived experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them.

Through sharing these stories told to me, I seek to provide readers with a sense of who these editors are as people and as feminists and how they perceive their work with CALYX to be important. Details about each woman’s personal history and experiences with literature and feminism outside CALYX give a sense of what personal characteristics, values, and life experiences they each brought with them and contributed to CALYX. Their stories also reflect on the insights and expertise they felt CALYX gave to them. Their detailed memories of significant events and accomplishments that occurred while they worked for CALYX offer insight into the day-to-day realities of feminist publishing activism. In reading these stories, we get a sense of what it was like to be part of CALYX at various times in the publisher’s history and get a glimpse “behind the scenes” into the hands-on world of feminist editing. I offer these glimpses or “snapshots” into life at CALYX within a feminist interpretive framework that gives value to everyday lives of women and recognizes the political implications of personal experience.
The political nature of publishing is another interpretive framework that guides my interpretation of the stories shared here. In examining the many facets of CALYX’s publishing achievements and connecting CALYX to the wider context of a feminist publishing movement, I hope to illustrate the ways that feminist publishing is a unique venture in the literary and commercial book world and how feminist publishers like CALYX have embodied the political nature of publishing.

I recognize my own role as narrator in shaping these stories, first as they were told to me during the interviews, and later in editing for clarity, selecting which stories to include, and ordering them into an overall narrative. During the interviews, our conversations often flowed freely from one topic to the next, and the stories and memories sometimes took us into unexpected territory. I have selected pieces from these interviews that I feel tell an intriguing story about CALYX and the women who shaped its history and accomplishments. Although my narration presents and orders these stories, I do not want my voice to dominate the text; mine is one voice among many, adding my piece to the story of CALYX. On one hand, this narrative is fragmented, partial, and multi-voiced; this is the nature of having so many voices speaking at once, not entirely agreeing with each other or sharing the same perspective. On the other hand, allowing these tensions and differences to emerge from the stories as they are told gives an overview of the dynamic processes that shaped the history of CALYX. Including these many perspectives also extends the length of this chapter. I also recognize that different interpretations could be made from the material that I gathered and that there are many, many more stories to be told.
These narratives combined create a vivid portrait of the collective nature of the organization named CALYX. Instead of a single entity, CALYX is a multi-dimensioned collection of energies, efforts, and personalities that extends through space and time into the lives of thousands of people whose lives have been touched and shaped by CALYX—just as CALYX has been impacted by each of their contributions. CALYX is the context in which these people came together to accomplish a feminist literary and artistic vision. We cannot fully understand the influence CALYX has had on our world without examining the lives and experiences of the many women (and a few men) who made it happen. The women included here are only six of hundreds of editors, volunteers, interns, board members, contributors, and donors who could also tell amazing stories about their work with CALYX. The history of CALYX is all of their histories, infinitely complex and detailed, rich with personal experience.

The six editors who participated in this project offer a range of perspectives on experiences spanning the last thirty years and more. Margarita Donnelly and Meredith (Marni) Jenkins, two founding editors, reflect on CALYX’s early years and the many changes that have occurred in publishing since then. Cheryl McLean, Linda Varsell Smith, Beverly McFarland, and Micki Reaman are four more editors who have been intimately involved with CALYX’s feminist publishing mission. These six women provide incredible insight into CALYX’s accomplishments and struggles as a feminist press and speak eloquently about the impact CALYX has had on feminism, literature, and women’s lives.

Unfortunately, there are several key voices in the history of CALYX that are missing from this project, and their absence leaves many gaps that could not be filled
without their participation. Barbara Baldwin and Elizabeth McLagan, the other two founding editors, would have brought valuable insight to this project, especially in the discussion of CALYX’s mission and early years. Lisa Domitrovich is another former editor whose perspective could have added significantly to this project. There are many other editors I would have liked to consult with, including Alice Ann Eberman, Catherine Holdorf, Teri Mae Rutledge, Dorothy Mack, Debbie Berrow, Christine Rhea, and others. I do not consider this narrative to be complete without their input.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of CALYX’s thirty-one-year history, touching on significant events and periods to set the background for these editors’ stories. Next, I introduce each editor and present excerpts from the interviews that focus on their personal backgrounds and how they came to feminism and to CALYX. The third section offers a multi-voiced narrative of CALYX’s mission, accomplishments, struggles, and hopes based on the interviews with the six participants and on other sources from CALYX.

Because I include extensive excerpts quoted directly from the interview transcripts, this narrative is long and detailed and can be repetitive. Sometimes multiple voices describe the same situation or event. I feel it is important to include various perspectives and narrative styles in this project in order to give weight to the stories told by each participant. Through these stories, I do not seek to tell the “truth” about CALYX or to provide a comprehensive history of this publisher’s existence. Instead, I hope that readers can gain a sense of who these six women are and how they experienced their involvement with CALYX, hearing their voices speaking through the text from each of their own distinct perspectives.
A History of CALYX: 1976 to Present

A brief history of CALYX sets the stage for the stories that follow and provides an overview of CALYX’s operation and major achievements. As Beverly McFarland describes CALYX’s founding in “A Portrait of CALYX,” in 1976 in Corvallis, Oregon, “four women set out to right some historical literary wrongs” (41). Barbara Garden Baldwin, Margarita Donnelly, Meredith Jenkins, and Elizabeth McLagan were writers and artists with little to no publishing experience and “no capital” but “a clear vision” of the kind of publication they wanted to create (CALYX, Inc., CALYX Journal Marketing Plan 4). Having met through various writing and reading groups, these four women discussed the need for a West Coast venue for feminist literature and art. As Cheris Kramarae writes for a CALYX exhibit at the University of Oregon, “CALYX was the first West Coast literary journal with women editors publishing women’s works.”

CALYX was established as a nonprofit corporation “with a vision to provide a publication that celebrates the excellence and diversity of women’s literature and art” (“History”). Margarita Donnelly describes the mission in her editorial statement for the 30th Anniversary Issue of CALYX Journal:

When CALYX was founded in 1976, the four founders—Barbara Baldwin, Meredith Jenkins, Beth McLagan, and I—believed that a female aesthetic in literature and art existed and that it could be better seen and nurtured by publishing women’s work in the context of other women’s work. We named the journal CALYX—the protective covering on the flower bud. We envisioned CALYX as the cup allowing the blossoming of women’s imagery that would bear fruit and bring forth new life. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 6)

The four women worked collectively to produce CALYX Journal, with the first issue published in June 1976. Kramarae reports, “The first issue was produced during late nights on borrowed equipment in the Corvallis City Hall’s graphics department.” Until
1986 when CALYX Books was founded, the organization’s sole publication was the journal, which included art, short fiction, and poetry and, later, book reviews. The full title of the journal was *CALYX Journal: A Northwest Feminist Review*, but only for the first year (Volume 1, Issues 1-3). The subtitle was changed to *A Journal of Art and Literature by Women* at the start of the second year (2:1).

As Beverly McFarland documents, Barbara Baldwin was a “housewife, a mother of two,” and a poet with a BA in English and was working as a secretary at Oregon State University (“A Portrait” 41). Margarita Donnelly had a BA in anthropology and an MA in education and counseling; she was a founder of *Women’s Press*, a feminist publication in Eugene, Oregon, and was a single mother, working at Special Services Consortium at Oregon State University (Kramarae). Elizabeth McLagan had a BA in history and was working as a bookkeeper while she “began to write poetry and met Barbara at a poetry workshop” (McFarland, “A Portrait” 41). Meredith (Marni) Jenkins had degrees in fine arts and zoology and was a painter and graphic designer (McFarland, “A Portrait” 41).

For the first two years, the four founders made up the core editorial collective; contributing editors appeared in *CALYX Journal* by the end of the second year. Olga Broumas, a contributing poet and a friend of the group, was the first Contributing Editor listed (and in 2007 still appears as the longest-serving Advisory Editor). Other volunteers arrived to help with various aspects of the organization; all of the collective editorial, production, and promotion work during this period was done on volunteered time. The journal was based out of the editors’ homes until 1978 when CALYX moved into office space in downtown Corvallis (McFarland, “A Portrait” 43). The journal did not have a distributor until 1980, so the editors and other volunteers traveled through the Western
states selling journals at bookstores, women’s events, and book fairs (McFarland, “A Portrait” 42).

The founders immediately sought grants and donations to produce *CALYX Journal*, and in 1977 they received their first National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant. NEA grants have been a “major foundation” of support for the publication of almost every issue of *CALYX Journal* (McFarland, “A Portrait” 43). In the *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan*, CALYX reports that from 1978 to 1981, they received grant support as “one of only three literary publishers ever awarded an NEA Literature Program three-year Development grant” (CALYX, Inc. 5). Beverly McFarland notes that lack of financial support “was one of the first major obstacles to overcome, and it has remained the biggest problem through the years.” She adds, “*CALYX* could not have survived without these national grants” (“A Portrait” 43). State and federal arts grants have provided a large part of CALYX’s financial base but the organization has also “been sustained through sales, subscriptions, [and] donations… with the majority of the work accomplished by an impressive group of devoted volunteers” (CALYX, Inc., *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan* 4).

During these first years the collective published three issues of *CALYX Journal* each year. The first special issue of the journal, the *Matriarchal Issue*, appeared in 1978 (2:3). Beverly McFarland observes, “Quality began early to be rewarded” (“A Portrait” 43). CALYX authors Olga Broumas and Eleanor Wilner, another contributing poet and long-time Contributing Editor, both won prizes for manuscripts published in early issues of *CALYX* (McFarland, “A Portrait” 44). Many other awards and grants were to follow.
In 1978 the first of many staff changes occurred when Elizabeth McLagan left CALYX to pursue other jobs and her own writing (McFarland, “A Portrait” 46). The end of 1980 ushered in more changes to the organization and operation of CALYX. Barbara Baldwin resigned after the staff held “several meetings to discuss the future of CALYX” (McFarland, “A Portrait” 47). Apparently the staff could not entirely agree on the way CALYX should be run. Meredith Jenkins moved to Seattle soon afterwards but remained a Contributing Editor for many years (McFarland, “A Portrait” 48). Margarita Donnelly then took the helm and became Managing Editor of CALYX, drawing a part-time salary as funds allowed.

The publication of the International Issue, a special double issue of the journal (5:2/3), in October of 1980 brought CALYX much acclaim but also led CALYX into a period of struggle and transition. CALYX editors still take pride in the publication of the International Issue, “a bilingual collection of creative work by women from 37 countries,” which included the first English translations published in the U.S. of the work of Nobel Laureate Wislawa Szymborska and also the first color reproductions of Frida Kahlo’s artwork to be published in the U.S. (“History”). Despite these successes, “this issue failed to reach expected sales levels and engendered [CALYX’s first] debt” (CALYX, Inc., CALYX Journal Marketing Plan 4).

The next few years were difficult due to changes in staffing as well as the debt left over from the production of the International Issue, and the journal was produced on an irregular schedule for two years. Beverly McFarland describes the “first half of the 1980s [as] an intense period of struggle” (“A Portrait” 48). However, during this time CALYX published a Special Photography Issue in February 1982 (6:2), a Special
Northwest Women’s Art Show Catalogue in Fall 1982 (7:2), and the special issue Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo: An Anthology of Native American/Latina Art and Literature in Spring 1984 (8:2). Seven guest editors assisted with the selection of manuscripts and art for Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo, culminating in the publication of “the first anthology of Native American/Chicana/Latina women’s work” (Kramarae).

In 1984, editorial collective member Lisa Domitrovich became Assistant Managing Editor and helped initiate positive changes at CALYX. As Beverly McFarland reports, “Margarita Donnelly said CALYX would have folded without Lisa’s enthusiasm and promotion help” (“A Portrait” 49). The organization added more paid staff positions and began going to national and international conferences and book fairs “to help give CALYX national exposure” (McFarland, “A Portrait” 44). Fundraising efforts intensified and the organization began having more contact with other feminist publishers at conferences such as the International Feminists Book Fair, Women in Print, American Booksellers Association, and International Women’s Book Fair (McFarland, “A Portrait 45). The name of the first student intern for CALYX appears in the Spring/Summer 1985 issue (9:1). Student internships remain a vital component of the organization to this day.

The next major change occurred in 1986 when CALYX, Inc. expanded to include CALYX Books. As with the publication of CALYX Journal, publishing books is a means for the editors to provide “a forum for… women’s voices by publishing writing and art that would not be published by commercial presses” (“CALYX Books”). From the beginning, the editors sought creative work by underrepresented writers and were committed to helping writers develop their work through intensive editorial exchange. Nurturing new authors is part of CALYX’s mission as a feminist publisher: “As a small
press working with emerging authors, CALYX only publishes a few books annually—
this allows the editors to concentrate on editorial support for each author” (“History”).
To create opportunity for previously unpublished authors to become published, CALYX
accepts unsolicited manuscripts. As noted on the CALYX website, “CALYX Books
regularly publishes first books by an author; the editors love nothing more than launching
a new writer’s career” (“History”). Another commitment is to keep books in print as long
as possible, giving an author an extended chance to succeed. Literary quality is always
foremost in the editors’ minds when selecting manuscripts to publish, and “being a non-
profit organization means CALYX is able to prioritize literary value and diversity”
(“CALYX Books”).

The book publishing venture also allows the editors to publish special issues of
*CALYX Journal* in book form, thus expanding their life in print by allowing for
reprinting. One such special issue is *Women and Aging*, first published as the Winter
1986 double issue of the journal (9:2/3) and then reprinted in a book edition. This
groundbreaking collection of essays, poems, fiction, interviews, and art was “the first
anthology to address ageism from a feminist perspective” (Kramarae). The tenth
was reprinted in a book edition. The first two books that were not special issues of the
journal were *The Riverhouse Stories* (1986) by Andrea Carlisle and *The White Junk of
affirm CALYX Books’ commitment to publishing good books that probably couldn’t get
published anywhere else. They also reflect CALYX’s continuing commitment to
Northwest writers” (“A Portrait” 50).
CALYX expanded its offices in 1986 and then moved across the hall in 1989 to take advantage of a more continuous office space (McFarland “A Portrait” 43). The next years were a period of growth, with the editors publishing several books a year as well as the journal. CALYX’s books received a significant amount of recognition and continued to sell steadily. *CALYX Journal* won many awards for excellence and in 1989 CALYX was awarded the Stewart H. Holbrook Award from the Oregon Institute of Literary Arts “for significant achievement in literary publishing in Oregon” (CALYX, Inc., *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan* 4). A book that began as a special double issue of the journal in Fall 1988 (11:2/3), *The Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women’s Anthology* won the American Book Award in 1990. Guest editors Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Mayumi Tsutakawa worked with Managing Editor Margarita Donnelly to produce *The Forbidden Stitch*, “the first anthology of Asian American women’s work to be published in the United States” (Kramarae).

Although CALYX was growing and expanding its publishing efforts, the organization began struggling to keep up with the ambitious publishing schedule. The staff and volunteers were overextended by the amount of work required to maintain the quality of the books and journals (CALYX, Inc., *Long-Range Plan: 1999* 3). By the late 1980s, an outdated bookkeeping system and increased costs of production in the book industry, as well as “the lengthy period of time between when a book is sold and when the revenue is received,” created “cash flow problems” for the organization; CALYX was “debt-laden” by 1990 (CALYX, Inc., *Long-Range Plan: 1999* 2).

An NEA Advancement Program grant from 1989 to 1991 brought CALYX into another period of transition. Known officially as the NEA Advancement Target
Technical Assistance and Phase I Programs, this grant brought arts nonprofit consultants to advise CALYX on improving its business practices and planning strategically for the future. A long-range plan for CALYX was created, outlining strategies and goals to improve the publishing operations, financial stability, fundraising base, staff resources, promotion and marketing, and facilities and equipment. CALYX was awarded the next level of Advancement in 1991 as only “the fifth small press in the nation to be awarded an NEA Advancement Phase II grant” (CALYX, Inc., *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan* 5). Under the Advancement program, CALYX restructured its management positions and its Board of Directors in order to improve its business operations as a nonprofit corporation. During these years CALYX also “improved the financial reporting systems, increased fundraising activities, and improved staff development” (CALYX, Inc., *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan* 5). These changes brought some much-needed stability to CALYX: “Through the NEA Advancement process, the organization has undergone a transformation that continues to be realized at every level and is operating in the black for the first time in a number of years” (CALYX, Inc., *CALYX Journal Marketing Plan* 5).

At the same time that CALYX was improving its business strategies with the help of the NEA Advancement grant, the staff also began aggressively promoting *CALYX Journal* with the help of another grant, the Lila Wallace–Reader’s Digest Literary Publishers Marketing Development Program. With this grant’s support, CALYX created a Program Coordinator position (later changed to Managing Editor) in 1992; they added a Promotion Coordinator position in 1993 with the assistance of another grant (CALYX, Inc., *Long-Range Plan: 1999* 14). Journal subscriptions increased dramatically and book sales also increased at that time. A 1993 book, *The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes* by
Barbara Scot, “sold out of its first printing (9,000 copies) by early 1994 and went into a second printing of 5,000 after being awarded the 1994 PNBA book award” (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1999 16). These years were a boom time for CALYX, but changes were on the horizon.

Structural changes had been occurring in the publishing industry for a few years, but the effects did not have a significant impact on CALYX until around 1995. Bookselling and distribution became more centralized as large corporations dominated the market and independents went bankrupt all over the country. This trend continued for several years until virtually no independent distributors or bookstores were left. Referring to this time period, Cheris Kramarae writes, “feminist publishers and booksellers are feeling under siege. The rise of superstores has forced many independents out of business.” State and national arts grants were also disappearing. The effect on CALYX was devastating, as Kramarae reports:

Government funding for the arts has been cut drastically, at the same time CALYX journals and books are winning awards. Meanwhile, CALYX’s total income dropped 18 percent between 1994 and 1995, and CALYX’s grant support dropped 88 percent… The costs of production increase even as sales decrease.

All these forces seemed to converge suddenly on CALYX.

In 1996, CALYX experienced some of its most pressing challenges. Kramarae quotes Margarita Donnelly as calling 1996 “the year from HECK.” Although CALYX received the Oregon Governor’s Arts Award that year, no financial support accompanied the award. To alleviate some of the financial burden on the organization, “the staff met and collectively decided to cut all positions in half to conserve funds; everyone agreed to stay on, even if they had to take second jobs elsewhere” (Kramarae). Additionally, while
the young women’s editorial collective worked to put together *Present Tense: Writing and Art by Young Women*, CALYX’s 20th anniversary anthology, “the so-called hundred-year flood hit Corvallis—and Margarita’s home—with force. Editorial work… was often set back due to landslides, floods, and highway closures that prevented the editorial staff from getting to meetings” (Kramarae).

Amidst all these challenges facing CALYX, a new 1996 release, *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland, sold exceptionally well that year, attracting the attention of a New York publisher. Bantam Books bought the publishing rights to *Into the Forest* for “a sum which saved the CALYX press from closure” (Kramarae). The staff was able to return to their regular working hours and CALYX paid off the debts that had accrued since 1995 due to “falling sales revenue resulting from the inroads of the superstores and changing sales patterns in the industry” (CALYX, Inc., *Long-Range Plan: 1999* 2).

*Into the Forest* may have saved CALYX from bankruptcy in 1996, but the editors realized that they would also have to revise their long-term planning due to the rapid and widespread changes in the industry. As stated in the *Long-Range Plan: 1999*, “We can no longer expect sales to increase in bookstores as it did prior to 1995” and “the selling and distribution for journals and books has changed drastically over a short period of time” (CALYX, Inc. 5). They also recognized that the organization’s reliance on federal grant support was leaving CALYX vulnerable. The *Long-Range Plan: 1999* points out that between 1994 and 1999 “the National Endowment for the Arts lost 40 percent of its funding base and was restructured. There is no longer an NEA Literature Program and for the first time in its history CALYX received no NEA grant support from 1996 to 1998” (CALYX, Inc. 5). Some new strategies for survival that CALYX adopted in the face of a
changing industry were to seek increased financial support from private foundations and individual donors, to market books and journals directly to consumers through the CALYX website and by other means, and to sell publishing rights to CALYX books to larger publishers as they had done with *Into the Forest*.

In the past ten years CALYX has successfully implemented some of these changes. A 1997 book, *Second Sight* by Rickey Gard Diamond, was sold to HarperCollins and foreign rights to *Into the Forest* were sold in 14 countries (CALYX, Inc., *Long-Range Plan: 1999* 16). CALYX has increased fundraising efforts and reached out to individual and private donors. The updated CALYX website allows for direct online purchase of journal subscriptions and books. Although CALYX manages to remain in operation, the productivity and staff have been drastically reduced; the staff is currently operating at an equivalent of 1.2 full time positions. Only one special issue of the journal has been produced in the past ten years—*Cracking the Earth: A 25th Anniversary Anthology* in Summer 2001 (20:1).

Important books are still being published at CALYX; all the editorial work in selecting, editing, and proofing the manuscripts is still done by dedicated volunteers, as it has been since the beginning. *Going Home to a Landscape: Writings by Filipinas* (2003), edited by Marianne Villanueva and Virginia Cerenio, is a valuable addition to CALYX’s multicultural catalogue. A revised edition of *The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes* (2005) by Barbara Scot updates the influential earlier book. *Femme’s Dictionary* (2004) by Carol Guess and *Storytelling in Cambodia* (2006) by Willa Schneberg are two collections of poetry that exhibit CALYX’s continued commitment to sharing exquisite, radical, and challenging women’s voices and visions with the world.
At CALYX’s 30th anniversary, fundraising remains the biggest challenge and is an ongoing effort for the staff, volunteers, and board members. Despite its challenges, CALYX remains committed to its original vision of creating a forum to celebrate women’s creativity and diversity through art and literature. In the 30th Anniversary Issue, Margarita Donnelly recalls,

in 1976 the founders of CALYX believed the world was changing and were sure women’s art and literature would be accepted into the mainstream and given equal status and that the need for CALYX would be short-lived. But here we are celebrating three decades of publishing, and the statistics for women are only slightly improved.

A recent survey of small press publishing by a CALYX intern revealed only twenty-five percent of those published are women. In evaluating major literary anthologies, women’s literature currently averages ten percent of the work included, up slightly from the seven percent representation of women in anthologies in 1976 when CALYX was founded. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 6)

CALYX has been part of this progress, but clearly much more work is to be done before women are represented equally in literature, poetry, and art. By insisting upon publishing high quality literature and art by women with the loving care that only a small press can provide, CALYX has done its part to expand people’s awareness of important issues that affect women. Publishing equality is only one facet of the feminist mission that CALYX endorses by its publishing efforts.

CALYX’s achievements are best seen in terms of human impact and publishing successes, rather than financial gain. As Margarita Donnelly reports,

During the past thirty years CALYX has provided the public with a conversation by over 3,500 women authors and artists that is a collective expression of the different realities of women’s lives, visions, and dreams. A reality previously defined by a limited elite that excluded women’s perceptions has now been opened up to include a multitude of voices that are flourishing. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 7)
To achieve this incredible impact, CALYX editors have devoted innumerable hours, personal sacrifices, and, I dare say, sleepless nights. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to telling some of their stories. If part of CALYX’s success is in the ways it has touched the lives of writers, artists, and readers, then listening to the stories told by CALYX editors can reveal another layer of the human impact CALYX has had.

**Feminist Literary Lives: Personal Histories of CALYX Editors**

Each editor is introduced here based on our interviews as well as on my own personal observations and on written statements in work published by CALYX. Before I interviewed them, I already knew Margarita, Linda, Beverly, and Micki from working with CALYX. I met Marni and Cheryl for the first time in our interviews. The editors are introduced in order of their arrival at CALYX, with Margarita and Marni, two founders, coming first. Cheryl and Linda both got involved with CALYX in the early 1980s, Beverly in the late 1980s, and Micki in the early 1990s.

During our conversations the editors told me about their personal backgrounds and their lives before they came to CALYX. I was especially interested in their alignment with feminism and how they had developed a feminist awareness that they then drew on in their work with CALYX. Their various feminist perspectives have become part of the collective and have influenced CALYX’s feminist goals and achievements. These stories of coming to a feminist awareness and then coming to (or founding) CALYX reveal a variety of feminist sensibilities and perspectives.
Margarita Donnelly

Margarita Donnelly is the only one of the four founding editors still working at CALYX. She is, by all accounts, a guiding force for the press and a major reason that CALYX still exists. In “A Portrait of CALYX,” Beverly McFarland describes Margarita as “indomitable” (44) and this is a suitable word to portray this woman who has led the press with so much determination, willpower, and hard work. Now the Director of CALYX, Margarita manages the business and financial side of the organization and is not as involved with the editorial collective process as she was in the beginning.

In describing Margarita for the 30th Anniversary Issue, editorial collective member Alice Ann Eberman calls up an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the fierce one, the one who gives women strength and hope, the modern optimistic symbol of feminism… If you can imagine Our Lady with curls of disheveled red hair instead of a halo, and a holey sweater instead of azure drapery, with hands held over a keyboard instead of folded in prayer—that would be Margarita, fiercely dedicated to the power of women’s visions. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 8)

I could not describe Margarita any better. I met Margarita when I started my internship at CALYX in the spring of 2003. It seemed that she was always running around the office, attacking grant proposals and dysfunctional answering machines with her characteristic ferocity. Margarita is a passionate storyteller. The stories included here were told with considerable drama, her voice rising with tension to a shout or dripping with sarcasm as she re-enacted dialogues. Once her stories got started, they created their own momentum. Margarita and I sat and talked one afternoon in the summer of 2006 in her office in the middle of the CALYX office space, and she told me these stories about her personal background and how her feminism developed before CALYX was founded.
She admitted the difficulty of recalling her feminist perspective and that of the other founders at that time: “I’m not clear what everybody’s ideas of feminism were, and I have to sort of re-create what I think my ideas of feminism were back then.” Reading feminist books and publications had a significant influence on Margarita: “I had been reading everything—I read *Sisterhood is Powerful*—I just read everything that was coming out by women from about ’67 on.” She elaborated,

I’ve been a big reader all my life—even though my undergraduate degree is in anthropology—and I had literally not read many women until the late ’60s. And then I just went on a rampage to read more women writers and also analyzed a lot of things. Robin Morgan was a huge influence on me; she had some poetry that was really quite fervent and beautiful and revolutionary. Then there was *Ms.* magazine, which was mainly at that time all East Coast writers. It became more and more apparent that there were hardly any venues for West Coast women writers. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Her feminist convictions grew the more she read; finally, she said,

I had dropped out of the graduate program I had been in at U of O, because I couldn’t take the patriarchy anymore. I really reached a point where it was just really hard to be reading the stuff I was reading and dealing with what felt to me like quote unquote “patriarchal” stuff. I was becoming more and more aware of the situation of women, because the statistics then were just horrendous. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

As an activist, when Margarita perceived a problem, she looked for ways to try to solve it. She had already been active in protesting the war in Vietnam. As Margarita mentioned in an interview with Jerome Gold, “my involvement in the anti-war movement got me into feminism. And then, you know, the sexism in the anti-war movement was so horrendous” (Donnelly, Interview 316). In 1969 Margarita founded *Women’s Press*, a radical feminist, collective newspaper in Eugene, Oregon, where she had been going to graduate school. Margarita described the connections she saw between art and activism:
By the time we started CALYX in ’76 I had already done *Women’s Press* in Eugene. At the time I was sort of a radical. I was very involved in the start of a lot of the women’s groups down in Eugene, and a bunch of us had broken away from the anti-war movement and started our own feminist stuff. Out of that came *Women’s Press*, which was a monthly newspaper, and I think it kept going for almost nine or ten years. It was a collectivized thing too.

I’ve always loved literature; I was always a big reader, and when we did *Women’s Press*, we always included poetry and book reviews. It wasn’t just political work that we were publishing; we always included lots of art and literature. Because I came out of South America, because I came from a tradition where literature and art were considered activist occupations [laughs]—because in Latin America, poets start revolutions!—I didn’t think anything about it. To me they were all the same. I didn’t see the separation that a lot of Americans see. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Margarita grew up in Venezuela and described her upbringing as bicultural and bilingual. That multicultural outlook is a significant piece of her background that impacts her feminist vision and her work at CALYX.

Along with starting the *Women’s Press* in Eugene, Margarita also had significant work experiences in the early 1970s that influenced the kind of feminism that she brought with her to CALYX. Jobs in very sexist and racist environments pushed Margarita’s activism in new directions as she gained an awareness of labor issues:

I got a job being one of the first hardhat women in Oregon, with one of my girlfriends. We moved up to Hood River for this job; we worked on the Hood River highway and a highway through Gifford-Pinchot. And I ended up staying there and working in a cannery. The situation with being a woman on a road crew was hilarious. I mean it was beyond the beyond. It was like in 1969, I think it was ’70 when we did it.

I always wanted to write this thing about “hard knocks on a feminist hardhat,” because it was really something working with those men. I mean, it was incredibly bad. It was just incredible what they did. You just had to learn to hold your own, and what was holding me together was I was still reading *Ms!* [Laughs] I was reading *off our backs*—I think *off our backs* was already publishing. I was still staying very, very political.
It was an incredible eye-opener to become a political feminist and then to work in a male-dominated area and see how bad it was—and have to hold your own in it. The blade driver would come after me, and I learned to carry rocks in my pockets and throw them at him. I was a pretty good shot, and actually after I pinged him a few good times he stopped chasing me with the blade. Our truckers wouldn’t stop for me… I’d get these gravel truck drivers who paid no attention because I was a girl. So I learned to just throw my stop sign into their windshield, and pretty soon they’d start paying attention to me. But it was just incredible. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Margarita knew that she was hired on the road crew only because the project was on a federal contract, which was subject to affirmative action legislation requiring hiring of women and minorities. After the crew moved off the federal contract, she quit before they could fire her. She stayed in Hood River to work in a cannery. Margarita remembered rampant sexism and labor and safety violations in the plant:

The women all had jobs where they stood on the line and couldn’t move without permission, and it was terribly noisy. They were breaking all the rules in the book. I ended up organizing the women—I said we’ve got to go to the Teamsters meetings. You know, because these men are getting all the jobs where they moved around, but the women were stuck on the line.

There was some really dangerous equipment—there were slicers and all sorts of things, and they were breaking all sorts of rules, I found out. I got the women to start attending the meetings, and complaining about their situation. OSHA had just started that year. They were driving gas heisters in that plant in the fall, and there were pregnant women who, because of the carbon monoxide and stuff in the plant, were fainting into the equipment. I mean it was incredible what was going on in that plant.

They had used paint that was not allowed with food; they had slippery floors because we did pears part of the season and it was all cement floors with no protection. The noise levels were too high, so they couldn’t give verbal instructions on dangerous machinery. They didn’t have anything posted properly—it was just straight out of Upton Sinclair. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

After Margarita almost lost a finger in a slicing machine, she left the cannery but eventually put in a complaint about the cannery’s safety violations to OSHA
As Margarita related exuberantly, “OSHA caught ’em red handed… They walked into that plant and caught ’em red handed—and really got ’em, [shouts] for ALL their violations—ALL of ’em!” She found out later that the women she had convinced to go to the union meetings had organized and filed a class action lawsuit against the cannery for sex discrimination. Margarita exclaimed with satisfaction, “The women won their suit—that was the best part. They won their class action sex discrimination suit… It was INCREDIBLE what came out of that” (Donnelly, personal interviews). Clearly these employment experiences influenced Margarita’s feminist outlook as she saw what effect women’s collective action could have on sexist institutions.

Margarita summed up these stories about her early work experiences: “And that’s where my feminism was all coming from all those years.” Reflecting on the significance of these experiences, Margarita said,

So it was quite an education I got during those late years of the ’60s and ’70s when I became a feminist. All of that built into the feminism that I came to CALYX with, which included a lot of working class issues as well. A lot of class issues as well as racism and sexism, so that’s partially where all my stuff came from. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

During the early 1970s Margarita also worked for a community action program on the Columbia Gorge and for the Forest Service as a Civil Rights Instructor, teaching rangers about racism and sexism. She got a job at Oregon State University working with minority students and also worked as the program coordinator at the OSU Women’s Center. Working in Corvallis felt like quite a change from the active political lifestyle Margarita had been accustomed to:
When I took the job here at OSU and moved to Corvallis, I got so bored, quickly, with the town. Back in ’73 there wasn’t a whole lot going on here; this town had kind of escaped the ’60s in a strange way. It didn’t have the immensity of the political stuff that had happened at U of O. We closed U of O down I don’t know how many times. The outrage over Cambodia was just incredible; we closed that place down for almost a month and had teach-ins—U of O was very political back in the ’60s.

Then coming here, it was just this sort of cultural shock. The first thing that happened to me was I came to look for a place to rent and I got refused because I was a single mom. I looked at this guy and said, “That’s illegal” and he said, “I don’t care!” [Laughs] It was ’72 or ’73. “That’s illegal!” “I don’t give a shit, lady, you’re a single woman. I won’t rent to you.” I didn’t have time to deal with that; I had to find a place to live. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Margarita described her boredom with Corvallis as part of what got her into the writer’s group from which the idea for starting CALYX emerged:

We had this writer’s group going out of the women’s center where we’d meet and talk about novels. It was some of us that were in that that started talking about a publication. I was going to stay out of it, because I was into filmmaking at the time, and Barbara had to drag me in. Barbara and Marni dragged me in and got me involved. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Then Barbara also brought Beth McLagan to the group. Judy Chicago’s book *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1973) had a big influence on the four women. Margarita remembered seeing a show of Chicago’s work in Portland and then reading *Through the Flower* with the group. Margarita said that she was influenced by the idea that women artists had been excluded: “we already knew that women writers had been left out,” but she had not been as aware of the situation with artists.

The founders were aware of the lack of venues for women artists and writers, especially on the West Coast, as Margarita recounted:

Aphra had gone under. That had a lot to do with us starting. *Ms.* had just started publishing, but only Eastern writers. There was a journal in D.C. that had just ceased publishing. We felt there was nothing for West Coast women writers—
that’s what we wanted to do. We all knew that women writers and artists were not getting the credit they deserved. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The group chose the original subtitle for *CALYX Journal: A Northwest Feminist Review* to reflect this commitment to Western women writers and artists. A major goal was to provide a venue that did not exist at the time:

> There weren’t very many Western women writers, particularly, being given many venues to be seen in, and so we decided that. BUT we quickly dropped that [subtitle] at the end of the first year, I think it was. First of all because of the term feminist, but also we weren’t just Northwest—I mean, right off the bat. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

There were several reasons for changing the original subtitle—the term “feminist” caused problems both amongst the editorial staff and in writing grant proposals (described in more detail in the next section) and *CALYX Journal* had clearly already outgrown its regional association. The group agreed to switch the subtitle to *A Journal of Art and Literature by Women* in the second year.

Margarita speculated that the four founders may have had different perceptions of feminism and that some conflicts within the group stemmed from those different values. Clearly a committed feminist activist, Margarita admitted to being more interested in filmmaking than literature at the time that CALYX was organized, but she felt that literature was also an area where she could work for change:

> It was part of my interests—I loved art and literature, and I really felt it made a difference. We all knew the statistics when we started CALYX, that women just weren’t being published anywhere near the same rate as men, and the history of how women’s work was ignored or buried or lost or called anonymous. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The founding of CALYX was a true activist enterprise, emerging out of the ideals of its founders who wanted to change the reality of publishing for women. They believed their
ideals would bring them support, as Margarita reflected in an interview with Jerome Gold:

We never had any money. CALYX is a real miracle; we started it with no money. Absolutely nothing… We started with a small grant from the Women’s Resource Fund in Portland. They gave us eight hundred dollars. We got the first issue out that way. (Donnelly, Interview 318)

Margarita saw CALYX as a unique expression of feminist publishing:

We’re one of the few [feminist presses] that’s collectivized, where decisions are not made on the basis of one or two people reading everything and deciding. We have an open collective that does the decision-making of what we publish, and it’s a very different attitude. (Donnelly, Interview 318)

Recognizing the unbelievable amount of work that goes into a feminist publishing collective with an idealist mission, Margarita said, “It finally hit me that only crazy people do this kind of thing” (Donnelly, Interview 321). She reflected on her reasons for getting involved with CALYX and also for staying with CALYX for all these years:

Only people who really love literature, people who really care about the written word, are the people who get involved. And there has to be a certain element of craziness, dysfunctionality, and only people with a certain sort of craziness in their personality take this on. They’re somewhat self-sacrificing. (Donnelly, Interview 322)

However crazy it may have felt, Margarita found feminist publishing colleagues at other feminist presses and quickly formed relationships with other women in publishing. She mentioned some of the presses that influenced her—Daughters, Inc., Chrysalis, off our backs, Shameless Hussy Press, Sojourner, and others.

I enjoyed listening to Margarita’s stories that she told—filled with tones of indignation and triumph. Margarita’s powerful stories of activism and political commitment offer a portrait of a determined woman who has kept CALYX operating over these many years through dedication and force of will.
Meredith (Marni) Jenkins

Like Margarita, Marni had a feminist background and had been involved in feminist activism before she came to Corvallis. She had come to Oregon in 1971 for graduate school to study oceanography and zoology. She had also studied fine art. Marni is a painter and acted as art editor on the editorial collective for *CALYX Journal* while she remained in Corvallis. Around 1980 she moved to Seattle, where she still lives. She remained closely involved with CALYX as a Contributing Editor for many years.

I met Marni in the fall of 2006 at her home in Seattle that she shares with her partner Shan, a documentary filmmaker and feminist activist. My first impression when I met them was of coming home—I was greeted with hugs at the door and then served an amazing breakfast and birthday cake, all while attempting to conduct an interview! My mother and sister were with me, and all five of us sat at the table in Marni and Shan’s dining room and talked for several hours about activism, CALYX, art, and community while enjoying a wonderfully friendly Sunday morning.

Marni and Shan both told fascinating stories about their activist experiences and the ways that activism has shaped their lives. Their stories were simultaneously laced with humor and deep reflection. Marni had clearly thought at length about what her involvement at CALYX had meant to her and how it had influenced her life. Currently, Marni works at a children’s hospital in Seattle as a health care administrator. She still actively works on her art and is closely involved with Shan in lesbian community groups and projects. Although she is no longer involved with CALYX, she loves books and remains an avid reader. She described her way of promoting reading to her friends:
I love to take books everywhere. When I’m vacuuming or drying my hair [laughs], whatever, I have to have my book! I’ve started people reading. When they say, “Oh, I don’t have time,” I say, “Oh, well, do you dry your hair in the morning? Do you stir pudding in the pot? Do you vacuum? You can find time to read!” You can read while you do it. It’s fun—yeah, why not? (Jenkins)

Marni’s stories and poetic reflections on life kept us all laughing over the course of the conversation.

She told me about her first feminist activist experiences in Arizona and New York. Marni’s stories reveal her continuing commitment to activism—when she brought up past experiences she often connected them with her life today and with current events, and our conversation frequently moved toward a critical discussion of today’s political climate. Reproductive rights is an issue Marni remains keenly aware of as an indicator of women’s rights in general, as she described:

In Arizona the only real political work I had done was working with abortion rights and women’s health—the Margaret Sanger clinic had been bombed in 1969. I was really pretty passionate about abortion rights, which is why it’s really tragic to see it rise again. Gay or straight, women’s rights—reproductive rights—are really under fire.

A few months in New York inspired further feminist activism when Marni got involved with the Redstockings:

My experience in feminism started in the ’70s. I had been slightly introduced to it by the Redstockings in New York when I had gone to Visual Arts, a school in New York City, in 1971. Ruth, my first lover, and I had been there that one summer and fall in New York City… We worked with the [Redstockings] group; they were just starting then too. I think they started in ’68 or ’69, so it was still a collective. We just participated—we helped get some of the newsletters together and brainstorm committee work and that kind of thing. The women there were stimulating and inspiring. (Jenkins)

Marni portrayed her upbringing as very constrained by traditional societal and family expectations. She repeatedly used the word “smooshed” (rhymes with pushed) to
describe the constraint and repression she felt within a disapproving family or a conservative environment. Feminism was an escape for her, and a means to freedom. However, Marni had to face incredible personal hardship in claiming her personal identity as a lesbian and a feminist:

So, coming from Southwest, moving to Oregon—I moved to Oregon in ’71. I was lovers with a Latino man who was pretty brilliant but quite an alcoholic, and I buried myself in that relationship to escape memories of being lovers with a woman.

[Ruth and I] both had kind of severe [laughs], strange ways to keep us from being together. Her grandmother threw her into a mental institution for about fourteen years, and then I was told that if I continued with that “liaison,” as my dad put it, I would never see my mother and sisters again. So, you know, I was freaked.

I went to look for Ruth that summer in Pennsylvania… and I couldn’t find her. So it was very hard. Moving to Oregon—trying to be quiet, trying to be a good girl, go to graduate school, and not be queer—was pretty intense, and then meeting Margarita was so fabulous; it was a breath of freedom, really. (Jenkins)

Marni recalled getting to know the other CALYX founders through a book group:

I think it was through a book group. We were reading *Rubyfruit Jungle* and all these early, early lesbian novels, but it wasn’t just that. Margarita was very involved in film, and so she, I don’t remember—it was this book group that she got together. Barbara Baldwin was a poet, and I didn’t know her but Margarita did. So she kind of got this group together to start CALYX.

And then Judy Chicago’s *Through the Flower* came out and so we were inspired by her efforts to make women’s history. That was before Z Budapest and the historians came forward, so Judy Chicago was, for me, the pivotal force around thinking about women’s work in a broader sense. Thinking about it as how we can make it, make our voices heard. (Jenkins)

Becoming involved with CALYX offered Marni a sense of freedom she had not felt earlier in her life:

Up to that point, in my early twenties and in my family, my voice was being smooshed [laughs], being silenced—like “Shut up and sit in a corner”—that kind of message.
So starting CALYX was a real freedom in lots of ways, and even though I might not have articulated it at the time, emotionally that’s what I was responding to. It was exciting even thinking that I could go back to being a lesbian with freedom again. (Jenkins)

Being in Oregon also felt like a different political environment than others she had been in. Marni speculated, “I think the grassroots ethics of people in Oregon make different personal freedoms possible in ways that other environments don’t always” (Jenkins).

Marni reflected on how CALYX exposed her to ideas and forms of activism that she otherwise might not have become aware of. She said that there were elements of feminism that were “little known to me” and that Margarita, perhaps “since she was older, and she was employed by the university system… had a lot more opportunity to see what was going on nationally and she kind of fed that to us.” Marni remembered attending women’s film festivals that Margarita organized in the late ’70s and early ’80s:

It was great. I never would have had that opportunity. In fact, some of the festivals that she put on still are the best I’ve seen, because she was able to bring forth women filmmakers who made a difference in feminism in the early days. (Jenkins)

Making connections with other feminist activists and feminist publishers gave a wider perspective to her work with CALYX. Marni noted the nationwide emergence of feminist publishers:

So it was really wonderful that we were able to start CALYX along with others nationally. There was a whole wave of people. (Jenkins)

Marni mentioned several presses and publications that CALYX had relationships with:

Feminist presses—Aphra, in terms of an inspirational press. Press Gang and Makara—they were really important to me at the time, personally. Seal Press here in Seattle with Rachel DaSilva. They were one of the few that made money! They actually made money.
off our backs—they are really an old radical newspaper… They were very much an influence too. Through the Looking Glass, that prison newsletter… The Wishing Well to help rural women and city women connect nationally under domestic violence and rape crisis stuff.

Country Women in Grants Pass, with Jean and Ruth Mountaingrove. Then when they divorced it stopped. That was sad. They were twenty-five years or twenty-eight years or something… I couldn’t believe it. It was like your parents getting divorced or something, because we’d always go visit them… (Jenkins)

Having those connections with other feminist presses offered CALYX a sense of support:

A huge support—that we were on the right path, that this was the way to have a voice. This is the only way to have a voice, maybe. If we didn’t do this, and if we didn’t establish this, then I felt like it could be smooshed again, having been smooshed before! (Jenkins)

She remembered also becoming aware of just how radical the work that they were doing was, and how threatening it could seem to mainstream society:

What was interesting though, when we first started—and I think that was a part of being in my twenties and not having the experience—was to realize even though we were feeling liberated and all that, and gaining a voice, the rest of the country wasn’t that ready for us. (Jenkins)

Resistance to feminism was noticeable to Marni both personally and professionally, as a feminist editor. For instance, Marni described how feminist publications were often censored at the border between the U.S. and Canada:

We paid several trips to Vancouver, Canada and visited Makara, a women’s publication up there, and Press Gang, a women’s publishing company. I had some friends in Press Gang, women that became friends of mine. It’s really sad that they can’t still go on.

Canada has such a different legal system than we do. They don’t allow certain material in at the border. They don’t allow certain things like CALYX across the border… They don’t allow the most innocuous things in—but yet boy’s stuff is not turned away. It’s all about women and power and control… (Jenkins)

She related one extreme example of that censorship affecting feminist organizations:

4 Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove collected and donated most of the hundreds of periodicals in The Feminist and Lesbian Periodical Collection in the University of Oregon’s Special Collections.
Little Sisters Bookstore in Vancouver, Canada, finally won their lawsuit to get some materials from the U.S. for their business. Seventeen years later, they were successful in their suit. They fought for seventeen years to get certain materials across the border.

So there’s a whole lot of censorship—inter-border censorship—that happens. Women who go from Seattle to Vancouver have a tough time if they’re taking stuff, especially for sale. Or sometimes even [not for sale], you get your stuff confiscated. (Jenkins)

Marni worked with CALYX in Corvallis until around 1980, and then remained involved as a Contributing Editor from Seattle:

I commuted and I was involved until about 1990. They would send [manuscripts] to me and then I would go down for meetings and certainly for fundraising and all the print stuff. (Jenkins)

*CALYX Journal* lists Marni as a Contributing Editor through the Winter 1998/1999 issue (18:2).

Reflecting on her own personal growth as a result of working with CALYX, Marni felt that CALYX gave her a newfound confidence in herself and enabled her to move on from Corvallis to a big city. Marni explained,

I was maybe better equipped to come to Seattle. I was really strongly convicted that I move to a big city before I got too old. I was probably thirty-two… I really knew that I wanted the amenities of a city. I wanted to be exposed to theater, art, music that cities had to offer. So I took my art around to all different cities—St. Louis, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, L.A.—and decided on Seattle. (Jenkins)

Marni described her choice of Seattle in both activist and artistic terms. She said she was looking for a place where artistic collaboration was happening and where she could find an activist community. Compared to small town Corvallis, “Seattle had the more showy, transitory legal issues going on—a lot of the more notorious cases. You needed people who weren’t afraid to be aligned with them”:
All those things were swirling around, so when I hit Seattle, I think CALYX had helped me become a stronger person, more able to define myself and express myself in a crowd. And I had to be. I had to be on. I had to be clear, and—still it’s tough. (Jenkins)

Marni remains very aware of current activist projects and spoke of her present involvement with activist groups in Seattle.

Marni and Shan both had a lot to say about Seattle collectives, including lesbian separatist communities and feminist communes. Shan had lived in a feminist communal household called Paradise Island, and Marni commented, “Yeah, and I almost got to be in it, and then it disbanded. I was disappointed.” Shan retorted, “It burned down!” Another group they associated with was the Gorgons, a radical lesbian group that created a matriarchal separatist community. They remembered that frequently the lesbian separatist groups and non-separatist lesbian feminist groups disagreed over activism and lifestyle choices. Marni and Shan both remembered the feeling of disapproval or judgment that could come from these different feminist factions. Marni recalled, “The lines were so strict back then. If you had male children then you weren’t accepted into some groups, because you were participating in the patriarchy, and all this garbage.” Both women remain active with political feminist groups and lesbian communities.

Marni also still makes art, mostly paintings, though she said, “I’m going to digital now.” She showed me a series of beach paintings hanging in the dining room:

This was a series of six... this was sunset at Eleanor Beach on the Oregon Coast... In the ’80s I used to do a lot of bodies, a lot of girls actually. (Jenkins)

Shan laughed and said that the paintings of the bodies were down because the parents had been visiting. Suddenly Marni remembered an early art show where her work was picketed by a feminist group for being pornographic:
One of my shows down in San Francisco got picketed. In 1980 I was at this little gallery by a women’s bookstore and I did this series called “Grandmother’s Gloves.” It was my grandmother’s black little knit gloves that an ex-lover had in front of her breasts, just so the cleavage showed—no nipple. I’d outlined the gloves, well, I’d airbrushed silver and I’d outlined it in red, as though energy from our hands passed through the generations—because I was mesmerized by this reflexology class I’d taken. [Laughs]

They were picketing the show because they thought that by using red, black, and silver, I was giving out satanic messages and it was pornographic. This was a women’s group—Women Against Violence and Pornography. Who was that woman who used to lead it, a poet—Andrea Dworkin. It was her gang that picketed my show! Holy cow! [Laughs] (Jenkins)

Marni felt that her art has given her an important form of expression that she has been able to hold on to throughout many changes in her life:

I feel lucky that my art has always been my center. Wherever I am in my life, whether I leave it for a few months or a few days, it’s inside—reach in and pull it out. It’s important, so I feel lucky about that. I think people who don’t have a particular passion, it’s much harder to figure out “the fit.” That’s what I’ve observed anyway. I think everyone needs their own particular piece of the puzzle—why we’re here, to understand our role and what’s going on… (Jenkins)

Marni expressed how much she values CALYX for being a part of her life and her feminist experiences. Most of all, she hopes that CALYX will continue into the future:

I’m hopeful that CALYX will persevere. I must confess I haven’t been as active in the last few years because I’ve gone back to school and started working in a completely foreign field—healthcare. (Jenkins)

Our interview lasted longer than planned because we all were having such a good time.

Meeting Marni and Shan and hearing about their continuing activism was very inspiring, and I left that afternoon feeling encouraged and reinvigorated.
Cheryl McLean

Cheryl has been involved with CALYX in almost every capacity since she started volunteering in 1981. She has read manuscripts on the journal editorial collective and for the book collective. She acted as CALYX Board President for several years during CALYX’s restructuring in the early 1990s. After leaving the journal and book collectives, Cheryl remained involved as a Contributing Editor. Additionally, Cheryl has had a significant ongoing role with CALYX as the designer of the books and journals. For a large majority of the books CALYX has published, Cheryl has designed the cover and done the book design and layout. Outside her work with CALYX, Cheryl is an author, editor, and graphic designer, runs her own small press, and has taught English and Journalism classes.

I met Cheryl at her Corvallis home in December 2006. For our interview, we drank hot tea on a light-filled landing surrounded by windows looking out into moss-covered trees. She brought a stack of CALYX books to refer to during our conversation. I asked her about her background with feminism and how she came to gain a feminist awareness. At first she felt that she didn’t yet hold an explicitly feminist viewpoint when she came to CALYX, but that her feminism was under the surface:

I was at OSU as an undergrad in English lit, as my major, and I graduated in ’79. I really was not reading a lot of feminist literature at that point. I had read Our Bodies, Ourselves, and that was eye opening, but probably what was most influential for me at that time was existentialist literature. I was reading Camus, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard—and that was transformative for me.

I think that that fed my burgeoning feminism as well, because the message was very similar—you take responsibility for yourself and your actions, and define yourself through your choices and your actions. That was very much a part of what I understood the message of feminism to be—that we’re taking on our own responsibility. (McLean)
As we kept talking, however, Cheryl remembered that she did have several memories of “feminist” moments in her undergraduate study at OSU. She described one of these experiences:

Before I was connected with CALYX I served on the President’s Commission for the Status of Women at OSU. I was one of the first members. We started a hotline for women to be able to report issues of sexual harassment, and we did a study of salaries on campus. When we set up the hotline, we also had one of the Commission members at the Women’s Center for certain hours on certain days for people to be able to come and talk about issues of discrimination or harassment.

We didn’t have very many calls. And when we reported that to the president of the university, he said, “Well, that’s good then, there must not be any issues on campus.” [Laughs] We, of course, had a different interpretation.

So I guess I should backtrack a bit—I mean, I can’t say that CALYX was my first real connection with feminism because I was involved with that commission. I almost forgot about that part of my student experience. But that was a bit of an eye opener! [Laughs] (McLean)

Another experience that she remembers as an early feminist awakening was during her freshman year at OSU in a home economics class:

Here again, I don’t know that I had put the word “feminism” to it, but I remember being utterly appalled. When I was a freshman at OSU my first major was foods and nutrition—which was a joke, because I was the original Twinkie kid, so for me to think about going into nutrition was crazy. It was in the College of Home Economics at the time, and the first class you had to take as a Home Ec major was Introduction to Home Economics. There were 152 people in the class…

The associate dean came to the podium and, after introducing herself, said, “Now girls”—there were 151 women and one man in the class—“Now girls, I know most of you are just here to find a husband, but we’re going to teach you a few things along the way.” And I just—my jaw dropped. I left that class and went and changed my major! [Laughs] I just said, “I can’t believe I’m hearing this!” This was OSU, 1975… So I don’t know if I would have put feminism as a word to my reaction to that experience, but it was a profound moment. (McLean)
Cheryl arrived at CALYX soon after graduating from OSU with a degree in English. She laughed when she recalled, “I actually met Barbara Baldwin at a party! It was just after I had graduated, and had my first job with my BA in English as a cocktail waitress!” She described that as a time when she was trying to figure out what to do with my life. And she told me about CALYX, which I hadn’t read yet. I’d been in Corvallis, and I’d heard about it but not come across it yet. They were just starting work on the International Issue, and she asked if I wanted to volunteer, so I did. I pretty quickly ended up on the editorial collective, which was great fun. It was discouraging as well as great fun because I, until that moment in time, thought of myself as a poet! (McLean)

Cheryl reflected on skills she learned and practiced as part of the CALYX collective, such as how to express and defend an editorial opinion:

It was my first experience of working with a collective—this was before the business model of working in teams became so prevalent. Working in a collective was really an amazing experience, and it helped me find my voice—personally helped me find my voice and hone my editorial instincts. It really helped build my confidence in those, because there was so much give and take and not always a lot of courtesy in the editorial meetings: as in, “You’ve got to be kidding, you don’t really like that, do you?” In the midst of these animated discussions, I thought, “Well, I’d better get some gumption here if I’m ever going to contribute anything to the conversation.” (McLean)

She described learning a lot about herself as an editor from this collective process and developing a critical editorial eye that she had not previously known she had:

As I said, reading for the editorial collective kind of destroyed my confidence in myself as a poet, which was probably justified; well, I know it was justified. But it built my confidence in my own judgment. I think as women we are not encouraged to make judgments. We are not encouraged to be discriminating, in a sense. We’re the nurturers; we’re supposed to always be supportive, not critical.

But an editor’s function is to make judgments, make qualitative judgments, and to defend them. To have to marshal my arguments as to why I made this judgment certainly helped me be a better editor as well as a better teacher. But I think it added to my overall strength, as an individual and as a woman.
I think that this piece of what CALYX does isn’t looked at very often. I think it’s something that has happened for a whole lot of people over the years—people who have been on the editorial collective, people who have volunteered. I think that’s a really valuable service that CALYX performs—helping people develop a sense of their own aesthetic; that’s part of it. (McLean)

Cheryl emphasized how much CALYX helped her develop professionally: “I am a designer today because of the experience I had with CALYX.”

Being active with CALYX also led Cheryl to recognize feminism more explicitly as an important part of her perspective:

CALYX awakened my feminism as feminism, more than anything else at that point in my life. I was already pretty independent and operating on many of the levels that feminism was about—but I hadn’t put a word to it. I hadn’t really been aware of a lot of the issues other than—you know, the ERA was going around at that time and I was aware of all of that, and certainly staunchly supportive of it. But I think really CALYX was what made that connection for me. (McLean)

When I asked if she thought this awareness came from the literature she was reading at CALYX or from the people she met there, she responded,

Both, I think. Certainly the literature was very powerful, but I think probably it resonated more in the discussions that we would have in the editorial collective. We would be discussing the issues as well, and there was always something powerfully relevant—CARDV [Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence] was getting started right about that same time, and we were making connections there. (McLean)

Looking back at her early involvement with CALYX, Cheryl reflected, “It was also just a time of broadening my awareness about feminist issues in general.” At times during her involvement with CALYX, Cheryl noticed the extremes of feminist dogma playing out:

The whole backlash stuff has been interesting. You can point to the extremes of feminism—I mean, the outer reaches, the militancy—for example, there were times we went to CALYX parties where a few women were upset that boy children were there! It wasn’t the CALYX people, but just some of the people there. For most people, though, the reaction was more like, “Naa, come on, it’s a little boy, it’s okay!”
So there were elements that took things a little too far. But as somebody pointed out to me, sometimes you need to swing the pendulum all the way to get any kind of movement. So who knows? I suppose those extremes have their function as well. (McLean)

Some feminists involved with CALYX have been more radical than others, but, overall, Cheryl felt that “most of the people that I’ve connected with through the years I would say are united by… a good heart—that is, good intention.” She pointed out that these good intentions had an impact on the journal itself: “CALYX was never at base an angry publication. It’s not that anger wasn’t spoken; it was there. But it was not the mission.”

Cheryl expressed satisfaction with her current role at CALYX doing the design and production for the books and journals. She said, “I’m glad to still be involved and this is the fun stuff I get to do—they give me a little bit more creative freedom at CALYX, most of the time.” About her previous role on the Board of Directors, Cheryl said, “It wasn’t a good fit for me, let me put it that way. The Board required someone with a lot more administrative capability or background.” She also left the editorial and book collectives because of time constraints:

I really don’t have anything to do with the Board or the editorial collective anymore—which is just fine. I’m happy just doing the design and the layout, that part, and helping out with other things… I just don’t have time to do the editorial collective. I ran out of time when we were doing books. I stopped doing the journal first, and then I was just doing books for a while, and then in the books I was just doing prose, not poetry. We stopped reading book manuscripts for a while and I just never got back into reading again. (McLean)

Cheryl now edits professionally for some larger publishers, and she laughed when she said that the quality of the work doesn’t compare with the work in CALYX. I enjoyed having this opportunity to hear Cheryl’s moving stories and her articulate reflections on
the editorial power and achievements of CALYX. Her professional life continues to be intertwined with CALYX and she offers CALYX much valuable support.

**Linda Varsell Smith**

Linda is another long-time CALYX editor who has played many roles in her involvement with CALYX. She has been an office volunteer and part of the journal and book editorial collectives, worked briefly for CALYX in advertising, and currently hosts the weekly journal editorial meetings at her home in Corvallis. On the journal editorial collective since 1982, Linda is the longest-serving journal editor at 25 years. Outside of CALYX, Linda is also active with many other writing and poetry groups, publishes novels and collections of poems, and has taught creative writing classes at a local community college.

When I joined the journal editorial collective in the spring of 2004, I first met Linda at her home where she hosts editorial meetings in her front entry room. All around the room, covering the walls and ceiling, hang thousands of angels—dolls and ornaments made of every imaginable material in a multitude of colors. Linda describes herself as a “stubborn Swede” but over the three years of editorial collective meetings I attended, Linda consistently and frequently made us laugh with her hilarious (and accurate) interpretations of the pieces we were discussing. Alice Ann Eberman describes Linda as someone who cannot and will not be defined… At times she is our resident curmudgeon, seemingly immovable in her opinions. Then in another round of critiques, she’ll break into song, having set her comments to some silly tune, and we’ll be rolling with laughter. By all appearances she’s quite serious, almost stern, but then there are those angels. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 9)
When I interviewed Linda in the spring of 2006, we sat in the room full of angels with our cups of tea after the weekly editorial meeting had ended and talked about her experiences with feminism and with CALYX.

“I firmly believe in feminism, and opportunity for all,” Linda stated. She defined feminism in terms of practical opportunity and choice:

What feminism means to me is choice; and the opportunity to pursue whatever your dream is, and not be curtailed by cultural restrictions and limitations. In my feminism I want my granddaughters to have the same opportunities as my grandsons, so they can do their own paths. It’s beyond the vote, because a lot of people don’t vote anyway. It’s all a matter of when you’re planning your life journey, that you have options. Feminism opens the playing field to everyone. (Smith)

Linda told me about her early feminist awareness and about having a feeling from a very young age that something was not fair about her experiences as a girl. She has poignant memories of her girlhood when choices were not available to her. Linda remembered the constraint of gender expectations and the limitations she felt at school with a lack of sports opportunities:

I’m so glad—just a small thing like women getting sports. When I went to high school, all I could expect to be was a member of the leader’s club or a cheerleader watching the boys play. I wanted to play basketball; I wanted to have opportunities to do gymnastics. I wanted these opportunities—they weren’t there. I remember being very angry, even as a child.

This was fifty years, no, fifty-five years ago or so. I remember even as a child—little girls can’t do this, little girls have to wear these stupid dresses (which I still don’t wear). I remember when I was young, I think I was five or six, I cut off my hair and called myself David so I could go out and play and do things… I picked up very early that boys could do things that I could not. And that was really very, very painful for me. (Smith)

Even in college, Linda felt that women had a more difficult time being successful than men. Marriage or pregnancy could derail a woman’s career aspirations. She pointed out
that sex had serious consequences in a time when the newly developed birth control pills could be lethal—Linda “had two friends in college die from taking the birth control pills at the time.” Early on, she made a decision to focus on her studies and wait to get married and have a family until after she finished her degree. She knew that being a housewife and mother were not her only goals in life:

After I had my children, I still went on and got my master’s, even when they were very young. My mother was very smart, and she got married and she gave it all up. She was a brilliant teacher. Then she ended up having a lot of health problems. A lot of it, I think, was thwarted dreams. She kept telling me how happy she was with the children. Well, I had children too, but it was not enough for me. (Smith)

Linda described her early feminist awareness as an “innate rebellion” against the forces that conspired to hold her back because she was a woman. However, a feminist perspective was difficult to consciously articulate in the years before second-wave feminism became a movement in the late 1960s. Linda experienced a breakthrough moment when she read an early feminist text:

I felt very thwarted. So I kept taking classes and everything else. But then I read The Feminine Mystique [1963] by Betty Friedan, and THEN it was all clear to me… That book was very liberating to me. I didn’t feel like such a freak, that I wasn’t fully fulfilled.

Of course my mother’s always telling me, “Wear dresses,” “Children should be enough,” and all this… I saw it made her miserable and sick. I adore my mother and we’re very good friends, but I don’t agree with her about the role of women. Once I got my master’s, she was very proud of me, but she was not setting a role model for me. (Smith)

Another breakthrough moment for Linda was hearing Gloria Steinem speak:

I’ll never forget Gloria Steinem. I went to the League of Women Voters meeting in Atlanta. Jimmy Carter was then the governor of the state and he came and talked to us, and I remember thinking, “He’s kind of nice.” Gloria Steinem was guest speaker at the League of Women Voters, and she says, “Don’t ever forget
that most women are one man away from welfare.” For some reason, I never forgot that. I was really aware that I was in that situation too! (Smith)

She kept reading feminist books and publications, and she said about feminist writing: “It was just coming out and it was very exciting. I started reading more women, so by the time I came to CALYX I had already read quite a bit of feminist literature.” Linda said of the feminist books that came out in the 1970s, “they really encouraged me to go for it.”

Linda mentioned some specific works and authors that she found especially influential:

I just had been reading all the women writers… You take little bits from all of them, and you say, “Thank god you wrote that!” No More Masks anthology by Ellen Bass—that was another anthology that I think was really groundbreaking at the time… I’ve always admired Sylvia Plath, and I’ve always wished that she had survived longer. I like May Swenson. I just read so much, it’s hard to think. But I do remember Betty Friedan. (Smith)

Linda identified herself as a writer from a very young age and has been a teacher for most of her career. Her writing and teaching are also a means of feminist activism for Linda, as she is involved in feminist writing groups and taught classes for women writers.

She recalled balancing her family responsibilities with those of being a writer:

I took lots of courses through Haystack. I would just leave my family for two weeks and go to the coast in the travel trailer. And for two weeks I was not a mother, I was not a wife—I was just a writer. I met lots of writers and had a great time; for many very crucial years for me, that kept me alive. It was very life enhancing.

I think I was lucky in my choices; my husband’s always encouraged me to go, teach, do what I want to do. And he—by his income, with his benefits—allows me to teach at Linn Benton, all the things I want to teach, part time. I definitely wouldn’t put him down, just because he’s male, but I wouldn’t be with him if he put his thumb down. (Smith)

Linda was very conscious of the many ways that women’s traditional roles of wife and mother could constrain a woman’s talent. She described women’s historical
achievements as often contingent on their freedom from traditional roles and was aware of that contingency in her own life:

I’ve always said—even when I was very young—if I thought I had had exceptional talent, I would not have married and I would not have had children. I enjoy writing and everything, but I’m not a Sylvia Plath. Most of the talented women in the past either did not marry or have children, or they married well, because otherwise they couldn’t do their thing. And that’s a very sad fact of history. (Smith)

Linda was thankful that her situation enabled her to pursue her dreams and find a sense of fulfillment as a writer in addition to having a family.

In addition to the feminist writing groups she is part of, Linda’s involvement with CALYX is another aspect of her commitment to literary and feminist projects. She mentioned again that sense of rebellion that motivated her feminism as being what brought her to CALYX:

When CALYX came to town, here was a great opportunity to help a feminist cause. I volunteered pretty early. I’ve been on the collective since ’82. That’s only six years later, but I had volunteered before that. It was my rebellion, really, that brought me to CALYX, and what keeps me here.

So I’ve been on the collective now 24 years. But I’ve also been on the [book collective], reading for poetry and also for fiction, and actually for a while I helped select art. (Smith)

Linda also worked briefly at CALYX doing advertising, but left to take a teaching job at Linn Benton Community College. She remained on the editorial collective and also volunteered in the office or at book fairs when CALYX needed help. She stated, “I’m only doing the journal at the moment. But I have done about anything that was required of me.”
The future of CALYX and of feminist publishing worried Linda. She mused about changes that the feminist movement has brought, but noted that these changes might not be permanent:

With that feminist wave that came in the ’70s—and the hippie movement and everything—things were really changing. The old ticky-tacky existence wasn’t satisfying. So many women sacrificed their lives in service to their husbands’ careers and their children. It’s very sad. Now we seem to be retrograding again, and it bothers me a lot. (Smith)

Linda said that she would like to see CALYX become more financially stable in order to keep promoting feminist literature to a new generation of women. We talked about anti-feminist attitudes we have encountered among young women; Linda emphasized that publications like *CALYX Journal* are still needed to help keep feminism alive.

**Beverly McFarland**

Beverly is the Senior Editor at CALYX and has been on the staff as an editor since 1991. She coordinates the editing of journal and book manuscripts by volunteers and also coordinates the internships at CALYX. I met Beverly when I first came to Corvallis for an internship with CALYX and worked closely with her in the office and on the editorial collective. In editorial meetings, Beverly manages the manuscripts and the contact with authors, though decisions are always made collectively by the group. I have spent days with Beverly selling CALYX books at various book fairs and events, and I always enjoyed the stories she told about people she met through CALYX or funny events that happened. I think Beverly has a file in the back of her mind labeled “Noteworthy and Humorous Anecdotes about Life at CALYX” and many of the stories she told me during our interview come from that file.
We met for the interview on a weekday morning at my house in Corvallis in the summer of 2006. I made tea (of course) and we talked at the table in the dining room for several hours. She brought a book of feminist literary theory from her personal collection, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* (1985) edited by Elaine Showalter, which she said had especially influenced her. We began by talking about her early life and how she came to her understanding of feminism: “To me it’s a very inclusive term—anything having to do with women.” She described her background, growing up in a still-segregated Texas:

Growing up in the fifties in central Texas, race was very much a human rights issue. I got involved a little bit, and realized that the situation with racism—I thought it was very un-Christian. My religion was very much a part of it. As a Methodist… I took what Jesus was saying very seriously, about how people should live together, and that meant everybody, you know, all races, men and women.

And then I discovered in 1954 when the Supreme Court declared, unanimously fortunately, that separate but equal was unconstitutional, I didn’t know anybody who agreed. Not one soul would admit it. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly reflected on how much social change was occurring at that crucial time. Girls in her graduating class went on to college in greater numbers than ever before. In her family, she said, “it was expected that we would go to college—that was totally part of life. Mother didn’t, but Daddy certainly expected us to.” But, she noted,

I’ve talked to so many women of that era, and in high school, thinking about it, before our class there weren’t very many girls who went to college, but in our class there were six… I don’t know why there was, all of a sudden—the break was there… I’m thinking about these things for the first time.

This is the middle fifties and things were complacent, but on the other hand, there was so much change *stirring*. You know, we think of the sixties as the beginning—but the roots were there in the fifties. (McFarland, personal interview)
Going to college opened up new opportunities for Beverly to engage with different kinds of people and to experience more than life in a small town had to offer. She described living in a student co-op in college as teaching her “an equality in getting along with all kinds of people, which I was then able to do.” Racial integration had an impact on her college experience:

I went to the University of Texas Austin—and so when I was a freshman in 1955, it was the first year they integrated… They integrated the classes, so I got to meet black students, and I had some black friends. (McFarland, personal interview)

She worked for racial equality in a position she held on the inter-co-op council, and she also began to notice the situation with women in the university. She began doing historical research on women in journalism, and she found a buried history of women journalists that people in the field were unaware of:

The Journalism school was small, so you got to know people and you got to know your professors. There were actually two women professors. In the history of journalism—there have always been a lot of women in journalism, and they kind of have to be reinventing the wheel. People say, “Oh, this is the first woman editor.” “No it’s not, way back when…” [Laughs] You know, that sort of thing. But they’ve been there, and it hasn’t been quite the challenge. (McFarland, personal interview)

Writing an article on women in engineering and architecture for a journalism class opened her eyes further to the status of women in the university:

I wrote a feature article for a class… on women students in engineering and architecture, because there was ONE female architecture student in the whole architecture school, TWO female engineering students in ALL the engineering classes. So I interviewed the deans, and those women, and a few others. (McFarland, personal interview)

She remembered the attitudes of the deans as mostly positive:

Those deans were very good… I remember the engineering dean said that there are a number of fields that he thought women would be really good in, and he hoped to make the opportunities more available. He realized that they just hadn’t
made it available and that frequently there would be classes where the women would not be comfortable. That was his job, to deal with that, and he was just realizing that. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly recalled that in talking with the deans while researching her article, she actually helped to spread awareness of women’s issues within the administration:

He said he admitted, “You talking to me made me realize that things need to be changed, and I’m the person that’s gonna have to help change them.” The architecture dean felt the same way. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly told me that she has always been interested in history, but clearly she has also long been interested and invested in women’s achievements in many areas.

In Beverly’s personal life, she said a feminist awareness further emerged when she became a mother and in conversations with her sister, who was raising a family at the same time. She shared one specific memory:

We were in Texas, the Christmas when Brant was, what, five and a half, and Russell was six, and our father gave the boys little rod and reels. My sister and I, we looked at each other and said, “We never ever got a rod and reel!” [Laughs] Daddy goes fishing and we went fishing a lot… but we never had our own rod and reel. I never learned to use a rod and reel, we were just using the bamboo poles. And the little BOYS get rod and reels! (McFarland, personal interview)

Books were another important source of Beverly’s feminist awareness. She described the literary journey that she took to reach a critical awareness of the status of women in literature. She said first that she had always been a reader but had not paid much attention to who the authors were:

I had read a great deal, just what people had recommended to me. There wasn’t any library in my hometown, and the high school library was so small. I started reading books in the sixth grade, and they let some of the sixth graders go to the high school library. My hometown was only about twelve hundred people.

But in my junior and senior years of high school, I read anything considered classic by 1955, because [my English teachers] would bring me books to read…
They were mostly [by] men, but they were wonderful books, and I didn’t pay attention to that. (McFarland, personal interview)

Not until she started teaching after college did she become conscious of how women had been left out of the study of literature. In her editorial statement for the 30th Anniversary Issue, Beverly told a story of a time she taught a memorable unit to her literature class:

Not until I saw the effects of a gender-biased textbook in my second year of teaching English in public schools did I become aware of the importance of women’s writing and women’s stories. The book was a standard ninth-grade literature anthology, divided into thematic sections. An early section covered six people who overcame handicaps, making the best of their lives. That was over forty years ago, but I remember them well. Three men—one facing a mortal illness; one, a physical handicap; and one, racial prejudice. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 9)

In our interview, she told the same story, and continued,

Then we had the three women, and the ONLY thing they’ve had to face was being a woman. And the girls—it was just a transformation! You always get some girls are very bright and brainy and they’re going to talk anyway; but then you get the little shy ones who aren’t. Then you’ve got the brainless pretty ones who have been getting by on their prettiness, you know, until they get a teacher like me that doesn’t pay any attention to that [laughs]. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly wrote about the effect that the literature unit had on the girls in her class:

All the girls in my classes, even the shyest, sat up taller and participated with fire in their eyes and steel in their voices in the discussions about these barrier-breaking women. (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 10)

After this experience, Beverly began looking at the literature textbook with a critical eye for women authors and women’s roles in the stories:

I looked through that anthology… Okaaay… maybe a third of the writers were women, but barely ten percent of the main characters were girls. And a lot of the stories didn’t have any girls at all, or else they were somebody’s girlfriend, or somebody’s mother, or somebody’s wife, just on the side. (McFarland, personal interview)
She noticed that the vast majority of the stories and novels her students were assigned to read were centered on male characters and that in the stories, “again, the women are kind of peripheral.” When the stories did have interesting women, she said, “they’re not the main characters. The story’s not about them” (McFarland, personal interview). In order to even the score a bit, Beverly assigned her class to read all the stories that featured strong female characters, “to be fair!”

This experience changed the way Beverly read and perceived literature beyond the class that she was teaching. She looked back at the books she had studied in college:

So then I really started examining all the things that I read in college—have a degree in English, you’ve got all these literature courses—and ninety percent of them have been men. It just hadn’t really dawned on me, because I was just absorbing everything that people had given me. (McFarland, personal interview)

After moving to Corvallis, Beverly remembered going to the library frequently and seeking out women authors. Some of these authors offered a different aesthetic or way of writing about women’s lives than she had seen previously:

I started taking out a lot of women writers, and I discovered there were as many women writers as there were men, really, in the library. There were certain people that I discovered I really liked, and they told stories about women’s lives and they made the stories about women’s lives… stories about the entire life. Working in the home was just as important as doing anything else. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly said she became a subscriber to CALYX Journal as soon as she discovered it after moving to Corvallis. Then, “in 1988 I saw a notice in the newspaper that CALYX wanted volunteers. I was working half-time as a technical editor and secretary. I showed up at their offices one Saturday, and I stayed” (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 10). She recalled,
It was during spring break because Laura was home from college, and she saw it about the same time I did. She said, “Mother, you’ve got to look into that,” because I was a subscriber… (McFarland, personal interview)

She remembered that, at the time, CALYX’s journal production schedule was irregular:

They had just started publishing books in ’86, and they’d been trying to do three journals a year and then publish a couple books also, and the journals weren’t coming out very regularly. I’d get all these letters saying [laughs], “We’re sorry, the journal’s late.” And I would think, “Well, don’t spend time sending me letters!” [Laughs] I told them that lots when I first started working there. (McFarland, personal interview)

She started volunteering and was able to apply her editorial expertise to the projects CALYX was working on:

So I showed up as an office volunteer, but then I was able to use my skills immediately. They were working on The Forbidden Stitch and the copyediting had been done, but I was involved in the proofing. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly described her reasons for joining CALYX:

I wanted to work with women’s literature, and it was a feminist project, but it was also an editorial project. You know, I’m an editor! [Laughs] I’ve done a lot of technical editing, and this was such a JOY working with literature! And working with women’s literature, that was an added joy. And with the other women, that was nice. (McFarland, personal interview)

After volunteering a few hours a week for a year or so, Beverly was invited to join the editorial collective. She was in a master’s program at Oregon State University at the time. She responded,

“Not till I finish my master’s.” And it wasn’t LONG. I hadn’t decided what I was going to do for a project, and I had to finish in a year and a half… I’d been playing around [with ideas] in my mind and just nothing was coming out. All of a sudden I said, “Nobody’s ever done a history of CALYX.” So I said “Okay, [laughs] that’s what I want to do.”

I did the history of essentially the first twelve years, the first twelve volumes especially. I made an index of the first twelve volumes, on little index cards… and
I did a survey of what was in them. Themes… I thought it was really interesting [laughs]. (McFarland, personal interview)

She finished her degree in 1989 and joined the editorial collective while volunteering about four hours a week in the office. In 1991 she joined the CALYX staff:

   Margarita needed more help in the office… so I started working. I guess in ’90 I really started working more part time, and in ’91 then I joined the staff half time. I’ve been working about fifteen hours, which is what I’m paid for now [laughs]. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly has been a fixture at CALYX ever since, and her guidance has introduced many volunteers and interns to CALYX’s day-to-day operation. Her master’s thesis was also an inspiration and a vital reference for me in doing this project.

Micki Reaman

   Micki started at CALYX as an intern in 1992 and she joined the editorial collective soon after. She was hired to work on marketing and promotion for the journal through the Lila Wallace–Reader’s Digest grant and became the Managing Editor in 1997. Micki also collaborated with Cheryl on the design and production of CALYX Journal for many years. In 2004 Micki left her job at CALYX but she remains involved as a volunteer. She now works at the community art center in Corvallis. I met Micki when I interned at CALYX; when I arrived there she was the youngest staff member in the office. It had been a long time since I had talked to Micki, so it was a pleasure to have a reason to meet her at a café in downtown Corvallis in December 2006 to talk about her experiences with CALYX.

   Micki described her feminist background as being founded in her academic work in college:
I was a student at Evergreen State College in Olympia [WA], and I was studying contemporary literature and a lot of feminist theory. I came across *Calyx Journal* in my readings, in the library, and I also read some of Gail Tremblay’s poetry. She’s a faculty member at Evergreen and I knew who she was. My project focused—the last year I was at Evergreen—on a combination of feminist theory and literature, creative writing. It just got me really interested in small press publishing, which I knew *nothing* about. (Reaman)

With this strong literary and theoretical feminist foundation, Micki related,

I was pretty steeped in the ideas of feminism, coming to *Calyx*, so it resonated perfectly well with me to be working with a women’s publisher—a publisher focused on women’s writing and nurturing women’s voices and visions and art. (Reaman)

When she finished her degree at Evergreen, Micki looked for an opportunity to gain experience in small press publishing:

I realized that *Calyx* was not very far away from where I was, and I didn’t really have plans for once I graduated. So I decided to see if I could come down here to Corvallis for a while. I think I was originally thinking in terms of a college term or maybe a year, just to do an internship, [laughs] and that’s what I did.

As you know, from your experience, *Calyx* welcomes interns and volunteers in all kinds of capacities and there are pretty endless opportunities for people who have the time and want to jump in. So, fairly soon after I got here, there was some grant money available for some marketing projects for the journal. They decided to hire me to work on that stuff. And I was at *Calyx* for thirteen or fourteen years, as it turned out [laughs]! (Reaman)

Micki commented on her decision to become involved with *Calyx*:

It was just a natural choice, because I loved writing and I loved reading literature. I just really didn’t know anything about what was involved in putting a magazine or books together. I just knew that small presses existed, and [laughs] it seemed like an area that would be potentially really what I would want to do. (Reaman)

As an intern, Micki worked on many different kinds of projects and took the opportunity to learn as much as she could about publishing:

So I started out working really closely with Margarita and Beverly—doing everything that you probably experienced when you were there too. Working on
press releases and mailing out book review copies and journal copies and databases and… so many things.

What else—I started attending the editorial meetings and eventually got on the collective. I wanted to learn as much as I could about small press publishing, so I just kept getting myself involved in more and more parts of CALYX. I ended up combining working with the editorial part and also on the organizational levels—working with Margarita on some parts of fundraising and special events and marketing. (Reaman)

Micki found that the feminism at CALYX was a bit different than the feminism she had studied in college, noticing a generational difference in feminist approaches:

I think that was especially fun for me coming out of school studying really theoretical writing and philosophy about feminism—more on the side of newer scholarship, so a little bit more into the French semiotic stuff… But this definitely felt like, for the most part, ’70s feminism—you know what I mean, the feel of it? There were younger women getting involved though, with all of the different presses, and there was kind of a little subgroup of younger women too, coming up into the press. (Reaman)

Micki also noticed that there was a lot more to running a small nonprofit press than editing literature, and she felt she had to find a balance between doing administrative and editing work:

Like most people who probably typically get involved in this way—interning in small organizations—I came to it because I was interested in the ideas and in literature, and as a writer and learning about editing. Not from the direction of running a nonprofit organization, the things that are involved in that. So I was always wanting to spend as much time doing editorial things as I could. And it was always a balancing act. (Reaman)

When I joined the editorial collective in 2004, Micki had just left the collective and was in transition to her next job. She described that transition as difficult but necessary:

It was hard for me to decide, but I had been doing it for so long and it was just so hard to… put that much time in, on top of the hours. I also think that it’s good for there to be change in the makeup of the editorial board, you know—new people, different people. (Reaman)
She said about leaving her position at CALYX: “I got away from it because I needed a change.” She emphasized that this change was a positive move for her:

> It was a very difficult decision to leave CALYX, but… it was just time for me to do something else. And it’s just amazing that Margarita and Beverly are still doing so much; I don’t know how they do it. (Reaman)

Micki talked a bit about her current position working at the arts center in Corvallis. She noted ways that the organization is different from CALYX:

> Where I’ve been working since is a community arts center, so it’s focused in the community in a way that CALYX isn’t. It’s also broad—it’s not just one art form. So it’s just been an interesting different kind of experience. I’m not sure where I’ll—what direction I’m going to go in. (Reaman)

Micki told me that while she worked at CALYX she found it hard to find the time and energy to pursue her own creative writing. After being away from her job at CALYX for a few years, she admitted that she hasn’t gotten back into writing, though she said, “I’ve been thinking about it.” But, she said,

> what I have been doing since leaving CALYX is spending a lot of time on music. So, I guess in a way, I have made more time for pursuing the arts in some way—in a personal way, rather than in a serving way, do you know what I mean? And that’s been a good thing. (Reaman)

Micki expressed one way that she felt her time at CALYX changed her, and that was in her attitude toward poetry:

> One of the big gifts that I feel that CALYX gave me—when I started, I wasn’t a big poetry reader. I was a prose writer, and prose is what I focused on reading as well. And I’m so happy to have spent as much time as I spent reading poetry and getting to the point where I just love poetry now. I think that’s completely from my time at CALYX. So thank you, CALYX, for that. [Laughs] (Reaman)

> Although our conversation was shorter than those I had with the other editors, after talking with Micki I had a better sense of her motivations for coming to CALYX and the way she saw her role in the organization. Her experiences with marketing the
journal seemed to significantly shape her perspective toward CALYX’s publishing efforts. Being younger than many of the other editors also influenced Micki’s role on the collective as a voice for change.

Each of these six editors shared widely different experiences with feminism and women’s literature before they came to CALYX, and these experiences shaped their perspectives toward their work with CALYX. Idealism in one form or another brought these women to feminist publishing as volunteers or as staff members. Over their years with CALYX, Margarita, Marni, Cheryl, Linda, Beverly, and Micki saw their feminist and literary perspectives change and grow as they worked intimately with women’s creative work in a feminist publishing environment.

**Narratives of CALYX: Achieving a Feminist Publishing Mission**

In this section, the editors share their thoughts on CALYX’s mission and operation, publishing accomplishments, and struggles, illustrating from multiple perspectives the complexity and richness of the feminist publishing experience. Many various facets of CALYX’s mission emerged in our conversations, but the editors maintained a primary emphasis on CALYX’s mission to publish women’s creative work of the highest literary and artistic quality. The editors told stories about CALYX’s many accomplishments as a feminist press operating with a collective editorial structure, and their stories provide an inside glimpse into the unique struggles feminist publishers have faced. Finally, the editors reflect back on the meaning of their experiences with CALYX and speculate about the future of feminist publishing.
CALYX’s Feminist Publishing Mission

In my conversations with the six CALYX editors, many different aspects of the CALYX mission emerged. The editors described what they thought the early mission was when CALYX was founded and illustrated how the mission evolved. I found that the central, pivotal mission around which the other aspects of CALYX’s mission revolved was the mission to publish creative work of high literary and artistic quality by women. This goal to “nurture women’s creativity by publishing fine literature and art by women” (“Mission”) seemed to be the most important and absolute element of the CALYX mission in the stories the editors shared. Other elements of the CALYX mission that we discussed were: operating as a feminist organization and promoting feminist ideals; giving women a voice and creating a safe, inclusive space for a diverse range of women’s voices; nurturing new writers and helping women writers launch successful careers; and producing the highest quality publication possible.

The CALYX mission is defined on the organization’s website:

CALYX exists to nurture women’s creativity by publishing fine literature and art by women. CALYX is committed to: introducing a wide audience to high quality literature and art by women; providing a forum for diversity and underrepresented writers and viewpoints; discovering and publishing emerging and developing writers; and preserving publications for future audiences. (“Mission”)

In many of its books, CALYX includes a statement that adds to the overall mission:

“CALYX is committed to producing books of literary, social, and feminist integrity” (Reaman et al. 176). The editors’ own interpretations of CALYX’s mission reveal much more depth and complexity to the mission than may be first apparent.

I organize my discussion of CALYX’s mission by the various elements within the mission in order to examine the tensions between these elements and see how the
elements of the mission work together to achieve a feminist publishing vision. First, the editors spoke about the mission of CALYX to operate as a feminist organization with feminist principles, promoting feminist ideals for social change. Second, CALYX editors drew on the feminist metaphors of silencing and voice to illustrate the way CALYX creates a “forum for diversity and underrepresented voices.” Third, the editors focused on the primary mission to publish “fine literature and art by women” and discussed the ways that literary or artistic quality is understood by the CALYX collective. They also illustrated ways that the aesthetic mission of CALYX might operate at odds with other aspects of the mission, such as reaching wide audiences or promoting feminist ideas. Fourth, the editors discussed the CALYX mission of nurturing new writers and encouraging writers to develop their craft. Lastly, editors mentioned the desire to produce the highest quality publication possible.

In reviewing the interviews, I saw that tensions emerged between various aspects of the mission. Some tensions sprang from personal differences in interpretation of CALYX’s mission or in differences in priority of one aspect of the mission over another. Other tensions emerged when one aspect of the CALYX mission worked against another. For instance, editors noticed that creative work with an explicit political commitment to feminism was not always the highest quality artistic or literary work. In selecting work for CALYX Journal, the editorial collective has prioritized quality over politics in every case, according to the editors. In addition, the primary commitment to publish “fine literature and art” was sometimes seen to work against the journal’s marketability or appeal to a wide audience. Furthermore, nurturing new authors is a costly endeavor that has been difficult for CALYX to sustain in terms of both human and financial resources.
These tensions recall Simone Murray’s claim that there is a “profound ambivalence at the heart of feminist publishing”—a conflict between “political authenticity and commercial viability” (Mixed 26). Feminist publishers operate within a paradox—existing as commercial enterprises in a capitalist system while striving to maintain a primary ideological commitment to social, cultural, or political change. In CALYX’s case, the press’s primary commitment to literary or artistic quality constitutes a form of publishing activism in defiance of the profit-driven mainstream publishing industry and in support of a feminist approach to publishing women’s creative work. The “ambivalence” that Murray observed is present in CALYX’s operation as a feminist literary press, with conflict arising in particular ways between specific elements of its publishing mission.

CALYX’s operation as a feminist organization informed by feminist principles places CALYX in a group of activist publishers for whom feminism is a way of operating. In Linda’s words,

Our feminist ideas inform not only our selection, but also our method of selection, and our method of operation. The fact that we are the last nonprofit feminist cooperative; it is more egalitarian, less hierarchical, than most organizations. So I think the feminist idea is there on every level. (Smith)

Not only the work CALYX publishes but also the means by which the work is selected, edited, and produced are informed by feminism. CALYX’s feminist values are reflected in the other aspects of the publishing mission as well as in how CALYX carries out its feminist vision.

A feminist commitment to diversity and inclusion of all voices, especially those who are underrepresented in mainstream media, remains a substantial part of the CALYX
publishing mission. Marni said that in starting CALYX, the founders were “making sure that we could establish this so that other women, young or old, could always secure a voice.” Marni noted, “I think we were all pretty united on that front.” The historical silencing of women in literature and art was becoming more and more apparent at this time through the work of feminist writers and editors, and the feminist metaphors of silencing and voice were in active use in feminist communities. Marni noted that the editors, including herself, felt silenced personally in their lives; silencing was not just an abstract concept:

I think it was all our intents to make sure that there would always be a voice, because I think all of us, in one form or another, had the experience of being silenced—historically and personally. (Jenkins)

Cheryl remembered learning about the statistics on women getting published at that time, and that “it was just horrendous.” She also recalled that people questioned her about CALYX’s mission to publish work by women, as she explained:

It was at the same time that things like Rotary Clubs and private schools were being opened to women—so people were arguing, “Hey, CALYX is exclusionary. How can you justify that?” Well, it’s kind of like redressing the balance finally—getting some opportunity out there where there isn’t opportunity in the rest of the publishing world. (McLean)

Linda recalled that when CALYX began publishing, “where we started was you had the token female in a literary magazine.” According to Linda, “giving women a voice and place to be published was the most important mission we had” (Smith).

Beverly also pointed out that CALYX creates a safe space for women writers that may not exist in other parts of the publishing world. Beverly described CALYX as a place “where women can feel safe, and they do, even the people who we reject—we get people who say, ‘Thank you so much for your note; I feel safe writing to you’”
This sense of safety and inclusion that CALYX offers to women is a rare quality in a publisher, and the CALYX editors know that women appreciate having a literary and artistic refuge.

Including a diverse range of voices in CALYX is another aspect of the mission to provide a forum for women’s creative work. Linda said that this mission for diversity and inclusion was especially important to her:

The aspect of CALYX’s mission I especially relate to is the diversity of voices, regardless of age, sexual persuasion, ethnicity, economics, all of it. It’s the diversity and the affirming of a woman’s experience that are most important to me. (Smith)

Linda described a spectrum of diversity of women’s perspectives and maintained that no one perspective should predominate over another in the work that CALYX publishes. She emphasized, “We have to cover the whole spectrum… That to me is what our goal is—that we maintain the diversity, and that no one group overcomes that” (Smith).

Cheryl also described the mission to provide a forum for women’s voices, and that meant for all women: “That sense of all inclusiveness was a big piece of what CALYX meant to me—the sense that all women are welcome here.” She added:

I always understood the mission of CALYX to be helping women’s voices be heard—helping women find their voices, and then helping them be heard; helping them make connections and get their messages out. And that mission applied to all women—women of color, women of all ages and classes. (McLean)

This inclusive aspect of the CALYX mission focuses more on the writer and artist as a person than on their writing and art. From CALYX’s beginning, its mission has contained this human element—a desire to create positive and nurturing publishing experiences for women writers and artists within a feminist environment.
There is one aspect of this part of CALYX’s mission—to create a safe and inclusive space for women of diverse backgrounds—that has perhaps not been addressed explicitly by CALYX. This is the question of who is considered a “woman” and where the boundaries of “womanhood” lie. As far as I know, CALYX editors (including myself) have not explored the assumptions that are involved in defining a writer or artist as a “woman” and the social, cultural, or biological foundations for those assumptions, nor have addressed the unique concerns of transgender writers and artists.

Although part of CALYX’s mission is to be inclusive and allow all women an opportunity to achieve a voice, the editorial collective process serves to make sure that CALYX publishes only the highest quality work. This aesthetic aspect of CALYX’s mission took precedence over other aspects of the mission in my conversations with the editors. As Cheryl illustrated, though CALYX seeks to be inclusive,

what happened in the editorial collective process, however, was more about—not about message—but about the quality of the work. If part of the quality of the work was that the artist was able to convey a message with a sense of power and elicit a response, then fabulous. But we also had an awful lot of poetry that had a message but not art. If it didn’t have the art, the message wasn’t enough. It had to have an aesthetic component. (McLean)

This aesthetic has a complexity that goes beyond beauty, as Cheryl noted:

Some of what’s been published is pretty brutal and hard, not something you would call beautiful, but it’s still crafted with an artist’s eye for power or emotional connection. (McLean)

The emotional impact of a piece is one thing the editors consistently look for in selecting work for the journal. Sometimes, however, “that certain something” that makes a piece effective can be difficult to define. Different editors had different concepts of the
aesthetic element of CALYX’s mission, but for all of the editors, CALYX’s emphasis on quality was a primary concern.

Marni said that the founders had the intention in the beginning to establish CALYX as a high quality literary and artistic publication, and that

CALYX worked hard to establish a reputation. I think Barbara Baldwin, being a poet, worked very hard to make sure that there was a level of excellence among writers, especially among poets. (Jenkins)

For Beverly, this aesthetic mission is what speaks to her the most. She described the editorial collective’s priorities when selecting work for the journal:

The quality has got to be there, even though—how many times have we said in the meetings—“Their heart’s in the right place, and we WISH we could take this, because it’s important, BUT it’s just not good enough.” (McFarland, personal interview)

Most often, the work selected is presented from a woman’s perspective, but as Beverly pointed out, this is not the most important aspect of the work. Content also does not take precedence over quality. As Beverly said, “For me, what they’re writing about is not in some ways the most important thing—it’s how they’re saying it” (McFarland, personal interview). She described occasions when people would assume that CALYX selected work based on the content or perspective of the piece rather than on the quality:

People say to me, “Oh, do you only do lesbian work?” [or] “You never do lesbian work, do you?” [Laughs] It depends on what comes in! [Laughs] So I keep telling them: when it comes in, and it’s good, you know, but not JUST BECAUSE. Some of it can get so polemic… It’s got to be the line between what they say and how they say it. (McFarland, personal interview)

Linda phrased this aspect of the CALYX mission most succinctly: “It needs to be good” (Smith). The difficulty with this central aspect of CALYX’s mission is, however, what is “good” when it comes to literature and art? Defining excellence in literature and art
varies widely from one school of thought to the next, and invoking the words “fine literature and art” can recall canonical, exclusionary models of aesthetic quality.

In seeking a better understanding of CALYX’s aesthetic mission, we need to consider how a feminist vision of inclusion and a celebration of the creative power of women might combine. A feminist aesthetic looks very different from a traditional literary or artistic aesthetic; that difference springs from combination of political and artistic sensibilities. As Beverly said, “It’s the literature too, it’s not just feminism but it’s the literature too” (McFarland, personal interview). For CALYX as a literary publisher, a commitment to publishing only high quality literature and art by women is in itself a political statement about the value of women’s creative work—such a statement counters centuries of literary and artistic tradition in which women’s creative efforts were belittled, scorned, ignored, and forgotten.

By leaving the definition of “fine literature and art” and “high quality” open to interpretation, CALYX has allowed flexibility and change in the aesthetic mission over time. Since editorial decisions are made collectively, a flexible interpretation of quality also allows for diversity in selection preferences and criteria among editors. CALYX relies on the expertise and judgment of the editors who make the artistic and literary decisions rather than on a fixed or absolute definition of artistic excellence. Cheryl observed,

One of the things about the whole collective process I found is that when you have to please six or eight different people with their different perceptions and their different tastes, you really do have a lot of cream that rises to the top. (McLean)
Diversity among editorial collective members is also vital to maintaining a broad understanding of quality in the editorial selection process, as Linda stressed:

That’s why it’s very important to me that we get some more young women [on the collective]. We’ve had some young people on the editorial board, but I think we need to have even MORE! Also important on the board, if we can possibly get it, is to get some women of color. Poor women—but poor women can’t afford the time. And Corvallis is just not noted for its color. (Smith)

CALYX has struggled to retain younger women on the collective, and the collective has frequently been all white and middle class. Diversity among the editorial collective members is seen as important to fulfilling CALYX’s mission in that it adds a range of perspectives and preferences to the collective decision-making process. Containing diverse editorial viewpoints, the collective is more inclusive of multiple definitions of literary and artistic quality, thus opening the door for more diverse creative work to be published in *CALYX*.

One theme that appeared in my conversations with the editors was the idea that the CALYX collective selects work on its own merit and not on the reputation of the author. Again, the editors emphasized that quality was the primary concern and said that they were not influenced by the author’s previous publishing achievements. Each piece submitted to CALYX is judged separately, and editors attempt to be impartial when the author is a friend or acquaintance or is well known. CALYX is recognized among authors for considering each work independently. Kathleen Alcalá wrote in her introduction to *Cracking the Earth: A 25th Anniversary Anthology*:

While CALYX was one of my first publishers, the collective rejected my stories just as regularly. Why was this?… With other journals the pattern for me has been that either a publication accepts everything I send them or rejects everything—only CALYX seems to take each piece on its own merits.
This is for two reasons: CALYX is sought out by the most talented writers in the country, and accepts only the best. (7)

The CALYX editors’ primary commitment to literary and artistic quality leads them to be highly selective of work that is submitted. CALYX has rejected work by many famous published authors while at the same time accepting work by unknown, unpublished writers and artists—the primary concern is with the quality of the work. Editors I spoke with saw this selectivity in mainly a positive light:

That’s one thing I love about CALYX—that, for the most part, the manuscripts are considered on their own merit, not on the name of the author or artist. At least when I was involved in the reading process, it was more or less a blind process… not literally, because you still had the names on the manuscripts, but you didn’t look at that. You didn’t consider that.

It’s really not about who you are at CALYX. It’s about what you have to say and how you say it. I think that’s rare in this day and age. So I think that’s of value, of great value. Feminist or no. Irregardless of its mission. (McLean)

Cheryl saw the commitment to quality as a way for CALYX to remain inclusive by treating all authors equally and holding them to the same high standard:

I think that’s important: that we don’t just create an old girl network like they’ve had the old boy network forever. That we keep the standards the same across the board. (McLean)

Beverly told a story about an author whose book had been published by CALYX who had later received rejections for several short stories she submitted. Several years ago at Bumbershoot, an arts festival in Seattle, Beverly remembered,

She was standing at the [CALYX] table and somebody came up and said that she was really sorry to get a rejection letter. And [the author] said, “Well, they published my book and they still send me rejection letters—don’t feel bad!” [Laughs] (McFarland, personal interview)

Well-known or widely published authors may get discouraged when they submit work to CALYX and discover that their previous publishing success has no influence over
CALYX’s selection process. Published authors can become accustomed to special treatment from publishers, and clearly there is a reason for that. There is a compromise that CALYX makes in remaining highly selective, and that is that CALYX loses out on the potential marketing appeal that big-name authors can have. Because work by established authors is much easier to promote and sell than work by unknown authors, most publishing houses are happy to accept work by well-known authors, with less consideration to quality. We all know where this path leads, and CALYX is determined not to go in that direction. All the same, marketing and promotion of CALYX Journal and books remains difficult because of the editors’ unwavering commitment to new authors and to only the highest quality work.\(^5\)

Effort to market and promote the journal to a wide audience is one aspect of CALYX’s mission where tensions within the mission can emerge. Micki said that while she was at CALYX, marketing efforts were somewhat frustrated by the editorial decision-making process, which occurs completely independently from the business interests of the organization. Micki speculated that perhaps the separation was affecting CALYX’s marketability. She stated that there was a need for the mission to be discussed openly so that CALYX could promote the journal more effectively:

I think it is important for CALYX to talk about what its mission is and what its vision is. While I was there I remember we had conversations about—for instance, when things started getting hard—whether we needed to think a little more strategically about what we were publishing. That had always been very sacred—the editorial collectives were not going to be infected by any kind of thought of marketing, or making decisions about what we’re publishing based on whether it would sell… (Reaman)

\(^5\) A strange irony about the publishing industry is that higher quality work does not equal higher profits, and in fact often equals the opposite. Mass appeal ensures profit more reliably than the quality of the work.
CALYX’s editorial loyalty to literary and artistic quality over all else has brought CALYX the excellent reputation it deserves, but it has also existed in tension with other areas of its stated mission, such as marketing or promoting the work to wide audiences.

Another source of tension in CALYX’s mission is between the primary desire to publish “fine literature and art” and the feminist agenda to publish works of feminist integrity and to promote feminist ideas. Many editors noticed a source of conflict or incompatibility that occasionally arose from the intersection of these two aspects of the CALYX mission. This tension became apparent to the editors early in CALYX’s history when some women submitted very political, feminist-oriented work but not very high quality work. Margarita believed that the first subtitle of the journal, *A Northwest Feminist Review*, was partly to blame. As she explained when I asked her about CALYX’s mission,

> We did talk about [the mission]; I can’t remember any of the discussions. We mainly talked about the quality of the work, and after the end of a year we could see that—which is why we changed the name—we could see that using the word “feminist” had affected what people sent us. They would look for something feminist in their work and maybe not send us their best work, and we felt that the quality of the work should stand on its own. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Once again, the mission to uphold literary and artistic quality took precedence over a stated or overt allegiance with feminism. Beverly noticed the same phenomenon happening more recently:

> Sometimes you read things that people write elsewhere and it’s lovely, and everything they send to us is not that lovely—because they’re trying to be feminist… Well, I think that happens sometimes—you read a bio, and they’ve been published elsewhere, and you think, “How did they get published so many times?” That’s because they’re sending us their most polemic work, the most slanted, and they’re not thinking about the quality also. (McFarland, personal interview)
In my experience on the editorial collective, when a moment of crisis arose between the desire to publish a work with clear feminist impact and the commitment to include only the highest quality work, the editors always gave primacy to their dedication to quality.

At the same time, the editors did speak briefly about how they saw CALYX functioning as a vehicle for feminist expression. Clearly, most of the work that CALYX publishes is both of significance to feminism and of the highest literary quality. By virtue of receiving creative work from women around the world, Cheryl stated, “CALYX has always been right at the heartbeat of whatever is on the women’s agenda, so to speak” (McLean). Linda agreed that CALYX can function as “a mouthpiece for the feminist movement” (Smith). Beverly pointed out that CALYX’s aesthetic standards do not prohibit political pieces from being published in the journal. She said, “We’ve got some political things, and we have several political pieces in this issue” (McFarland, personal interview). Beverly also explained that the book reviews published in CALYX can sometimes follow a feminist agenda: “We try to review works that have significance to feminism, but we can’t always tell that about poetry and novels, really.” She noted that CALYX also tries to review books from other small presses, including other feminist presses, which would not be reviewed in major publications, in order “to give a book a chance” (McFarland, personal interview).

Being supportive and nurturing of authors and artists is another way that CALYX editors feel their work reflects feminist values. CALYX has from the beginning sought to support and encourage women in their creative efforts and to help new writers and artists establish their careers. Beverly said that part of the mission she very much enjoys is working with authors:
I think it’s a very much part of the feminist—the nurturing idea, you know—mothering is not a smothering. [Laughs] It’s a nurturing thing so they can stand up and the blossom can open and they can go on and publish a whole bunch of books on their own. And we helped them at the beginning. (McFarland, personal interview)

CALYX editors often delight in providing a first-time publication for an author, as Beverly described:

When I send the contributors’ copies, I send a postcard and I say, “Is this your very first publication ever?” Every time, there’s two or three women who say, “This is the very first one ever!” And yeah, it’s really exciting. (McFarland, personal interview)

CALYX also prides itself on the number of well known authors who were published first or early in their careers in CALYX Journal. There is, however, another compromise that CALYX makes in its commitment to new authors, again in relation to marketing and making a profit from the books and journals.

Nurturing new writers is clearly an expensive and time-consuming endeavor, though often highly rewarding. Rather than feeling betrayed when authors go on to publish elsewhere and become successful, CALYX editors take pride in giving that author’s career a start. However, focusing primarily on new authors, especially in book publishing, may compromise CALYX’s marketing effectiveness or profitability. Micki emphasized that in a competitive publishing world, marketing goals must be clearly defined. She suggested that publishing multiple books by an author could help CALYX make more of a profit:

CALYX had a policy about not publishing a second book by a writer, because part of the mission was to publish as many new writers as possible. But when it became clear that it might be helpful to us marketing-wise, that we would be able to sell more books if we did publish a second book [by an author], since we’d already put all that effort into… So, we started questioning things like that a little bit. (Reaman)
Aspects of CALYX’s mission such as this one to publish as many new writers as possible may have changed and evolved over time to meet changing needs. Conflicts have emerged between various elements of the CALYX mission, but the central mission to publish high quality literature and art by women has not changed.

Neither has CALYX’s commitment to quality of presentation. CALYX editors are immensely proud of the beautiful books and journals they have helped to produce. Beauty and professionalism of presentation were the intent of the founders from the beginning, in order to best feature the creative work in the journal. According to Margarita, the material in CALYX Journal was intended to be women’s art and literature that would stand on its own. We didn’t even do book reviews back then, or essays, and we never wrote editorial comments. We said that the work would stand on its own.

And it would be produced in a beautiful format, and the level of excellence would be given equal venue in its formatting. So it was always on really fine paper and we did the best we could with reproducing art, though we couldn’t afford color. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Marni agreed that quality of presentation was a focus for the founders. She remembered the collaborative effort involved in deciding how best to present the work in the journal:

We all wanted to make sure that their work could be presented in a beautiful way. Margarita and I were very passionate about that. She’s always been very strong on presentation, and I’ve appreciated that because I came from a more classically trained base of using archival materials and making sure when you mat your work it’s museum mounting and that kind of thing.

So when we would choose paper or choose fonts and things for CALYX, that was always in mind—that there would be a lovely presentation, so that the work would be treated with honor and respect. I think that’s been carried out. I think it’s been tough these last ten, fifteen years because prices have gone up phenomenally and publishing is tougher. (Jenkins)
Although CALYX has struggled financially to keep publishing, the editors have never sacrificed the quality of the creative work nor of the presentation. Many of the editors wished that CALYX could afford to include color prints of art in the journal. Only once, in the 1980 *International Issue*, have color prints been published in *CALYX* other than on the cover of the journal. Within financial limitations, CALYX has remained steadfast in its commitment to produce the highest quality publication.

That CALYX would survive and keep publishing women’s creative work was a hope that all the editors expressed. Marni felt that part of the mission for her in the beginning was to create a self-sustaining project:

> When I started CALYX with Margarita and Barbara and Beth, my intent was to have something that would live on—through interns, through people that would keep taking it forward—and it has continued. (Jenkins)

She also described the educational aspect of the mission that was part of this goal for CALYX to be an ongoing project:

> Part of the purpose I think is really important is for people like you to come in, learn the ropes… CALYX as a teaching vehicle or as an educational vehicle is really important. When we started it as 501(c)3—that was part of the mandate, as being nonprofit, was that it be *educational*. (Jenkins)

In educating women about the business of feminist small press publishing, the mission of CALYX can be collectively carried forward. Marni’s strongest wish for CALYX was, “I hope that it’s passed on.” Cheryl observed that there is a continuing need for feminist publishing today:

> I think feminist publishing is still important—just keeping the flame going, keeping the idea out there that women’s voices deserve to be heard. There still needs to be this vehicle for that purpose. It’s too bad, but the need is still there, I think. Certainly the need is there for emerging artists. (McLean)
New authors, especially those with radical or marginal voices and messages to share, benefit greatly from feminist publishers’ commitments to publish writing by women within a nurturing and inclusive feminist environment. These many elements of CALYX’s mission operate together to create a powerful vision of how feminist ideals can inform a publisher’s operation on every level and result in a body of published work that has significant impact on feminism, literature, art, and our lives.

Significant Publishing Achievements

Each of the editors I talked with shared many examples of significant and memorable experiences while involved with CALYX. The editors also shared stories about CALYX’s significant achievements as they perceived them. These stories together tell a larger story of CALYX’s achievements through the eyes of women who were on the inside of these accomplishments. These “snapshots” appear roughly chronologically as they trace the history of CALYX through events that the editors found especially memorable and important. Early editorial experiences are followed by a discussion of specific publishing accomplishments and the unique dynamics of the collective editing process.

Memorable Early Editorial Experiences

A recurring theme in the editors’ stories about the early years at CALYX was a “do-it-yourself” approach to publishing. CALYX’s beginning was a grassroots effort, drawing on whatever resources were available, with volunteer labor probably being the most significant of those resources. In these stories, there is always a sense of
togetherness and shared experience as being part of a collective, which the editors remembered fondly.

Some aspects of production of the journal were hands-on for the CALYX volunteers. Cheryl fondly remembered laying out the journal pages by hand with a blade and a hand-waxer:

Because CALYX is so small, we have to do everything. At that time, we still got rolls of typeset that would stretch all the way across the room, and we had to lay out pages on a light table using an exacto knife to cut between the lines of type and be sure you didn’t cut off any d’s or g’s (ascenders or descenders)…

A short story would come in one big long roll, all in line, so you would have to lay it down, decide where the end was going to be, cut along that line—look at these lines, how close they are! You had blueline grids to work with on a light table, and a little hand-waxer—I still have mine downstairs, actually. It’s very handy! So we would get together and lay out the whole thing. (McLean)

Another aspect of production that was done by hand was assembling the signatures in preparation for binding. When the signatures (printed press sheets) arrived from the printer, volunteers helped assemble the journal by collating the printed pages into the correct order so they could be bound into a finished journal. Linda described her memory of assembling the journal signatures:

I remember I did all kinds of office stuff, but what I remember most was when we’d get these tables, and we’d put all the signatures of the edition. We didn’t have enough money to assemble the signatures, so we could save money if we would assemble all these books. And so we went round and around the table, picking up the books. That was one of my earliest memories of CALYX. (Smith)

*CALYX Journal* was distributed by volunteers in those early years before they had a distributor. Marni recalled enjoying the poetry reading events that they put on when they traveled to sell the journal:

Whenever we would take the journals out—not just for fundraisers, but poetry readings—that whole thing was really wonderful. Christina Pacosz was an early
poet that we published and she and Olga Broumas and Barbara [Baldwin] often gave readings… That was a really wonderful collaboration I think. I just liked when we could combine those events—have a publication go toward the poetry reading too, and how that could manifest in many opportunities for many kinds of audiences.

[Readings were in] Portland and Eugene, and there were some in eastern Oregon and I think there were some down in San Francisco—wherever we could. We went to all these bookstores to schlep the magazine and do the reading. That was often how it was sold. We would take it to different bookstores… dragging the issues around in Margarita’s car [laughs]! (Jenkins)

CALYX editors and volunteers also traveled to book fairs and feminist conferences to sell and promote the journal. Linda remembered several memorable conferences, but the weirdest one was when we went to California and we had about six of us in the car and we had NOTHING. We were so poor, we’d go to all the parties to get food. (Smith)

Editors also shared memories of camping on the beach in the rain during this period.

Although CALYX Journal began specifically as a forum for Western women’s work, the journal quickly gained national attention, as Margarita related:

We were getting work from all over the country right off the bat. We had a review on NPR before the end of the first year, and he gave the most incredible verbal review of CALYX Journal. And after that we never had to worry about [submissions]. We had sent out our notices looking for manuscripts, mainly to universities across the west, and so the first couple of issues it was from those notices. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Themes in the literature began to emerge, prompting special issues of the journal. Other special issues were intended to fill a gap or cover an issue that the editors perceived was not being addressed:

Over the years we could begin to see certain themes coming out, which is why we did an issue we called the Matriarchal Issue, and a photography issue. We could see that there were certain things not happening—we weren’t getting a lot of Chicana or Native American work, and so we did a special issue of Chicana and Native American women. And we brought in some other editors to help us with
that. We began to do some special theme issues after that… And that really made a difference. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

In doing these special issues of the journal, CALYX broke new ground and opened up a literary forum for work that had not previously been published. Many of the special issues CALYX put together were the first of their kind. Margarita noted,

> We began to develop this reputation for doing unusual things, and it’s all because we *always* functioned collectively. I really think that the strength of what we do comes from that. We really were collective, even when we were fighting with each other back in the first five years. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

CALYX’s collective organization helped it operate with a hands-on, grassroots ethic in the early years. No one woman had to do it all herself; all aspects of CALYX’s operation were divided amongst the group. The unique dynamics of a publishing collective also paved the way for CALYX’s many publishing accomplishments over the years.

*Publishing Accomplishments and Feminist Impact*

Over the span of three decades, CALYX has produced a great number of groundbreaking, powerful, and award-winning publications. Many of the books and journals published by CALYX have received national attention and have been incorporated into university courses and adopted by book groups. CALYX’s publishing success can be seen in material and literary terms in the success (in sales, reviews, and awards) of the books and journals published and also in the number of “firsts” that CALYX has produced of a type of work or on a particular issue. The value of CALYX’s legacy partly rests in the body of published work it has helped to create that has powerful significance to women’s literature and to feminism.
In addition to the commercial or critical success of CALYX’s books and journals, however, CALYX’s publishing success can be measured in other ways. Many of the editors I talked with spoke of CALYX’s success mainly in terms of human impact: how many authors CALYX has published, how many writers have had their careers boosted by publishing with CALYX, how many readers CALYX has touched, and how many editors and volunteers have been involved with CALYX. Often this human impact was described as a spreading of consciousness or awareness of women’s issues and also as a raising of women’s confidence and sense of value in themselves. Touching women’s lives and consciousnesses deeply was an achievement these editors mentioned that cannot be described in numbers or dollars, but could be even more significant than CALYX’s material, quantitative successes.

A memory that Marni shared from CALYX’s early years was of hearing from women who were producing their creative work in the early morning hours in a moment of respite from domestic duties:

Often, when we started editing, there were people who would be sending us paintings and poems about their lives and the hours before dawn; that was the only time they got to work, when all the kids were asleep. That was the only time women were in their studio, from two to four in the morning, or whatever. It was just poignant how many women would work then, because it was unheard of—to just make art. It was the only time they had—if they were working, that was what they had to do, and raise their children. (Jenkins)

This memory was a touching illustration of how *CALYX Journal* began to touch the lives of women from the very beginning of its publication. Because of the existence of *CALYX Journal*, women who may not have otherwise submitted creative work to a journal felt that they could create and submit work for a women’s space.
CALYX editors often refer to CALYX’s successes in terms of the writers and artists who have been published in the journal, especially those who have gone on to become well known. The CALYX website lists some of these but also stresses the number of authors published in all: “CALYX Journal is known for discovering important writers, such as Julia Alvarez, Paula Gunn Allen, Olga Broumas, Natalie Goldberg, Barbara Kingsolver, and Sharon Olds, among the more than 3,800 writers published during our first 30 years” (“CALYX Journal”). Other authors CALYX is proud to have published “first or early in their careers” include Ellen Bass, Chitra Divakaruni, Molly Gloss, Linda Hogan, Colleen McElroy, Wislawa Szymborska, and Eleanor Wilner (“History”). Linda agreed that CALYX’s achievements can be measured by the many authors they have published:

Our accomplishments are in giving the jumpstart for a lot of women writers, like Barbara Kingsolver and Olga Broumas and all those others. We were there, we published, and so got the word out for these writers, and I think that’s probably our best accomplishment. (Smith)

Along with the “firsts” of an author’s work CALYX has published, CALYX also has produced many “first” publications on a particular issue. The 1980 *International Issue* was a major early accomplishment for the small press and included many “firsts” that the editors are still proud of. Cheryl called the *International Issue* a “major milestone” (McLean). Margarita described ways that this issue was groundbreaking at the time:

We decided to do the international anthology of women’s work because we knew that a lot of women’s work wasn’t being translated. In it are the first translations in English of Szymborska, the Polish poet who won the Nobel prize, and the first good translations of Akhmatova that became this huge collection that was published a few years later.
The first color plates of Frida Kahlo. At that time nobody knew about Frida Kahlo. Her autobiography came out a couple years later. I had a connection through somebody who sent us to Mexico City, so I dealt with getting the permissions from the woman who had control of the Frida Kahlo estate in Mexico City… We had those excerpts from [Kahlo’s] diary… So there were a lot of firsts in that one. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

This first special issue was a major accomplishment for the CALYX collective and set a standard for the groundbreaking work that CALYX continued to produce.

*Women and Aging* (1986) is another collection that many editors mentioned when thinking about CALYX’s significant accomplishments. Margarita described the occasion when the collective got the idea to do an anthology on women and aging:

*Women and Aging* was an anthology that got done because the issue had come up at a national women’s studies conference with Barbara McDonald. They were having a national women’s studies conference in Seattle and Marni came up with the idea: What if we did something on aging? I actually didn’t want to do it—I reacted, because I was really ageist. I said, “Oh, that would be boring. Who would want to read something about older women?” We were pretty young then—I was just turning forty I think.

But then we did it, and we brought in some older friends to help us with it. It was really an important thing to do, because I had never realized how women became invisible as they got older—I mean, it’s bad enough when you’re young, but then when you get older it’s even worse. So that anthology was really important. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

In her editorial statement in *Women and Aging*, Margarita said that while working on this anthology, she started to feel more aware of issues of aging in this country:

I began to read again in the same way I read when I first became a feminist. I looked for images of older women, began to analyze the literature I have read (and published) and the pattern was very clear.

Older women, aging women… are not reflected in our society or are depicted in negative stereotypes. They are also absent from the feminist media and literature, and I have been a part of that erasure… We hope this anthology is a beginning and helps uncover older women’s realities. (Alexander et al. 7)
That this anthology changed its editors so deeply is another mark of its significance. This powerful work helped put awareness of ageism onto feminist agendas where it had previously not existed. An important element of this success was in the editors’ ability to admit their own lack of awareness of this issue and to be humble and open-minded enough to learn from their limitations.

Cheryl pointed to *Women and Aging* as one of the most significant pieces that she helped work on at CALYX. She described the same sense that they were accomplishing something new that would be meaningful to many women:

*Women and Aging* was one of the pivotal points for me in terms of feeling as if we were really at the forefront of something big going on... To have a whole issue dedicated to something that was so universal—I mean, we’re all going to be old someday—it was really powerful. And the work is just so fabulous—it’s so good. Some of my very, very favorite pieces are in here, and I just love them. (McLean)

Cheryl told a moving story to illustrate the power of *Women and Aging* through the very real effects this book had on women:

One of the reasons that I think CALYX has been so important is that it helps form connections for people. I think probably one of the biggest is for readers who read poetry or short stories and realize, “I am not alone. I am not alone.”

I think the most dramatic scene of that I came across was when a bunch of us had gone to the American Booksellers Association conference in Las Vegas, of all places. Our office manager/bookkeeper at the time was Scotte. She and I were walking through a publisher’s party. We’re walking along and we saw these two older women, one in a wheelchair and one pushing her, looking like my great aunts, all fluffy white hair and apple cheeks in gingham or polka-dot dresses.

Scotte stopped and says, “Oh, hi!” Later I asked her, “Did you know those people?” She said no, and I said, “Oh, it seemed like you must have known them.” She said, “Oh, no, but it was just the most wonderful experience. When they found out I was with CALYX, they said, ‘Oh my, we just never knew there was anybody else like us, out there.’” And she said they were a lesbian couple, and they had tears in their eyes about how wonderful it was to know that CALYX was there.
I asked Scotte about how it was that she greeted them like long-lost buddies, and she said, “No, no, it’s just old dyke radar.”… I just love that story and that aspect of CALYX’s influence. Here were these women who’d probably been hiding their whole lives and had this—in fact it was *Women and Aging*—that they recognized themselves in so much and realized: We are not alone, we are not the only ones out there. I’ve heard that in different situations *many* times, about those kind of connections. That’s priceless. (McLean)

Tears came to my eyes as Cheryl told this story; it felt so redemptive. After our interview, I immediately went home and read through my copy of *Women and Aging* from cover to cover. I indeed noticed that the book contains many powerful feminist ideas and perspectives about women’s aging that I had not encountered anywhere else. In her editorial statement for *Women and Aging*, Cheryl wrote about working on the anthology: “That it has been a consciousness-raising is an understatement. It has been an awakening” (Alexander et al. 8). She continued:

> I hope that the voices in this anthology will create a wave of awareness and discussion and consciousness-raising that will send its ripples through the feminist community and beyond. I hope that these women will force us to confront our own ageism and examine our beliefs about aging and the images our minds relate to the words “old woman.” (Alexander et al. 8)

This amazing power of consciousness is one of the secret weapons of the feminist movement; from the early years in the 1960s, consciousness-raising has been a strategy for creating feminist change by reaching out to individuals and groups of women. CALYX’s publications are clearly part of this feminist tradition of consciousness-raising and *Women and Aging* is an exemplary book that embodies the feminist consciousness-raising ethic.

CALYX’s publishing achievements can also be seen in the rate of sales of the books and journals, which have been extraordinarily successful by small press standards.
Margarita can describe better than anyone else this feat of CALYX’s publishing success.

She explained that CALYX, even though frequently struggling financially, was actually highly successful with its publications:

> You have to understand that by the ’80s and the ’90s, we were printing 4,500 to 5,000 copies of the journal regularly, and selling them all, except for a few hundred…

> At the same time, we were also doing three to four books a year, and our books were selling through really well. We were publishing—on a fiction book we started with 5,000 press runs; poetry books we did at least 2,000 press runs, which is a really good press run for a small press—and we sold through. We had very few returns. Our books got great reviews, we won lots of awards, and the authors were great, and the books sold. We had a return rate of less than four percent. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The return rate is a key point for small publishers because of the way the book industry operates. Distributors and bookstores can return unsold books to the publisher and demand a refund, even when the books returned are no longer salable and even when a substantial amount of time has passed since the books were purchased. This policy in the book industry makes small publishing incredibly difficult since small presses rely on every dollar of income from book sales and often do not have large cash reserves on hand to pay for returns. A minuscule return rate such as CALYX had at that time is a mark of high quality publications, appropriate marketing and promotion, successfully targeted bookselling, and effective distribution.

As Margarita said, the late 1980s and early 1990s were very successful years for CALYX in terms of publishing. Then in the mid-1990s the publishing industry started to change (explained in detail in the next section) and the changes hit CALYX around 1995, leaving the press with financial difficulties. A bestseller could not have come at a better time:
So we had a bestseller with *Into the Forest*—it was an unknown writer, Jean Hegland. That book sold 13,000 copies in eight months, which for us was a bestseller. Then it got picked up by a big publisher in New York and we sold it for five figures, and then we sold rights to fourteen countries for five figures. So, we got a lot of money out of that, but that saved us. In ’96, that book saved us. That kept us going for the next seven years, because we made enough off of it that it funded us pretty well for a few years. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

By small press publishing standards, a bestseller is quite a different phenomenon than for larger publishers. Compared to the hundreds of thousands of books that large publishers need to sell to make a book worthwhile, a small publisher like CALYX can succeed quite well on a much smaller press run. Numbers can sometimes be misleading; just because small presses sell fewer copies of books than big publishers do, their successes are no less notable. Often, books sold by small presses are promoted for little to no money. CALYX has relied on creative promotion campaigns and word of mouth to sell their books, rather than expensive marketing ploys:

The way we survived before the superstores had control of commodifying books was that we just had to do word of mouth. What we did with *Into the Forest* was we sent a copy to almost all the independent bookstores on the West Coast, and it was word of mouth that sold the book to New York. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Beverly also recalls that 1996 was a significant year for CALYX, not only for selling *Into the Forest* and getting out of debt but also for winning the Governor’s Arts Award after they were convinced that CALYX was not going to receive it. She described her reaction to finding out CALYX had won:

1996 was quite a year, because at the beginning of the year, we were in a really bad… big debts, and we didn’t know what were we going to do. We knew that we had been nominated for the Governor’s Arts Award, but we had been told we weren’t going to get it. Then we sold *Into the Forest* for a large amount. It was during the Christmas holidays, and Margarita was gone, and Micki was back east… it seemed to me that they were at some women’s studies association meeting, before Christmas or something.
I was in the office to check on some of the mail, and do some stuff, and there was a letter saying that we had been *awarded* it! [Laughs] So I had to leave messages... I said, “Call me! We’ve won the Governor’s Arts Award.” I couldn’t share it with anybody right then, so I had to call these people and leave messages—nobody was home, Margarita wasn’t in her hotel room. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly and other editors I talked with had fond memories of accepting awards that CALYX received over the years. This sense of a public recognition and appreciation for their efforts offered a feeling of success, even when CALYX was struggling financially.

Micki also pointed to 1996 as an important but difficult year. She described working on *Present Tense: Writing and Art by Young Women* during that eventful year when the future of CALYX was increasingly uncertain. Micki remembered that the idea to do a young women’s anthology came out of discussions she had with several other young CALYX editors:

I don’t remember when we started talking about it, but Amy Agnello and then Teri Mae Rutledge were at different times staff members at CALYX, when I was. We talked a lot about—in general as an organization—that transition of having a younger readership and a younger audience... Who’s going to read CALYX in ten years; who’s going to be reading CALYX in twenty years, or whatever. So that’s how that project got started. (Reaman)

Then the process of working on *Present Tense* was memorable but stressful:

It was really hard timing, because we were trying to publish [*Present Tense*] in ’96. When we got into ’96... things were going down and resources were slim. Before that, that’s true, we had had a period of time when we increased staffing and we were getting paid full time salaries, for a while, which was luxurious...

But things were getting cut back that year, and we didn’t even know whether that book was going to be published. So we—the several of us from here—were traveling to Seattle to meet with the editorial board, and the whole time not knowing if it was ever going to really be a book. So it was very *stressful*. (Reaman)
Part of the intent behind *Present Tense* was to reach out to a younger audience and attract the next generation of *CALYX* readers. Micki remembers that discussions of *CALYX*’s readership came up quite a lot in those years and that the editors tried to think of ways to broaden *CALYX*’s appeal:

I was interested in knowing what would make the journal more appealing—or if the journal *was* appealing—to a broad group of people who would be the journal supporters twenty years from now. It felt, in a vague kind of way, like our audience was a little on the older side. But I don’t even know if that’s really true… We did do a reader survey during when we had the grant for the journal, so we did have some data. (Reaman)

Like *Women and Aging*, *Present Tense* offered a feminist vision of life for women of a certain age. The powerful stories challenge myths and stereotypes about young women in America just as *Women and Aging* did for older women. Through publishing powerful works like these and in touching the lives of thousands of women, *CALYX* has made lasting contributions to women’s literature and to feminism. *CALYX*’s unique collective publishing process has given the work added feminist significance.

*The Feminist Editorial Collective*

One of *CALYX*’s most important achievements rests in its collective operation and organizational structure. The collective, as an organizational unit, is one of *CALYX*’s signature qualities, an expression of the publisher’s commitment to feminist ideals of egalitarianism and nonhierarchical working relationships. In *CALYX*’s day-to-day operation, the collective nature of the work has taken on its own dynamic quality. The collective editorial process comes to have an aesthetic of its own, reflecting values of inclusion, diversity, caring, compassion, equality, and humility. *CALYX*’s collective
Editorial process has resulted in the production of work that could not have been done by a single person and has created working relationships that are unique in the publishing world. In our conversations, the CALYX editors recognized the editorial collective as a major accomplishment in which each of them played a part.

Editorial decisions about what to publish have always been made by a collective at CALYX. Over CALYX’s history, there have been journal collectives, literature collectives, art collectives, and book collectives, divided between poetry and prose. Usually the journal editorial collective consists of five to eight members who equally participate in selecting work using a process of decision making by consensus. While I was on the journal editorial collective, we met weekly during the spring and summer to discuss the submissions we had read for that week and decide which pieces to hold and which to let go. A piece would be published in the journal only if it had support from a significant number of editors (four, during my years on the collective).

Usually there was clear consensus on a piece; rarely the discussions came down to a “fight,” though that happened occasionally. Linda recalled a time she fought for a story that she wanted the group to accept. She was satisfied later when that story received acclaim. As she described the scene,

I remember before we went to Washington D.C., I stayed at an editorial meeting until past midnight, because I was advocating for a story—LOVED the story. I said, “I’m not going to Washington D.C. until you accept this story.” We wrangled over and over about it, and finally we accepted it. Then I went on sabbatical for a year. [Laughs]

THEN I come back and the group started getting favorable letters [about that story], and I said, “If you don’t remember, you didn’t want that story.” [Laughs] That was one I really remember fighting for. (Smith)
Being part of the editorial collective was a highly satisfying experience for me and for many of the editors I talked with. There was a feeling of collective accomplishment—that we had reached a level of quality that could not be achieved solely by one person.

Book manuscripts are selected in much the same way as journal manuscripts. Then, the editors work collectively with the manuscript and with the author. As noted in the *Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994*,

> The collective is a unique structure in literary publishing in which a book is critically reviewed and edited by several editors who work collectively with the author through the editorial coordinator. In several instances, CALYX editors have seen promise in an unfinished or roughly drafted work and have worked extensively with the writer to see the work completed and into print. It is unusual in today’s publishing world—with its inordinate focus on mass market and bottom-line sales figures—for an author to receive that kind of care and involvement from a publisher. (CALYX, Inc. 4)

It is indeed unusual these days for a publisher of any size to work so extensively and personally with authors. A close relationship between editor and author is unfortunately mostly a phenomenon of the past.

Additionally, the title of “editor” itself can be a source of confusion, since there are so many different types of editors. Some editors spend all their time with paper and pencil; other editors manage people and schedules and budgets. Beverly told a story about the misunderstanding that can occur when people hear the term “editor” and make assumptions about the role that do not apply at CALYX. She recalled,

> In a social situation, totally away from CALYX, somebody said, “Oh, you’re still there at CALYX. What do you do?” I said, “Well, I’m one of the editors.” “Oh, what does Margarita think about that?” I said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Isn’t she the editor?” [Laughs] “Well.”

Margarita was the managing editor—managing editor means business. And my title at the time was editorial coordinator. But on making decisions, we’ve always been a collective. You know, so we have several editors. When somebody says
I’m an editor with CALYX, it doesn’t mean we’re THE editor, it means one of them.

“Oh really.” And that was somebody who should have known. They just have this really stereotypical idea—an editor makes the decisions, you have this hierarchical thing—and we don’t. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly admitted that there is some hierarchy at CALYX that occurs in situations involving people who have different levels of knowledge and experience:

The only hierarchy here really is with interns and volunteers, but once you give someone a job and she can do something, then hopefully it becomes more of a cooperative thing. You can run with it—we want you to work with us, but it’s not just something we’re telling you to do. (McFarland, personal interview)

There also may be some loss of cooperation that springs from one person’s preference for doing one task over another, as Beverly also noted:

I think when it began, the four women and then the first few years, more people did more of the same thing. In some ways it was more collective, the business. Now it has become less cooperative. Part of that was me—I didn’t want to do anything but the editorial stuff, and I didn’t really want to learn how to do some of the business stuff, much less have time. [Laughs] I was a little selfish about that, I realize. But I stay very busy, just doing the editorial. (McFarland, personal interview)

CALYX’s daily operations may be less collective now than in earlier years, partly because the staff is smaller. Losing staff members had an impact on Beverly’s experience of the collective nature of her job, as she related:

Micki was half time editor and half time doing office stuff too, so we had one full time editor. We worked together, and I really miss the cooperative part of that. Even though I’m copyediting and proofing, and still I have copyeditors who do [the editing] and then I collate it all… But it was nice having somebody else to help make some decisions. Margarita wants to be involved with the reviews, but she doesn’t have time to be involved… Stylistic decisions, that kind of thing, are certainly still collective and Cheryl’s involved in all of that too. (McFarland, personal interview)
Although the CALYX staff is much smaller now than it was, the organization still includes a vast network of volunteers and contributing editors. Interns are invaluable in the day-to-day operation of CALYX, and volunteers (myself included) sometimes have to manage office tasks such as opening mail between school terms when the interns are gone. Cheryl reflected on the volunteer aspect of CALYX’s operation:

That’s another place where CALYX is really remarkable, I think—ninety percent of all of that editorial work is done by volunteers. I know when Micki was working on staff and coordinating all that, it was the coordinating piece that she was getting paid for. All the editing work and the editing time was volunteer. Beverly, too—she’s not proofreading on CALYX time. (McLean)

The collective and volunteer nature of so much of CALYX’s work allows new people to come in and contribute to CALYX right away. This openness and acceptance of all types of people with different skills and interests is a wonderfully inclusive aspect of CALYX.

CALYX’s editorial accomplishments are very much tied to this collective process and the diversity of viewpoints and perspectives that are valued by it. CALYX acknowledges the ideological power of the collective in its guidelines for the journal editorial collective. CALYX journal editors are “custodians of CALYX values” and they should hold, in addition to “experience with and knowledge of writing, literature, and art,” commitments to “feminist values” and “multi-cultural values” (CALYX, Inc., CALYX Journal Marketing Plan Appendix). CALYX has sought to keep its journal and book collectives as diverse as possible, recognizing that personal differences bring strength to the collective. While the editorial collective I served on was composed of five white women, we differed in age, geographical background, job experiences, and (sometimes more than others) literary preference. However, we were probably more
similar than we were different in our backgrounds and interests. We all were highly educated, middle class, and passionate about literature and writing.

CALYX prides itself on having always published work by women from diverse backgrounds. To publish diverse works effectively and sensitively, however, requires multicultural awareness in the editors. At times in CALYX’s history, the editors have recognized their own limitations in being able to edit certain work and have invited guest editors to assist with the editing process. A few misunderstandings have emerged from the difficulties of understanding literature across cultural boundaries, which created valuable learning experiences for the CALYX editors.

CALYX has produced several multicultural anthologies and involved guest editors in the production of each. Margarita described this practice as a necessary and vital learning experience:

We knew we had to involve other people, because you know what our problem in Corvallis is. Part of the multiculturalism also came from my multiculturalism—I had grown up bilingual and bicultural. That helped, and then whenever we had breakdowns, knowing we didn’t have the right people to help us edit with something like the Bearing Witness/Sobreviviendo [1984], we brought in other people. We did that at every level.

We did that when we published the book of short stories by Charlotte Watson Sherman [Killing Color, 1992]. We realized that, because none of us were African American, we shouldn’t be the ones editing her work alone, without some assistance. So we got Colleen McElroy to help us, an African American writer we know. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Even with the best intentions, sometimes editorial misunderstandings occurred, as Margarita related:

When we were working on Kathleen Alcalá’s book, Mrs. Vargas and the Dead Naturalist [1992], that was the first time I didn’t get involved in the editorial process because it was such a clean manuscript. I was busy raising money, and I thought everything was going well because the people who were working on it,
even though they were all Anglos, I thought they understood Chicana/Latina stuff, because they were all well traveled and everything.

Then Kathleen called me up during the middle of it and said “Margarita, we’ve got a problem. Your editors are asking me to change things, and they’re not getting the gist of the story. I’ve really got to talk to you.” And I said, “Okay, okay, I’ll sit down and talk with them.” They just missed the whole meaning of the story—so they were asking her to do something to it… they just didn’t get the story. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

For Margarita, a powerful example of the need for a diverse, multicultural collective was the process of working on the Asian American women’s anthology, *The Forbidden Stitch* (1989). Margarita worked with two guest editors, Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Mayumi Tsutakawa. She remembered:

> When I worked on *The Forbidden Stitch*, there was a story we accepted that I would have never accepted. It took me ten readings before I got that story. And it was because I wasn’t Asian American. Even though I thought I understood what it was, I did not get what that story meant to an Asian American. It was really an important thing that I learn, because that story—the one that I had never understood—was the most cited story out of that anthology. It’s still being used a lot. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

It is significant that an editor with as much editorial experience and multicultural awareness as Margarita could tell this story. It can be difficult to openly acknowledge our limitations, especially in an area where we have expertise. This story is a testament to CALYX editors’ openness about their own fallibility. Margarita shared another example with me of a book published by a different feminist press that was not as culturally sensitive and ended up creating a big controversy. She agreed with me that in the larger book world, it is a rare editor who openly recognizes the limits of his or her own cultural understanding and seeks outside guidance, as the CALYX editors have so often done.
The Forbidden Stitch was a “first” of its kind, as Margarita noted in her introduction to the anthology:

When the editorial collective decided to do this anthology, we did not know then that there were no Asian American women’s anthologies in existence in the U.S.A. We were surprised to discover this anthology was a first and still is as it goes to press—an important indicator of the level of invisibility Asian American women experience in this society. (Lim, Tsutakawa, and Donnelly 15)

The Forbidden Stitch won the American Book Award in 1990—a testament to the significance of CALYX’s collective editorial process.

Besides creating unique relationships among editors, CALYX’s collective editorial process has led to relationships among editors, authors, and manuscripts that are unusual in commercial publishing. CALYX editors work longer and more closely with authors and their manuscripts than is common for larger publishers. CALYX editors sometimes have an intimate relationship with the manuscript and can even influence its development.

Cheryl pointed to The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes by Barbara Scot (1993) as a significant CALYX work with which she had a strong connection. One of the few nonfiction books CALYX has published, this book is a feminist travel memoir from the author’s time in Nepal. Cheryl was involved in the acquisition of the book for CALYX and even played a role in shaping the unfinished manuscript:

Barb had written this and she’s a friend of my sister’s; they had taught together. My sister had read the manuscript beforehand, and she thought it sounded like something that would be good for CALYX. She sent it to me, and I read it and thought, “Yeah!”

And I was able to have an impact on the manuscript. There were a few reflective sections in the manuscript, where she took an experience in Nepal and related it to her life past and present and to her relationships with her mother, grandmother,
husband, and sons. There weren’t many in the original manuscript, but I talked with her about it, about bringing in more of these.

As I said, “This is where you’re making your connections with women; this is where you’re making this resonate for a lot of people. Not many of us are going to go to Nepal for a year, but how this has affected your reflections on the other aspects of your life makes it really meaningful.” And, I mean, I just love this book—so that was cool to have had a hand in bringing that in. (McLean)

Cheryl told me that when Scot was published by a larger press after being published by CALYX, she noticed a difference in the way they treated her and her manuscript:

Barbara went on to publish with a big publishing house—Farrar, Straus and Giroux, I think, is who published her second book. She was really frustrated because she was expecting to have the same kind of editorial back-and-forth that she had with CALYX, and it didn’t happen. They just took it and published it.

And she was going, “But, but, but! Aren’t you going to help me make it better? Aren’t you going to look at it and give me that critical feedback?” That didn’t happen. And it doesn’t happen much in publishing anymore. So, that’s really a remarkable gift to give a writer, I think. (McLean)

The relationships that CALYX editors form with authors relates directly back to the CALYX mission of nurturing writers, especially new writers. It is unfortunate that more publishers do not also commit to being nurturing and supportive of writers in this competitive publishing climate where money drives most publishing decisions.

Beverly also illustrated the way that CALYX’s relationships with authors can be unusual but also immensely satisfying for both the editors and the authors. She discussed working on Into the Forest by Jean Hegland (1996), a post-apocalyptic story about two sisters surviving in a Northern California forest. Beverly described the editors’ intervention in the manuscript while editing the book with the author:

You know, we got her to change the end of that story. At the end of it, they burned all the books, because they leave and go into the forest… because it’s not really safe in the house, they’d be safer in the forest… And we said, “You’re burning ALL the books!!” [Laughs]
So, she kept one book for each person… We got her to change that and she thinks that’s funny. She talks about it: “They were heartbroken, they didn’t want me to burn all those books.” (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly also reported getting positive responses from authors about the kind of editing that CALYX offers. She described hearing from first-time authors and also from more seasoned authors about the way CALYX addressed their work:

Well, most of them who haven’t ever published anything, they’re just happy to be worked with. The interesting thing is to get the people who have published a lot, who say, “Whoa, I’ve never had anybody do this with my work before, thank you so much.” They’ll tell me, “You have cleared up some things that I’ve been worried about; you’ve asked the right questions about something, that I’ve never had people do.” I got two this time. Other publishers don’t do that in detail. (McFarland, personal interview)

Beverly has also heard from authors about the differences in the ways CALYX and larger publishers treat authors personally:

Our writers love us, and we try to make them feel very much a part of a family, in the sense that we let them know it may take us several months. But we do let them always know whether they’re going to be published or not! Some publishers don’t do that. I will hear from people who say, “Such and such published a poem and I didn’t even know they were going to do it, because they never let me know” [laughs]. (McFarland, personal interview)

In Beverly’s view, CALYX’s compassionate and nurturing approach to authors establishes a sense of loyalty to CALYX. She offered an example of a woman who “tried eighteen times before we published her. [Laughs] At least she kept trying!” She also said that authors feel a sense of pride in being published in CALYX. One story she told was about a recent book fair CALYX attended:

Did I tell you the story about Wordstock, the new book fair in Portland, which is really nice? I was there all day Saturday and a woman about my age came up and stood beside the table. I looked at her and said, “Can I help you?” She said, “I just want to bask!” “Oh?” “You’re publishing me in the next journal, I just want to
bask!” It was the first time we published her… it was so sweet. (McFarland, personal interview)

Feminist publishing can also be seen as collective in a larger sense in the way that feminist presses create a network to support one another. Feminist meetings at book fairs and conferences were a space where this larger collective network could manifest itself. In the booming years of feminist publishing, these networking opportunities were incredibly exciting. Micki remembered that, as a younger and less experienced editor, she enjoyed observing and learning from the other women at these events:

I think that the beginning of when I was at CALYX was kind of a boom time. It was a time when we were all still attending ABA conferences and when the feminist presses still had organized meetings. The ABA was always a time when they would meet and have meetings just to network together and to share information but also workshop-y kind of meetings to share, to really learn how to do certain things. So when I was first at CALYX we were attending all these conferences regularly.

Those early ones I went to, the meetings with all the feminist presses, were just really a blast to be able to attend. Some of the women who started those presses in the ’70s, you know: Firebrand Books, and the Naiad Press women and Aunt Lute Press, and Seal Press, and all the others… So it was really fun to be able to sit around and listen—at that point, listen—to all of them and hear what everybody’s doing. There was just a lot of energy around feminist publishing and publishing in general. And it was fun; it was quite fun, and energizing [laughs]. (Reaman)

While CALYX joined in a larger collective of feminist publishers during the heyday of feminist publishing, much of this network has since been lost. CALYX’s own collective editorial process and organizational structure contributed significantly to CALYX’s publishing accomplishments and to the ways CALYX achieved its feminist mission, in spite of an increasing struggle with a harsh economic and political climate for feminist publishers.
Struggling against the Odds: A Feminist Publisher Survives

While the CALYX editors worked collectively to produce noteworthy publications, problems and struggles arose. Personal conflicts, while unavoidable in any organization, often reflected the particularly stressful nature of working in an under-funded nonprofit organization. Financial difficulties and resource shortages have been an ongoing challenge to CALYX’s operation. However, the most significant threats to CALYX’s survival came not from within the organization but from massive changes in the publishing industry and from the loss of the feminist network that had provided vital connections between feminist publishers and booksellers. Cheryl voiced her opinion, echoed by many other editors, that “CALYX continues to exist today because of Margarita and her tenacity in the face of incredible odds” (McLean). This section offers a detailed look into these incredible odds that CALYX faced and surmounted.

Interpersonal Conflict and Human Resource Shortages

Just as in any organization, interpersonal conflicts and disagreements have arisen at CALYX. While most of these disagreements have been minor, some interpersonal conflicts were significant enough to change the course of CALYX’s history. Communication difficulties, power struggles, disagreements over how CALYX should operate, and differences in feminist values all had an impact on CALYX, especially in the early, formative years. My intent here is not to raise old controversies or expose old grudges in order to place blame. The controversies and conflicts are an important part of CALYX’s story and are also a revealing aspect of CALYX’s commitment to feminist ideals. In this first section, I attempt to characterize certain interpersonal conflicts
without revealing who was involved or who said what. My sources include conversations with the six CALYX editors who participated in this project as well as conversations with others who have been involved with CALYX and some written materials. A complete understanding of these conflicts is not possible without the inclusion of several key perspectives that are missing here.

In the first five years, struggles for power and control occurred among the editors, resulting in a lack of communication about some elements of CALYX’s operation. One editor felt that she had been shut out of the decision-making process and was not aware of what was going on in the organization. One result of this lack of communication was a controversy over negotiations with a group that was interested in taking over CALYX. The group thought that an offer had been made, but not all the CALYX editors were aware of this offer or supportive of the idea. The deal was called off and apparently grudges have been held ever since over this misunderstanding.

The collective editorial process also sometimes broke down because of interpersonal problems. In one instance, a poetry submission by a lesbian author was rejected by a single editor before the other editors had a chance to see it. This author, who became a prominent poet, never submitted anything to CALYX again. The editors disagreed over how much lesbian-oriented work should be included in CALYX, with some apparently fearing that CALYX would be labeled as a lesbian publication early on and would be damaged by the stigma that accompanied that label. Others felt that homophobia was influencing some of the editorial decisions and argued for a more inclusive, diverse publication. The editorial collective erupted into conflict over the cover art featured on one early issue (2:2). The cover image was an abstract
representation of a woman’s labia and clitoris. One editor remembers hearing words said regarding the image that deeply upset and offended her. She noted that differences in the editors’ understandings of feminism were part of the source of the interpersonal struggles at CALYX. At the end of the first year, the word “feminist” was taken out of the journal title, though at least one editor wanted to keep it in.

At this same time, conflicts were raging between radical lesbian feminist groups and liberal feminists (mostly white, middle-class, and heterosexual) over appropriate methods and concerns for the feminist movement. Various groups differed widely in their feminist agendas, priorities, and tactics. Liberal feminist groups were criticized, appropriately, for centering their agendas on white, middle-class, heterosexual women and excluding women of other races, classes, and sexualities from the movement. However, various feminist groups often spent more time and energy attacking and criticizing each other than they did working for positive change.

In 1980 the CALYX collective broke down in conflict and the editors had to plan a future for CALYX. One point of disagreement was over whether CALYX should pay a salary to any of the editors or whether the editorial and management work should remain on a volunteer basis. There was also a struggle over leadership and management roles. The year ended with Barbara resigning and Marni moving to Seattle. Margarita took over the leadership of CALYX, which was unstable for a few years after these dramatic changes. One editor described the establishment of the governing board as a way of making sure that the organization was “intact” and that there would be a form of accountability for the staff. She saw the board as bringing a security and stability to
CALYX that was needed in the wake of these power struggles and personal disagreements.

Today, CALYX still can suffer from personality conflicts and personal difficulties such as stress or lack of communication. The organization has held to a feminist collective ideal in its operations, but working conditions are not always ideal. Editors, volunteers, and interns usually have too much to do in too little time. Cheryl noted, “The work atmosphere can be sometimes just really intense, and as a result maybe sometimes unhealthy.” She added,

There are aspects of the CALYX working structure that are often not very feminist, which is too bad. But I think at its ideal place, which it gets to from time to time, it is a place of nurturing the individual—within the collective—and of, ideally again, respect for everyone’s contribution. That is where it should be.

And it’s not always there. And I think part of the reason it’s not always there, I mean aside from just individual personality stuff, is just the stress involved in trying to cope with too much to do and not enough time and not enough resources—and that’s pretty stressful. (McLean)

Micki noticed the same degree of stress and the danger of burning out, and suggested that this work problem is common among arts nonprofits:

It’s not just about literary publishing, but in general working for a small nonprofit arts organization in this country, I think the danger of becoming really burned out is very high. And the danger of not having a balanced relationship to work is really high. I think it’s just a common work habit in the mentality of arts nonprofits. (Reaman)

The small size of the staff places a significant limit on the work that CALYX is able to do now. Micki said that CALYX could do more, but needs more human power to achieve it:

When I left, the book part of the organization was really suffering from lack of resources. It was just impossible to keep up on that, with everything else—there just wasn’t enough staffing to really do it, and, you know, try to have volunteers do as much as possible but you still have to have enough staff support… I have pretty strong feelings about the resource issues [laughs]. (Reaman)
Micki mentioned that while she was on the CALYX staff, the editors had conversations about diversifying the publications and about attempting to reach a wider audience of younger women to sustain CALYX into the future. Again, the lack of resources was a main reason she believed that some of the goals were not achieved:

We did talk about having more regular themed issues [of the journal], but my memory is it kind of got derailed or stalled because of the amount of planning it would take to make that happen, for the calls and the amount of extra work that would be involved. And how would we manage it, with the staffing that we had. It’s still a valid idea, in terms of being able to have more to work with—to market a particular journal issue—but it’s a resource problem. It would take a lot more energy and time and work, and administrative work to do it. (Reaman)

In her opinion, getting younger women involved in CALYX and interested in *CALX Journal* is an important goal that CALYX needs to work toward:

It’s great that there are younger women involved in the collective now. When I left I probably was pretty unconvinced that we made changes of the type that would sustain any long term change, in terms of involving younger women, or broadening the [audience]… I mean I hope that we did, but I just didn’t know if there was enough of a change to make it last. (Reaman)

Personality conflicts emerge in any workplace, but the stress and strain felt by the editors at CALYX is related to the press’s ongoing resource shortages and financial uncertainty.

*Challenges in Financial Resource Management*

Financial struggles have remained CALYX’s biggest ongoing challenge. Linda said, “What bothers me is the continual financial challenge, and I worry about that a lot” (Smith). CALYX editors, board members, and volunteers have resorted to creative means to try to solve CALYX’s money shortages. Cheryl described one creative solution the editors used:
I think probably the hardest part over the years has just been the constant struggle with financial support. I mean, Margarita and I took out loans on our cars to get the journal published at one point because there was no credit coming for CALYX anywhere. We both had clunker cars [laughs], but we could at least get loans on them! [Laughs]

I don’t think they’ve had to do that kind of thing for a long time, but everybody’s been on half pay for a really long time. I don’t know if they’ll ever get back up to full salaries again and that’s disheartening after a while. I’m amazed that Margarita keeps going. (McLean)

Beverly felt that the financial situation and the resulting reduced staff size in recent years are the biggest problems now. One strategy CALYX adopted was to solicit advice about possible new sources of funding:

A couple of years ago when we started having really serious money problems, we sent out a plea for suggestions, and somebody wrote back and said, “Why don’t we try to get affiliated with OSU?” We couldn’t without totally losing the mission. We just couldn’t. (McFarland, personal interview)

The price of independence for a nonprofit publisher is having to face rejection of grant applications by foundations or institutions that do not agree with the stated mission or values. CALYX has indeed struggled with this problem, as its mission can be seen as exclusionary by non-feminist institutions.

Organizational difficulties added to the financial burden. As the press grew in the late 1980s, the editors struggled to keep up with the ambitious journal and book production schedules. Under the NEA Advancement Program from 1989 to 1991, CALYX planned to stabilize the publishing goals and set an achievable schedule. The plan also restructured CALYX’s Board of Directors to function more as a business and financial board rather than an artistic board, which it had been. From the beginning of CALYX’s operation, the artistic considerations had been placed higher than the business concerns:
CALYX’s concentration on maintaining the high quality of its artistic product has consistently taken precedence over the business aspects of operating a small press. Historically, CALYX has been, in essence, an artist-run organization. (CALYX Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 5)

A growing business was outrunning the administrative abilities of the staff:

As the organization has expanded, the financial record has not kept pace with the growth. The staff and the managing editor have strong artistic abilities but lack experience in financial administration. (CALYX Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 10)

Other financial problems arose due to the nature of the publishing industry and the long period of time it could take a book to become profitable. As explained in the Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994,

Publishers must pay printers up-front on production, yet income from book sales takes up to 18 months to be received and up to three years to show a profit. Income from Journal sales takes up to one year to be received and very rarely shows a profit. (CALYX, Inc. 10)

As part of the NEA Advancement Program, “CALYX identified as priorities the need to improve the business and financial management of the organization” (CALYX Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 5). Margarita related the kinds of problems that became apparent when they started examining CALYX’s operational structure:

Until the ’90s, we were not a very business oriented operation… It wasn’t until we got this big grant from the NEA that was called the Advancement Program (we actually got it twice) and that really made the difference. They came in and evaluated how we were operating and our debt levels and everything, and right away saw that we weren’t operating like a nonprofit business should. They analyzed things and they worked with the staff and the board, and they insisted on us developing a more business board, separate from the editorial artistic board.

So we weren’t running the business side very well, even though we were making money and getting grants. We had decent financial statements but they weren’t as good as they should have been. And we were robbing Peter to pay Paul to keep going; we’d get grants, and we might not finish all the projects, and then we’d be out of money, and then we’d still have to do the projects… (Donnelly, personal interviews)
She described the chaos and over-commitment that came with CALYX’s growth:

We hadn’t come out with three journals a year in years by then, by the late ’80s. We were coming out always late, always with apology letters. I remember one issue that, actually, we never did—Volume 6 Number 3 does not exist. Instead of making the next issue Volume 6 Number 3, we left this gap, so all these libraries [laughs] are always looking for Volume 6 Number 3.

There were just all these stupid things we had done, and we had to learn to be different. We had to develop this huge plan, which I had to write—with the help of some of our board members—for how we would stabilize and how we would get out of debt. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The plan included an outline of goals and strategies for publishing, finance, fundraising, human resources, promotion and marketing, and facilities and equipment. For Margarita, one of the most significant changes that occurred as a result of this restructuring was in her role with CALYX:

One of the things that happened during all of that is that the consultants that worked with us confronted me—I either had to be a business manager or an editor; I could not be both. Somebody had to run the finances at CALYX and keep it on an even level, and that might mean that I would have to give up something as far as editorial went.

The day that they told me that I had to decide who the business manager was and who was going to run all that commercial stuff and give up editorial, I cried. I had never—I don’t cry easily—but it was so hard to realize that I would have to become the money crunker—that person in charge of the organization, because there was nobody else who wanted to do it. I wouldn’t be able to do the journal anymore like I used to. It was really shocking that I cried, and then what was interesting was that I discovered over the years that it’s not so bad. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Although this change was hard for her, having been an editor from the beginning, Margarita also noted positive changes that emerged from her move away from the editorial side of CALYX:

I think it may have been very good. It certainly was good for me, to stop reading all those manuscripts, because I had been reading them for close to twenty years
by then. I could concentrate on book manuscripts… and the business of the organization. It’s been intriguing—I had to learn a lot of new stuff. I learned to balance budgets, and I had to learn to do cash flows, and I had to learn to do all the accounting-type stuff, and write this incredible plan, a long-range plan for the organization, and we did it all.

Beverly got more in charge, and Micki—they got in charge of the journal and I didn’t have to do anything but the art and the reviews. That was a real shift for me personally. It was a shift for the organization because it meant that we started operating quite differently, and relying less on anybody who had continuity like I had had. Probably it was good for the journal, because I had a lot of power and a lot of sway on the editorial collective, because I had been there from the beginning. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The next few years were a time of growth and reorganization for CALYX. Plans included adding staff positions and increasing paid hours, maintaining a stable publishing schedule, and even moving into a new office space. The Long-Range Plan: 1991-1994 described problems with CALYX’s offices:

CALYX has operated with inadequate equipment in crowded space for a large part of its life… Currently, to stabilize the budget, we are subletting one of our office spaces.

Our office spaces are on a second-story level in a building with no elevator. It is not accessible to disabled volunteers. It is difficult to carry book boxes up the stairs. (CALYX, Inc. 31)

This moment in CALYX’s history was optimistic enough to include plans to move in 1993 from the overcrowded and difficult to access office space into an office better suited to the publisher’s needs. I was astounded to find a description of the ideal office space that CALYX wanted to move into:

Ground level, accessible to disabled, large enough space to warehouse books in same location, loading dock facilities for unloading truckloads of books, comfortable offices, efficient use of space, a large room for editorial and Board meetings, a shipping room, a computer room, a production room, archiving and library space, a kitchen area with hot and cold running water, a child care area. (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan 1991-1994 32)
Sadly, the move never happened. Shortly after the CALYX restructuring and long-term planning was put in place, changes in the larger publishing industry decimated the feminist publishing network and brought new meaning to the words “financial challenges” for CALYX.

Rise of the Superstores and Threats to Independents

Amidst all of CALYX’s optimism and growth and reorganization in the early 1990s, sinister events were happening in the publishing world as superstores and conglomerates took over and put independents out of business. Margarita put CALYX’s optimistic plans for the future in context of these new developments in the U.S. publishing industry:

Now all of that happened just four years before the industry changed. From ’96 on, the industry really, really changed.

Well, the industry began to change in the late ’80s—in the early ’90s the superstores began, but they didn’t have a true impact until about ’95 or ’96. What happened in the meantime between ’90 and ’95 was the impact it was having was on distributors. Distributors were going bankrupt; I think there were five distributor bankruptcies in a five-year period.

In each of the bankruptcies we all lose money; we don’t get paid for the inventory—we lose the inventory they have and we don’t get paid for what they sold and owed us. All of us—all the publishers were affected by that. The other side of it that happened in terms of journal distribution is that almost all of the independent distributors of journals went bankrupt.

Oh god, it’s just a huge list of distributors that went under, and every one of them took thousands of dollars from each press with them when they went. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Small presses like CALYX rarely have a cash reserve to cushion them from such losses. Distributor bankruptcies were enough of a blow to put many small feminist publishers
out of business. Those that survived the destruction in the distribution business had to face the same problem with bookstores:

What we were left with—the biggest distributors were Ingram Periodicals, which is a chain store, and their return rate is godawful—it’s like 50 percent sometimes. So the return rate within the industry changed too, because the superstores [bookstores] took control of the industry and more and more independents started dying. By now we’ve lost 75 percent of the independent bookstores, and they were who sold our books.

Our overall sales fell after that. By ’96, the whole industry had changed. The return rates were terrible with journals—and return rates with journals, with the big distributors, are not returns, they’re destruction. You don’t get them back; they just get shredded or something. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

In a market where 50 percent of a publisher’s sales come back as returns (or do not come back, but the refund is still owed), small publishers cannot stay in business with such an unstable source of income.

At the same time that these changes were happening, Margarita pointed out that CALYX no longer had the NEA Advancement grant support or the Lila Wallace journal promotion grant, which had tripled CALYX Journal’s subscription rate in just a few years using an expensive direct mail campaign. Those grants ended just as “all this other stuff was happening.” CALYX was just barely able to hang on, but they survived with the sale of Into the Forest in 1996 and by reconsidering some of their marketing and promotion strategies.

The Long-Range Plan: 1999 included a note acknowledging these changes in the industry and their impact on CALYX:

Since 1996 when the publishing world began to change as a result of the inroads of superstores, the loss of independent booksellers, and the bankruptcies of some critical small press distributors… CALYX has had to revise its long range planning. We can no longer expect sales to increase in bookstores as it did prior to 1995, or to expect an increase in textbook sales and backlist book sales as in the
past. The selling and distribution for journals and books has changed drastically over a short period of time (between 1994 and 1999). (CALYX, Inc. 5)

Loss of national arts grant funding at this same time was also devastating, with a 40 percent cut in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. A new strategy was needed to survive these changes:

We have increased our outreach to private foundations for grant support, increased our fundraising appeals to individual donors, and researched new venues for increasing revenue. (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1999 5)

The plan included a list of new or revised strategies that CALYX proposed to adopt in the face of a changing industry. Some of these new goals were: developing the CALYX website and increasing direct sales to individual customers, selling novels to larger publishers as well as selling foreign rights of the books, developing new items for sale, and conducting direct mail campaigns (CALYX, Inc., Long-Range Plan: 1999 5).

Many of these new goals were successfully achieved. Still, CALYX is a shadow of its former self in terms of the levels of the staff and the book production. Margarita described this decline:

From then on out, for the last ten years now, it’s been a slow chug down and down and down. Now we’re only doing one book a year, our press runs on the journal are half of what they used to be, and our subscriptions are one third of what they were at their peak. We’ve never had the money, since.

Despite the fact that I’ve gotten us a lot of grants, we’ve never had enough money. It’s just been fighting to maintain. So as we lost people, as people quit jobs, we didn’t replace them. We had the equivalent of a 4 point FTE [full time equivalent] ten years ago. Now we’re down to 1.2 FTE running the whole organization, which is why we’re can only do one book a year, plus the journal. Beverly is obviously putting in more than her FTE; I try not to, but I do.

It’s just been this long slog, and we cannot sell through like we used to. Our returns on the books are running 40 percent, and they used to run 5 percent, less than 5. There’s no money that you can make off of that. (Donnelly, personal interviews)
According to Margarita’s descriptions, it seems that the biggest threats that CALYX has faced have come from outside rather than from internal problems or failures. CALYX’s work has been highly successful and acclaimed; it has been the wider publishing industry and arts funding climate that have presented the greatest difficulties.

In the current publishing industry that favors large commercial publishers and big box bookstores, small presses of all types can hardly compete on the same level as the huge mainstream presses. In the glory days of feminist publishing, independent distributors and feminist bookstores ensured that small feminist presses had a venue in which to sell their publications. Now, no one is looking out for their welfare. Margarita pointed out a reason large publishers have an advantage over small presses—not because they publish better books, but

what a big press has is a cushion with their bestsellers. That’s all. So, the bestsellers make up for what few other books they might do that are risky. A risky book in the big biz is a book that sells 40,000 in a year—that’s a risky book to the big biz. That’s what’s called a mid-line author. And our authors don’t understand why they’re having such trouble getting published, because they don’t get what happened in the industry. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Without feminist publishers to promote women’s voices and voices from the margins, new, radical, and innovative authors—the authors for whom feminist publishers first started publishing—are again silenced. This time, the gatekeepers of the publishing industry are corporate publishers who are interested only in the bottom line. Mainstreaming of radical or counter-cultural voices is done in the name of commercial interests such as mass-market appeal. Margarita felt that the commercialization of publishing threatens free speech in a way that people may not be aware of:
What it means to freedom of speech is really intriguing, because nobody is addressing that. Everybody says we’ve got the web and there you get your freedom of speech—but who finds you on the web? Who finds you on Amazon if you don’t pay for position? On Amazon you pay for position, just like in the chain stores.

You pay for position in Amazon, you pay for position in the superstores, in Borders and Barnes and Noble. The cardboard boxes with the books in them—they pay two to five to ten thousand a week for the position of those books when they have a big bestseller come out. The little guys can’t compete against that—we don’t even have a thousand. Our budgets are so small that we don’t even have a thousand per book to spend on that kind of advertising. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

I had not been aware that this positioning of books was so expensive or so significant to the promotion of books in chain bookstores. Margarita pointed out the irony that even when a small press like CALYX does pay to position books, it may not be an effective or appropriate promotion strategy:

Even little guys like us, if we bother to pay for position, we don’t get anywhere with it. We did it on one book, we did it on Switch, and the return rate when we paid for position in the Borders Discovery Program was 60 percent. They bought a thousand books and they returned 600 of them. Then they’re all damaged when you get them back. That’s the way the industry runs now. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Among all the recent changes in the book industry, the changes in bookselling seem to be the most frustrating and depressing for a small press like CALYX. For a press that puts so much attention, care, and loving effort into each book they produce, for their books to be treated so carelessly by the chain bookstores adds insult to injury.

Another blow to feminist publishers came from changes in review publications. CALYX and other small publishers rely heavily on getting their books reviewed to gain publicity and to sell books. CALYX experienced success with reviews until review
publications started to cut back on the number of reviews they publish, making the
review forum much more competitive and narrow. Margarita told me,

Look at the newspapers—do an analysis of ten years ago versus now and how big
the book review sections were in regional newspapers. The Oregonian—I used to
do reviews for them—they used to have five pages of book reviews every Sunday.
They don’t anymore; they’re lucky if they have one and a half. So all of the
regional newspapers and even many of the big ones have cut back on reviewing.
So the reason we don’t get as many reviews is that it’s much harder to get
reviewed now than it was ten years ago. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

With so many massive changes happening in all corners of the book industry, Margarita
summed up this trend: “So that’s why so many feminist presses have gone under.” The
widespread loss of feminist presses may have less to do with feminism or with the
presses themselves than with a ruthlessly competitive commercial book market that has
recently managed to destroy the last vestiges of the feminist press network and has driven
independent bookselling underground.

With the loss of a substantial majority of the feminist presses by the mid-1990s,
the feminist presses and publications that remained lost the vital support network of other
feminist organizations that had enabled them to stay in operation. Feminist bookstores,
conferences, and book fairs closed down; the word-of-mouth and grassroots campaigns
that sustained the feminist publishing boom vanished. Often, feminist organizations and
publications disappeared without a trace, and their colleagues only found out later.

Margarita said about the loss of other feminist publishers, “They never announced; you’d
find out afterwards. I remember when Belle Lettres went under, it was really—and
Women’s Review of Books. We all got a letter… I don’t hear from some of the other
presses, and I don’t know what’s happened” (Donnelly, personal interviews). Feminist
presses like CALYX realized more than ever how much they relied on this feminist
network to survive. Margarita described the process of losing touch with other feminist presses as the book fairs and conventions became too corporate or too expensive and CALYX stopped going:

The other thing that’s happened, as far as feminist presses go, is we all used to go to the ABA, the American Booksellers Association, and we’d have a meeting there. ABA sold their convention… and because there were no longer as many independent bookstores, it’s very expensive to go to ABA. We always used to go and we always had a booth… I think the last one I went to was ’94 or ’95—and we haven’t had a booth since. We let our distributors display us—but who goes to shows now are the chain buyers, so we have a distributor that handles that for us.

_Feminist Bookstore Newsletter_ went under, that was a really big one—that was what held all the feminist bookstores and the publishers together. We all stopped going to the meetings, to the ABA—we have not had a feminist publishers’ meeting since ’95. That was the last. There was this international feminist book fair every couple of years that rotated throughout the world and we went to a few of them, but not all of them. The last one was Australia in ’95 and then it ended. It was supposed to be in the Philippines and then they cut that one; it was going to be in Brazil and that never happened. There hasn’t been another feminist publishers’ meeting since. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

Margarita offered a very clear sense of the direct connection between the industry and CALYX’s success:

_We made money, we did!_ As long as there were independent booksellers, our books sold! They were there, they were well reviewed, they won prizes, and they sold through. I mean, to have gone as long as we did—I mean, our return rate was minuscule, it was better than those big guys… it was minuscule. It was the loss of the independent booksellers, it really was. (Donnelly, personal interviews)

This was absolutely heartbreaking for me to hear all this. Wanting to retain a small amount of hope for feminist publishing in the future, I asked Margarita about the independent bookstores: “When do we get them back?” Her response: “You can’t. It’s over. I don’t think that’s going to happen again.”
The Internet is always mentioned as the great redeeming venue, the great
democratic forum, the great free-for-all. Margarita had serious concerns about small
presses being able to market effectively on the web. She argued,

They have to know what they’re looking for. That is one of the problems with the
web—it’s not a simple thing to browse. How do you find a book you’ve never
heard of—a book that wasn’t well reviewed, that didn’t get on the Today Show,
that isn’t in the advertising—where do you find those books? And who’s doing
them anymore, outside of a few like us? (Donnelly, personal interviews)

At the same time, Margarita recognized that book distribution has changed, perhaps
irreversibly. The CALYX website is one way that CALYX can sell books directly, but
other new distribution opportunities could also be explored. Margarita noted that direct
sales (online or otherwise) may be preferable to selling in chain bookstores:

I think the idea of distribution is different now. We need to raise enough money to
bring new energy in that can rethink what distribution is in the twenty-first
century for small presses like us. It’s probably direct sales, and not worrying
about distribution with the chains.

I mean, if you don’t pay for location in the chains, who’s going to find you
anyway? How do you find books when there’s four thousand square feet of books
being treated like wallpaper, and where the people who work in the stores don’t
know the books well enough to turn you on to anything that you might not have
heard about? (Donnelly, personal interviews)

The collapse of independent feminist presses and bookstores may seem like a final doom
for feminist publishing, but the CALYX editors hope that feminist publishing will
continue, perhaps in new and unpredictable formats. As long as corporate media keep a
stranglehold on the publishing industry and enforce a mass-market mentality in the
production of mainstream books, feminist and other radical publishers will be necessary
to provide a venue for voices that challenge the dominant system.
A Continuing Need for Feminist Publishing

Although CALYX’s challenges have been many, its accomplishments are all the more meaningful for the adversity it has overcome. Despite anxieties about the future, none of the editors doubted CALYX’s relevance and value in today’s world. Reflecting upon CALYX’s significant achievements can offer hope by reminding us how much positive impact CALYX has already had, despite difficult circumstances. The editors shared with me many ways that they felt CALYX has made valuable and significant contributions to literature, to feminism, and to women’s lives. Hope for the future can also be found in the recognition of the continuing need for a feminist press like CALYX and the important work it produces. In a threatening economic and political climate with an ongoing anti-feminist backlash, feminist publishers like CALYX are all the more necessary to ensure that radical voices and counter-cultural messages can still be heard.

Editors reflected on how their time at CALYX helped them grow personally and as activists. Many editors came to CALYX out of a personal commitment to feminism, but being part of CALYX strengthened many editors’ feminist politics and desire to work for change in women’s lives. CALYX brought feminism directly into their everyday lives, which for some was transformative. Marni described the personal growth she felt CALYX gave to her:

CALYX was a way to put a voice to this independence that I always felt. I never wanted to get married or any of that stuff, even though the family was obviously pushing that—so feminism was really kind of a new hope, if you will, for me. It was a lifeline for me. (Jenkins)

She also described a confidence and belief in herself that she gained through her work with CALYX and with the other CALYX women:
I think that “lefties” are a great place to find a voice and to defend your opinion. It makes a difference when you say it out loud and you’re witnessed. In any arena, I think, it makes a huge difference when you feel like you are in the midst of “truth telling,” like the Native American people say. When you’re truth telling, it becomes a part of your character, it becomes a part of your self. I think that CALYX helped me establish some of that for myself. (Jenkins)

Linda and Cheryl both told me that CALYX helped them grow professionally to find satisfying careers in teaching, writing, editing, and publishing. Linda said, “Because of my work with CALYX, and the exposure to all the literature... it led me to really change fields completely. From—I was an elementary teacher—to just doing my bliss, as Joseph Campbell would say” (Smith). For all the editors, working with CALYX has been a significant part of their lives and is an effort they are proud of. I also feel that being part of CALYX—working in a feminist collective environment and seeing first hand the power of feminist publishing—has strengthened my commitment to feminism and to women’s issues.

Beyond the ways CALYX has benefited them personally, the editors also reflected on CALYX’s contributions to feminism and to society. They said that CALYX has made a difference in the lives of women through consciousness raising and through a positive portrayal of women and feminist issues. Cheryl stressed,

It’s very powerful, it’s very powerful. Raising people’s awareness of issues like gender identity, class struggles, of ethnic and cultural differences—there are just so many ways in which CALYX has had a profound impact on people’s understandings and perceptions. That’s worth all of it, to keep going. (McLean)

Linda said that CALYX has offered new hope to women whose choices and lives have been limited under patriarchy:

CALYX gives women the opportunity to share their experiences. There have been some really hard effects of male dominance in this society—all the rapes and violence and abuse.
I hope it gives courage to the ones who are struggling, and also to see the vast possibilities that are possible in the world. I mean, my heart breaks when I see women who have no choices. I just feel that everyone should have choices, and I think CALYX can show them people who have lived these choices, and what the results were, and also put them in contact with ways of perceiving the world that they may not have considered. (Smith)

For Marni, CALYX has had significant impact on women artists and writers as well as on readers. She stated, “CALYX has contributed in lots of ways. All the book fairs, national and international, all the different ways that women artists have been represented—that’s huge.” Having their work put into print also has had an impact on artists and writers:

“When something’s in print, it’s permanent—and that permanence makes a big difference” (Jenkins). Marni expressed the idea that CALYX’s survival through the years of hardship is a radical statement in itself:

CALYX being sustained by art and artists—it’s been supported and been maintained by that effort for thirty years—is a huge statement. It’s a huge political statement in itself. That’s radical. Survival is radical. (Jenkins)

CALYX’s impact on the feminist movement and on women’s lives is truly immeasurable. The main vehicles for this impact—the literature and art in CALYX Journal—constitute in themselves a kind of feminist activism.

Literature and poetry published in CALYX can “help people see the world differently” (Smith). What is unique about the literature in CALYX is that it represents contemporary women’s voices and perspectives, as Linda said:

What brought me to women’s literature is my innate curiosity about what women’s voices were saying, what women were writing. I was trying to write also and I wanted to know what CURRENT women were writing, what current women were thinking. So that’s what CALYX is so exciting for—is that you can see a wide diversity of what [women are] doing. (Smith)
The significance of literature published by CALYX is shown in detail in the earlier
discussion of CALYX’s publishing accomplishments and the human impact that
CALYX’s books and journals have had. Editorial statements from many of the books
published by CALYX point to the ways their work has had impact on women’s lives. In
Florilegia: A Retrospective, 1976-1986, the editors described the importance of CALYX
literature as being a conversation between women that continues:

The murmurs of women’s histories weave back and forth, women nurturing each
other’s work—ideas intertwine between generations, passing from mother to
daughter, from woman to woman—in “women’s domain”—an open space that
remains mysteriously invisible to men who never dally long enough to hear or see
the world in which women live. (CALYX Editors, “Introduction,” Florilegia 7)

The editors also pointed to a feminist consciousness that can arise from this conversation:

[CALYX] offers the creative thinking of a female consciousness that in its critical
reflection may present an impetus for action, a spark in the darkness lighting a
new path… The intricacies and drudgery of daily life form the background from
which we delineate the importance of “our” domain, a domain in which “the
personal is political.” (CALYX Editors, “Introduction,” Florilegia 7)

Literature may be a spark to ignite feminist change in women’s lives. Consciousness of
choices we do not realize we have, or of the political implications of our private lives, can
sometimes be enough to inspire radical action.

In Present Tense: Writing and Art by Young Women, the editors described
CALYX’s radical potential in a collective foreword. Mira Chieko Shimabukuro noted
the strength and courage to survive that anthologies like Present Tense can give to
women:

They save our lives, saying what some part of us has needed to hear aloud for a
long time… they remind us we’re not alone, encourage our strength, challenge us
to survive. (Reaman et al. 9)

On the feminist power of the work included in the anthology, Megan Smith commented,
These are women who demand not to be invisible. They demand to be heard and say that what they create is valuable. These women shape for themselves what it means to be a woman, and in doing so they provide a strong model for future female generations to do the same. (Reaman et al. 11)

CALYX literature and art can thus provide a model for women to use to examine their lives. Feminist literature offers models of womanhood that are more positive and affirming of diverse groups of women than those that appear in most mainstream media, which have been documented as having devastating effects on women’s self-esteem.

*CALYX Journal* and other feminist publications are integral to keeping an alternative vision of womanhood alive and accessible. Many editors expressed fear for a new generation of women facing an anti-feminist culture. Marni said, “Now I feel sorry for younger women in ways having to fight even more conservative messages from our culture” (Jenkins). Linda pointed out that many “young women are so, ‘Oh, don’t call *me* a feminist!’ but they want everything that the feminists have worked so hard to get” (Smith). She emphasized that it is “extremely important” to reach the younger generation with feminist literature, and she worried that *CALYX Journal* may be “so expensive that many can’t afford to buy it” (Smith). Also, as Linda noted, CALYX’s influence is largely limited to an audience that is interested in literature and poetry:

The women that we attract are going to be the more literary. How do you reach the ones who need support that’s not there? So there’s *more* to do. CALYX can’t do everything… I think there’s a lot more that needs to be done, but we’ve done our best. (Smith)

CALYX can never reach *all* women, but it provides a venue for women’s self-representation that can be affirming and healing for women around the world (as indeed *CALYX*’s subscribers are).
The growth of the Internet raises many questions about the future of CALYX, not only for distribution of the journal and books, but also for the presentation of the work itself. Publishing CALYX online is a possibility that the editors considered, but they remained unconvinced that online publishing is the “answer” to the challenges CALYX faces. Micki observed that online publishing remains a question among many that CALYX must address, to which there are no clear answers:

It’s really interesting to think about what all the possibilities are and how to make decisions about what to do—how much technology to go toward, the whole idea of having an online journal versus a print journal; the whole fundraising piece and how consistently you can expect to have money; and how you can… get the books out there and sell them… It will be a big challenge. (Reaman)

Marni insisted that even if CALYX were to publish some of the work online, the physical printed journal is an important part of the experience of reading CALYX. She said, “I could read an article online… but to have real pleasure I would read a book. I think people still need something physically to hold in their hand” (Jenkins). Marni speculated about how CALYX could evolve in the digital age:

Maybe it will be online with special broadsides upon request, or something like that. But it could be different than it currently sits—it could be different than a journal, a quarterly or a semi-annual, that kind of thing. I don’t know if people relate to the journalistic format… I think it might be interesting to try something online and then something in a broadside style that people could have as a takeaway. That would be lovely, like a featured poet or a featured artist… on nice paper—limited editions or something. (Jenkins)

CALYX Journal does not necessarily have to remain the way it is now, published twice a year in a consistent print format, but there is something satisfying about the continuity of keeping the format the same over the years. In my opinion, the physical elegance of CALYX and its consistent format create a sense of long-term value.
With a proliferation of online literary journals in recent years, it would be interesting to examine connections between print and online journals and explore the possibilities of selling artistic content in an online format. CALYX currently offers some excerpts from a few books and journals on its website as promotion material. However, currently there is no plan to convert *CALYX Journal* into an online format. I, for one, am glad that CALYX continues to publish its beautiful, elegant, high quality journals in print. I can admire their beautiful covers in a stack on my coffee table, take them with me outside or to bed, open them to my favorite poems over and over again, and lend them to my friends. If *CALYX Journal* existed only online, I freely admit that I would never read it. Although many people extol the Internet for being universally accessible (a questionable assumption), I worry that poetry and literature online are only accessed by a certain group of people who are committed enough to their Internet connection to pursue recreational literary reading online. I am not one of those people, so I cannot speak to the reasons someone would have for seeking out an online literary journal to read regularly. Perhaps *CALYX Journal* will someday appear both in print and online, thereby reaching out to a wider reading audience.

Online publishing is not the only question that CALYX faces for the future. Editors expressed concern about the current climate in the publishing industry and in the nonprofit world. Micki observed that “it’s just very challenging to keep a nonprofit strong in this economic climate right now” (Reaman). Several editors expressed hope that new grassroots publishing efforts could spring up in the future. However, they also acknowledged that it might be much harder today to start a nonprofit organization than it was in the past. As Micki related,
There are just so many more rules now and so many more precedents, and it actually costs money to start an organization... And when you think about it, those early presses really were all about idealism and people were doing things without being paid. I mean for years and years and years nobody got paid. I think people are still doing things like that, out of their own passion; but to actually start a nonprofit organization is much [harder now]. (Reaman)

In a 1993 interview with Jerome Gold, Margarita worried that there were not enough collective presses and multicultural presses to do the kind of work that needed to be done. She also admitted that what she and the other founders accomplished in 1976 might not be possible anymore:

It’s really interesting that there are very few collectivized presses, you know, with multicultural boards making the decisions about what gets published. And the fact that there’re so few presses available by people of color, and I’m very concerned about that. And I think it’s much harder in the ’90s to do what we did in the ’70s, to start from scratch with no money. (Donnelly, Interview 322)

The editors agreed that presses like CALYX must have volunteer labor to stay in business, as Margarita stressed:

You have to have free labor. There’s no other way. How could any of this have been done? Any of these small presses, they started off that way. It was free labor for years and years and years and it still is. I mean those of us who aren’t paid something as an income—it isn’t a real income—we’re subsidizing the organization. ’Cause we do so much for free. (Donnelly, Interview 323)

As a young woman moving from graduate school into the workforce with heavy debts, I can attest to the near impossibility for many young women of volunteering time to a nonprofit organization, despite the sincere interest they may have in the cause.

Marni insisted that multiple feminist publications are vitally important to keep a range of voices and perspectives in print:

I think we need the feminist press messages and ideas to stimulate future audiences, as much or more—so that there’s a whole variety pack out there, besides Bitch magazine or Ms. There’s CALYX and there’s the Poetry Review and all kinds of things. (Jenkins)
Mainstream presses threaten to completely overtake alternative voices in publishing. The effects are obviously devastating for writers and artists. Cheryl, who runs her own small press, spoke about the publishing industry as someone who has committed much of her life to small press publishing:

I’m concerned about the publishing industry in general. It has changed so much—even just in the last decade but especially in the last two decades. It’s very, very hard for young writers to get published. It is very hard. If it were not for places like CALYX, you know, they’d stop writing. They would get too discouraged; they would stop writing. I’m sure it happens to a lot of people already. It’s just really, really hard. And for book-length pieces—just count the number of places that publish unsolicited manuscripts, period. Big publishers aren’t willing to take risks on unknown quantities. (McLean)

Publishing work by new authors is something that fewer and fewer presses are doing, as Cheryl noted. She pointed out that Barbara Scot, the author of The Violet Shyness of Their Eyes, had been “rejected everywhere” before CALYX published her first book; it was the same for Jean Hegland, author of Into the Forest. Cheryl added,

But once we published these books—once somebody else publishes something by you—then you’re somebody who’s been published. But how do you get that first one out there if there isn’t something like CALYX? I’m sure there are others, but there aren’t that many. There are fewer and fewer all the time. (McLean)

Not only for the continuance of a vibrant feminist movement but also for the inclusion of radical or marginal perspectives in published literature, feminist publishers like CALYX are still very much needed. With these editors, I maintain hope that CALYX may continue and keep publishing beautiful, vibrant, exciting work by women who can offer us visions of better lives and a better world. As Margarita declared, “Here’s to the conversation, to thirty more years, and to the many voices out there waiting for discovery” (CALYX Editors, “A Flowering” 7).
CONCLUSIONS

Feminist publishing is defined at its most basic level as a political endeavor, engaging the political power of the written word to further feminist goals. In their idealism, organization and daily operations, relationships with authors and contributors, publishing decisions, and business practices, feminist publishers like CALYX exemplify the political and cultural power of the publishing enterprise. Listening to the stories told by those who were involved in this enterprise teaches us more about this little-studied aspect of publishing and encourages us to value the achievements of activist publishers. Hearing their voices also leads us to value the exceptional efforts and contributions these individuals made to feminist publishing. The political is also personal. We can learn much from their successes and from the hardships that they faced.

This project presents a narrative account of the emergence and development of CALYX, a nonprofit feminist literary publisher, based on interviews with CALYX editors. The analysis focuses on these editors’ perceptions of CALYX’s feminist goals and achievements and places CALYX in the context of the feminist press movement. Including many of the editors’ stories of their experiences in their own words highlights the unique voices and perspectives of women who contributed so much to CALYX’s feminist publishing vision.

CALYX shares many similar goals, accomplishments, and struggles with other feminist presses that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s. I have provided background research on the feminist press movement to detail the many ways that feminist presses responded to and challenged a prevailing environment of sexism and discrimination in
publishing and literature. Although a common feminist political commitment links them together, a fantastic diversity of approaches and priorities is observable among feminist publishers of that era. Feminist publishers were a vital link in the chain of feminist organizations that formed a vast feminist support network for women writers, artists, and activists across the U.S. In the past ten years we have seen this chain broken and the network unraveled; we must understand more about the feminist publishing endeavor if we seek to forge it again.

Feminist publishing history offers a rich site for investigation into feminist discursive politics and the politics of literary production. A wide recognition of the contributions feminist publishers have made to feminism and literature is now lacking in the disciplines of women’s studies and literary studies. Additionally, feminist publishing history’s potential as an experience-based source of feminist or literary theory has been largely untapped. Scholars in these fields cannot in good conscience continue to ignore the political and ideological nature of publishing and their own reliance on feminist publishers for new and innovative material to study. Multidisciplinary approaches to research and a broad application of the ethics of feminist research methodologies offer incredible potential to enhance our knowledge of feminism, literature, and social change.

This paper is an argument not only for the importance of studying feminist publishing but also for the value of feminist publishing itself. If we desire an ongoing and vital feminist movement, feminist publishers are important allies. As publishers with ideological and political missions, feminist presses ensure that radical and marginal voices have an opportunity to be heard when mainstream corporate publishers look only for ways to make a profit. For our own part, we cannot let our allies down. Part of our
own feminist activism can include buying books from feminist presses, submitting writing to feminist publications, sending donations, volunteering, supporting feminist bookstores, and telling our friends about feminist publishers we love.

I also offer this project as a model for the kind of research that can be done to better understand the feminist publishing legacy that the next generation of feminist editors is about to inherit. I hope that feminist editors of the second-wave movement will be inspired to write or tell their own stories in memoirs, interviews, or collective anthologies. Feminist scholars can do valuable research by soliciting stories from experienced feminist editors or by tracing the vast and mostly unexplored web of primary materials on feminist publishing that sit waiting to be found in libraries, archives, bookstores, and personal collections. Perhaps feminists will be inspired to start a new activist project—or even found a new feminist press. In presenting these stories, I hope to demonstrate that feminist activism can be as simple as showing up and asking, “How can I help?” Women of all backgrounds, talents, and skills have participated in a feminist movement that has enacted massive change—yet so much more needs to be done.

In doing this project, I have been amazed and excited to learn about the complexity and variety of feminist publishing. My hope that feminist publishing will continue is strengthened by evidence of the diversity and adaptability of feminist presses that have accomplished so much radical work in the past thirty-five years. Feminist presses have thrived on adversity since the early years of the second-wave feminist movement. I hope feminist presses will continue to provide the voice of dissent in a publishing industry that is increasingly commercial and centralized.
In conducting this project, I have become further committed to feminist publishing as an activist endeavor. I have also become more aware of the publishing process and its importance in the study of literature, society, and culture. While conducting the background research for this thesis, I was fascinated by the incredible variety and richness of the resources that I found. I encourage anyone wanting to know more about feminist publishing to seek out primary sources, sources in unusual places, and sources from a variety of perspectives, including non-academic approaches. My interest in interview research and feminist research methodologies has also grown. I believe strongly in the ethics of feminist research—including participants as co-researchers and being reflexive about my own role in shaping a project while seeking to conduct research that will benefit the participants. As a subjective human endeavor, all research is ideologically and culturally situated and has social implications. The more conscious and conscientious we are about the ways we conduct research, the more we can assure our research will have a positive impact on society, on the participants, and on ourselves as researchers.

There is much more research and writing that could be done on feminist publishing, past and present. Interviews, memoirs, and biographies are needed to document the personal histories of feminist publishing activists. Guides to feminist publishing need to be rewritten and updated. Archives need to be indexed and annotated bibliographies need to be created. Many comparative studies could be undertaken to examine similarities and differences between feminist publishers—women of color presses, lesbian presses, working class presses, Jewish women’s presses, and international women’s publishers. Literary analysis of feminist publications could
contribute to a growing body of feminist literary theory. Research into the variety and impact of online feminist publications could offer better insight into feminist publishing’s current evolution and changing relationship with technology. Feminist publishers like CALYX are themselves sponsoring market research to gauge the impact of their own publications; academic researchers could collaborate with presses’ own research efforts.

I have done this project for the women of CALYX in honor of their dedication to women’s creative visions. I hope that sharing their stories here can inspire increased appreciation and support for CALYX and for feminist publishing. Feminist presses offer hope for the continued availability of women’s creative voices that can inspire feminist consciousness and demand change. If we want a feminist future we must support feminist publishing in its many diverse forms.


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CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES

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MEREDITH ELEANOR JENKINS is a CALYX founding editor. She served as an art editor, editorial collective member, board member, and Contributing Editor for CALYX. Marni grew up in the southwestern desert on a remote ranch on the border of California and Mexico. With a Victorian upbringing, she was ready for feminism! She has been involved in a Women’s Rape Crisis Center, Women’s Building in L.A., women’s film, feminist art projects, Women’s Caucus for the Arts, Women’s Funding Alliance, and Artist Trust. She lives in Seattle and works in health care administration.
BEVERLY MCFARLAND is Senior Editor at CALYX and is on the editorial collective. She has been a CALYX volunteer, board member, and Editorial Coordinator. She has edited three anthologies for CALYX, including *A Line of Cutting Women*. Beverly has an MA in Interdisciplinary Studies in English, Journalism, and Education from Oregon State University and a Bachelor of Journalism and BA in English from the University of Texas at Austin. She has also worked as a secretary and editor for the Oregon State University Extension offices, as a technical editor, and as an English teacher and newspaper advisor. Her awards include the Women of Achievement Award from the University of Oregon Center for the Study of Women. She was born and raised in Texas.

CHERYL MCLEAN does the design and production of *CALYX Journal* and CALYX books. She has served as an editorial collective member (both book and journal collectives), Managing Editor (literature), Contributing Editor, and board member, including Board President. She has an MA in Journalism from the University of Oregon and a BA in English from Oregon State University. Cheryl is also the author or coauthor of five books, founder of Jackson Creek Press, and director of ImPrint Services, a graphic design and editing service. She has worked as an editor and journalist and has taught English and Journalism at Western Oregon State College.

MICKI REAMAN has been a CALYX intern, editorial collective member, journal and book designer, Managing Editor, and volunteer. She edited several CALYX anthologies, including *Present Tense*. She has a BA in Multicultural Literature and Feminist Theory from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. Micki has also worked as a scientific technician, a writing tutor, a library assistant, and a bookseller at
many bookstores, including Grass Roots Books in Corvallis. She now works at ArtCentric in Corvallis.

LINDA VARSELL SMITH has been on the CALYX Journal editorial collective since 1982. She has also been on the book and art collectives, worked in advertising, and volunteered in many capacities at CALYX. She has an MS in Educational Psychology from the University of Arizona (Tucson), a BA in Elementary Education from Central Connecticut State University, and an AA in Printing Technology/Graphic Design and Journalism from Linn-Benton Community College. She also took courses with many well-known poets in the Haystack creative arts program at Portland State University. Linda has served as board member and President of the Oregon State Poetry Association (OSPA), board member of the Willamette Literary Guild, Poetry Superintendent for Benton County Fair (25 years), and is the contact poet for OSPA’s Marys Peak Poets. She is also a member of Pen Women, Poetic License, a poetry performance group, and Children’s Book Writers. As a creative writing instructor at Linn-Benton Community College, Linda published the prize winning The Eloquent Umbrella, a creative arts journal, for ten years. Linda has published twelve young adult novels, four poetry books, and over two hundred poems.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What does feminism mean to you, in your life?
What brought you to CALYX? or to women’s literature, poetry, art?
What brought you to feminism?
Especially memorable or inspiring texts you were reading (feminist or literary)?

Favorite CALYX pieces that stand out for you?
Significant memories, memorable moments at CALYX?
What do you especially value about your work with CALYX?
Challenges, frustrations, difficulties?

How would you describe CALYX’s accomplishments?
Key landmarks for CALYX?
Turning points or changes?
What feminist ideas most influence CALYX? Have those changed?
Other feminist presses or organizations that were inspiring?

In the best possible world, what would you like to see for women? for literature?
Has CALYX’s mission been met?
What are the needs for feminist publishing today?
Can you offer any advice for young women going into publishing today?