

# Attempts to Build Community: How Independent Bookstores Contribute to Culture

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## Abstract

This study focuses on comparing the book culture of Glass Bookshop in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, with Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom. Each independent bookstore has a social narrative, portrayed as a space where communities gather and is important to the local community fabric. Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop have left-leaning, socio-political social narratives. Different aspects of each bookstore's websites, store events, and customer habits were compared and contrasted using qualitative data analysis. It was found that Lighthouse Bookshop appears more established in its book culture and community interactions than Glass Bookshop, which appeared to be more disconnected in its portrayal and interactions. Glass Bookshop closed in February 2024, so the study cannot be replicated.

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## Introduction

### *Research Problem*

When one walks into an independent bookstore, there is usually some sort of, what I like to call, a "vibe" that gets picked up by the potential customer. This vibe occurs from things such as the store's layout, which books the store chooses to display and promote, and how the independent bookstore interacts with its community. It is present in the social narratives the store chooses to present to the public through both the store's physical presence and its social media and web presence. No two independent bookstores share the same vibe, although there can be similarities, and the vibe is unique to that particular store. These vibes can be further extended into the concept of book culture or how books interact with their communities and the cultural fabric, of which independent bookstores can be a vehicle for these interactions. This study compared the book culture of Glass Bookshop in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, with Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom.

## Literature Review

Liddle (2019) discussed how feminist bookstores were created as spaces to foster social change. Shop owners rarely entered the business to turn a profit, instead focusing on creating gathering spaces for community members to learn and grow (Liddle, 2019). Feminist bookstore owners focused on carrying books written by women with feminist and lesbian content (Liddle, 2019). Because feminist bookstores usually have small spaces, staff emphasized the importance of special ordering available books (Liddle, 2019). A welcoming atmosphere and how products were displayed were essential to feminist bookstores (Liddle, 2019). Feminist bookstores were also vital for creating shared symbols and ideas (Liddle, 2019).

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Baidis et al. (2019) was a case study examining how independent bookstores have risen and fallen in popularity in the United States, focusing on 2009 until 2018. The economic recession of 2007 until 2009 impacted bookstores, and the introduction of technology to easily read digital ebooks also affected bookstores' sales (Baidis et al., 2019). Due to the economic recession, some industry experts predicted that independent bookstores would not survive (Baidis et al., 2019). The American Booksellers Association (ABA) recognized this problem and developed tools to help independent bookstore owners learn the skills necessary for financial and business management and competitive strategies (Baidis et al., 2019). Despite thousands of independent bookstores closing every year, the ones that survive have become destination shops that are part of the "fabric of their neighbourhood" (Baidis et al., 2019, p. 677).

Miller (2006) looked at the rise of chain bookstores within the United States and how their development affected the way independent bookstores presented themselves to the average American. Standardization of the chain bookstores into something more appealing affected the rationalization of selling books to the masses (Miller, 2006). Chain bookstores being developed in suburban shopping malls ran contrary to the usual location of independent bookstores in high-traffic, urban areas (Miller, 2006). Chain bookstores had clear signage and standardized looks between stores, leading to accessibility and the minimization of class associations usually found in independent bookstores (Miller, 2006). In turn, independent bookstores learned from the chains and eventually toned down the highbrow associations usually found in independent bookstores (Miller, 2006). However, both chain bookstores and independents learned from chain grocery stores regarding the development of displays.

Displays were a way to develop in-store marketing techniques. For bookstores, the way books are displayed sets the tone for the shop and influences the sale of particular titles (Miller, 2006). The location of the displays, how store displays were laid out and which books were highlighted helped influence which books were considered worthy of purchase (Miller, 2006). These displays also help contribute to the social narrative of an individual store, setting the tone and vibe for the store, particularly if the store is independent (Miller, 2006). Controlling these social narratives through the stressing of local ties and how the store contributed to the common good helped the independent bookstores begin to describe the bookstore as a community center that provides services and diversions outside of selling books (Miller, 2006). This led to attempts to position the independent bookstore as a third space for customers.

The development of the independent bookstore into a space where one could linger, and purchase books created the idea that independent bookstores were important to the local community. Talking points about how independent bookstores contributed to the fabric of the community, versus chain bookstores, which did not have the same connections, established the idea that independent bookstores were committed to a particular locale (Miller, 2006). There was also the idea that independent booksellers supported community life by providing community service and a necessary public space (Miller, 2006). The owners of independent bookstores developed branding where the importance of individual stores to their communities was a necessary part of their marketing to the general public (Miller, 2006). Independent bookstores continue to be a symbol in pushing back against the rise of capitalism in US society and culture.

O'Brien (2017) discussed the struggles that independent bookstores in the UK faced, including the collapse of the Net Book Agreement (NBA), which required books to be sold at a set price. Owners of independent bookstores used multiple revenue streams to try and maximize their profit margins so they could stay afloat (O'Brien, 2017). O'Brien (2017) discussed how independent bookstores connected people with shared values and contributed to cultural activities. O'Brien (2017) also demonstrated how independent bookstores contributed to the needs of the local and broader community. Independent bookstores were strong contributors to the local culture of a place.

Laing (2020) argued that independent bookstores, particularly in rural Scottish locations, must link local communities with events such as book groups or community gatherings, which are events that online shopping cannot provide. Independent bookstore owners recognized that they had a duty to contribute culturally to their communities and drive community activities (Laing, 2020). Independent bookstores helped support the book festivals, author events, and launch events emerging in rural communities (Laing, 2020). Despite being in rural locations, independent bookstores made an effort to become destination stores so that people would want to stay longer in their shops (Laing, 2020).

The points brought forward by the literature review support the questions studied by this research project. The main question I would like to explore is, "How does Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop contribute to their respective community's fabric and book culture?" The more granular questions this research study will examine are: first, "How do customers participate in the community surrounding Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop?" Second, "How does staff contribute to the community surrounding Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop?" And lastly, "How does the independent bookshop contribute to the fabric of its neighbourhood communities?"

## **Methodology**

### *Design*

Glass Bookshop was established in 2018 by Jason Purcell and Matthew Stepanic (Read Alberta, n.d.). The store unexpectedly closed in February 2024 (Drudi, 2024). The bookshop offered books with a socio-political focus, as well as Canadian and BIPOC writers. The store had several locations, with the last iteration of the store on the south side of Edmonton being one large room with two main tables, bookshelves lining the walls, and occasionally a third table pushed up against the wall in front of a mirror. The cash register was near the front of the store.

Lighthouse Bookshop was established in 1994 under the name Word Power (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-b). It is a socio-politically focused bookshop that is queer-owned and women-led (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-b). Lighthouse Bookshop focuses on offering activist, feminist, history, environmentalism, LGBTQ writing, poetry, and translated writing (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-b). Some form of the bookshop has always existed on West Nicholson Street in Edinburgh. The bookshop has four main rooms with bookshelves covering almost every wall and tables in every room.

This study incorporated a qualitative case study to understand the data results. The independent variables were the two independent bookshops, Glass Bookshop in Edmonton, Alberta, and Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, Scotland, compared in various settings. The dependent variables for the study were each store's websites, events, and in-store interactions, as well as the themes found for each observation. Data was collected on seven different data information sheets for this study.

Online website data collection was a one-time occurrence, with data information sheets for the collected information (Tables 1 and 2). Five subpages of each website for Glass Bookshop (n.d.) and Lighthouse Bookshop (n.d.-b) were compared. The Home, Browse, "Contact / FAQ", "Events / Videos", and "Merch / Subs" pages of the Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop websites were used for data collection. Glass Bookshop was more granular in its breakdown of subpages, and notes are provided to state these differences between websites. The tables included observations of the stores' colour schemes, layouts, internal and external links, content, and purchasing options on each of the selected subpages. These subpages showed a snapshot of what was important to each bookshop at that particular moment, and the tables were compared to each other.

Unobtrusive observations at Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop occurred for one hour each for two sequential weeks, giving an idea of how customers interacted with the space. In-store unobtrusive observation at Glass Bookshop was done over a two-week period from March 8, 2023, to March 20, 2023. Observations made during this period included the number of customers, the layouts of the first two tables, the items at the front register, the products displayed in the front window, and the posters on the walls. Observations were put into data information sheets and analyzed (Tables 3 and 4). In-store unobtrusive observations for Lighthouse Bookshop were done over a two-week period from April 17, 2023, to April 28, 2023. Observations for this period followed the guidelines for the Glass Bookshop unobtrusive observation and were put into data information sheets for analysis (Tables 6 and 7). In-store observations for Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop were compared.

Book club and in-store pop-up shop event data were collected using a data information sheet (Table 5). Categories for this data information sheet were the number of attendees, topics discussed, the atmosphere of the event, and the environment of the event. One online book club event for Lighthouse Bookshop was attended in February. Unobtrusive observation of the event lasted for one and a half hours. One in-store pop-up shop event in March was attended for Glass Bookshop. Unobtrusive observation of the event lasted for an hour. Due to privacy and confidentiality concerns, broad themes of conversation were pulled from the events. These qualitative approaches allowed themes to be pulled out, analyzed, and compared.

### *Limitations*

There were limitations to this research. The first limitation was time. This research was conducted over a limited timeframe, so there was not an opportunity to delve deep into Glass Bookshop's and Lighthouse Bookshop's culture. Working at Glass Bookshop for an extended period would have deepened the results, but the hiring and onboarding process made the option prohibitive. A second limitation was that this study focused on two specific independent

bookstores, and the data collected might only apply to some independent bookstores. A third limitation was subjectivity in categorizing themes from the data. Theme categorization was influenced by the researcher's knowledge and biases related to Scottish and Canadian culture, which might be incorrect on a larger scale.

## Results

### Pre-Analysis Charts

Table 1: Results Table for Content Analysis of Website Pages—Glass Bookshop

Name of subpage	Colour scheme?	Layout?	Internal links?	External links?	Content?	Purchase options?
<b>Home</b>	Light colours; mostly white space with colour in the header image and product images	Clean and minimal	Website subpages, product pages	Bookmanager (bookstore management service), Mailchimp (newsletter sign up), Pandemic University, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok	Mostly books for purchase, and links to useful information	No direct purchase options, but can click on book thumbnails to be taken to product's page for purchase
<b>Browse</b>	Light colours; mostly white space with colour in the product images	Clean and minimal	Website subpages, product pages	Bookmanager, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok	All books for purchase	Add to cart buttons under each book
<b>Contact / FAQ *</b>	<b>Contact:</b> darker colours with store hours against a grey background <b>FAQ:</b> light colours; white background with dark text	<b>Contact:</b> clean and minimal <b>FAQ:</b> clean and minimal	<b>Contact:</b> website subpages <b>FAQ:</b> website subpages	<b>Contact:</b> Bookmanager, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok <b>FAQ:</b> Google Maps, Bookmanager, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok	<b>Contact:</b> store hours, address, map showing location, and email address <b>FAQ:</b> answers to frequently asked questions about orders and different email addresses for other inquiries.	<b>Contact:</b> no direct purchase options <b>FAQ:</b> no direct purchase options

<b>Events / Videos **</b>	Light colours; mostly white space with colour in the product images	Clean and minimal	Website subpages, specific event information pages, product pages	Bookmanager, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, share links for Twitter, Facebook, and email	Calendar with dots showing events, event information, featured books	Buy Books links which open a popup window to easily purchase the book
<b>Merch / Subs ***</b>	Light colours; mostly white space with colour in the header image and product images	Clean and minimal	Website subpages, product pages	Bookmanager, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok	Non-book items available for purchase	No direct purchase options, but can click on product thumbnails or size options to be taken to product page for purchase

- \* Glass Bookshop has Contact and FAQ on two separate subpages. Observations for each page are made under that heading
- \*\* There aren't videos attached to the Events subpage for Glass Bookshop.
- \*\*\* Glass Bookshop doesn't offer subscriptions with their merch.

Table 2: Results Table for Content Analysis of Website Pages—Lighthouse Bookshop

Name of subpage	Colour scheme?	Layout?	Internal links?	External links?	Content?	Purchase options?
<b>Home</b>	Bold colours; mainly green, yellow, and light blue	Very busy	Website subpages, event posts, blog posts, product pages, terms and conditions (footer section of website)	Brand designer, software designer, Facebook, Twitter	There are blog thumbnails, event information, and books for purchase	Buttons to add books to basket
<b>Browse</b>	Bold colours; mainly green, white, yellow, and light blue	Very busy	Website subpages, subcategories of books, event posts, blog posts, highlighted books, terms and conditions (footer section of website)	Brand designer, software designer, Facebook, Twitter	There are blog thumbnails, event information, and books for purchase	Buttons to add books to basket

<b>Contact / FAQ</b>	Bold colours, mainly green and white	Simpler than other pages; text heavy	Website subpages, links to the start of individual sections, subscriptions offered, terms and conditions (footer section of website)	Alliance of Radical Booksellers website, Bread and Roses Prize website, brand designer, software designer, Facebook, Twitter	Answers to all of the most frequently asked questions, including orders, books and stock, work, events, accessibility, safe spaces policy, awards, and subscriptions	Links to subscriptions offered
<b>Events / Videos</b>	Bold colours, mainly white and yellow	Simpler layout; very thumbnail-heavy	Website subpages, event posts, link to featured event book, terms and conditions (footer section of website)	Brand designer, software designer, Facebook, Twitter	Event information, book club information, links to upcoming and past events	Button to purchase the highlighted event's book
<b>Merch / Subs</b>	Softer colours, mainly white and light blue	Simpler layout; very thumbnail-heavy	Website subpages, subscription and voucher information, products, terms and conditions (footer section of website)	Brand designer, software designer, Facebook, Twitter	Thumbnails of subscriptions, vouchers, and products for purchase	Buttons to purchase the featured merchandise

Table 3: Results Table for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 1—Glass Bookshop

<b>Observations—Week 1</b>	<b>Wednesday, March 8, 2023</b>	<b>Saturday, March 11, 2023</b>	<b>Monday, March 13, 2023</b>
<b>Number of customers</b>	7	20	4
<b>Layout of front table 1</b>	Short stories, poetry, non-fiction about plants, LGBTQ history, fiction, essays, staff picks	Staff picks, fiction, LGBTQ history, non-fiction, poetry	Staff picks, fiction, memoirs, essays



<b>Layout of front table 2</b>	Zines, poetry, novellas, essays, memoirs, short stories, race theory	Zines, poetry, non-fiction, essays, short stories, memoirs	Poetry, zines, short stories, fiction, essays, memoirs
<b>Books in front window</b>	Coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, one novel, zines, puzzles	Same as last time: coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, one novel, zines, puzzles	Same as last time: coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, one novel, zines, puzzles
<b>Items at register</b>	Zines, stickers, candles	Zines, stickers, candles	Zines, candles, stickers, tea towels, graphic novels
<b>Posters on walls</b>	One for the event on March 8: 2023 CLC Kreisel Lecture with Wayde Compton where Glass was the official bookseller	One promoting Transit Camp 2023 on March 18, 2023, an event about advocating for better city transit	One promoting Transit Camp 2023 on March 18, 2023, an event about advocating for better city transit

Table 4: Results Table for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 2—Glass Bookshop

<b>Observations—Week 2</b>	<b>Wednesday, March 15, 2023</b>	<b>Saturday, March 18, 2023</b>	<b>Monday, March 20, 2023</b>
<b>Number of customers</b>	2	23	0
<b>Layout of front table 1</b>	Staff picks, fiction, non-fiction, essays	Staff picks, fiction, non-fiction, essays	Staff picks, short stories, fiction, non-fiction, essays
<b>Layout of front table 2</b>	Poetry, zines, non-fiction, essays, memoirs	Zines, poetry, essays, non-fiction, memoirs, fiction, short stories	Zines, poetry, non-fiction, short stories, essays
<b>Books in front window</b>	Same as last time: coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, one novel, zines, puzzles	Coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, essays, one picture book, zines, puzzles	Same as last time: coffee-table style books, non-fiction books, essays, one picture book, zines, puzzles
<b>Items at register</b>	Zines, candles, stickers, tea towels, graphic novels	Zines, candles, stickers, tea towels	Zines, candles, stickers, tea towels



<b>Posters on walls</b>	One promoting Transit Camp 2023 on March 18, 2023, an event about advocating for better city transit	One promoting Transit Camp 2023 on March 18, 2023, an event about advocating for better city transit	One promoting Transit Camp 2023 on March 18, 2023, an event about advocating for better city transit. One promoting the Hazeldean Eggcellent Easter Market on April 1, 2023, supporting small businesses.
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Table 5: Results Table for Event Unobtrusive Observation

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Glass Bookshop</b>	<b>Lighthouse Bookshop</b>
<b>Number of people</b>	40–50 people (no one stayed longer than 10–15 minutes)	12 people (everyone stayed until they got kicked off the Zoom call by the host)
<b>Topics discussed</b>	Lots of plant discussions because it was the Little Plant Shop pop-up event. Some people commented about a book they had seen that they wanted to read, but not many.	Favourite children's books. History of Chilean revolution. General confusion about the book. Questions about the nuance of translating. One room setting made it difficult to understand what was happening. Ableist tendencies in the book. Not what a book is "expected" to be. False advertising of what to expect from the book.
<b>Atmosphere of event</b>	Relaxed. Most people seemed to be making a day out of going through the local businesses in Ritchie, but not many people stayed for an extended period. There was a lot of, come in, buy a plant, maybe pick up a book or two, and leave.	Friendly and warm. Clearly most of them know each other.
<b>Environment of event</b>	Physical in-store event. About a 50/50 split of masked and unmasked customers, even though masking in store is encouraged by staff.	Zoom call. Most people with their cameras on were in their living rooms or kitchens.

Table 6: Results Table for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 1—Lighthouse Bookshop

Observations Week 1	Monday, April 17, 2023	Wednesday, April 19, 2023	Friday, April 21, 2023
Number of customers	18	12	14
Layout of front table 1	Staff recommendations, fiction, non-fiction focused on the pandemic	Non-fiction, memoirs	Non-fiction
Layout of front table 2	All fiction	Fiction	Fiction, memoirs
Books in front window	Fiction, non-fiction, event books, tote bags, mugs, zines	Fiction, non-fiction, poster, mugs, zines, tote bags	Fiction, non-fiction, poster, mugs, zines, tote bags
Items at register	Books, pins, stickers, prints	Zines, books, stickers, pins, prints	Books, zines, stickers, pins, prints
Posters on walls	Local events (most past)	Mostly past events	Past events

Table 7: Results Table for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 2—Lighthouse Bookshop

Observations Week 2	Monday, April 24, 2023	Wednesday, April 26, 2023	Friday, April 28, 2023
Number of customers	17	13	24
Layout of front table 1	Non-fiction, memoirs	Non-fiction	Non-fiction
Layout of front table 2	Fiction	Essays, fiction, short stories	Fiction, short stories
Books in front window	Fiction, non-fiction, poster, mugs, zines, tote bags	Fiction, non-fiction, poster, mugs, zines, tote bags	Fiction, non-fiction, poster, mugs, zines, tote bags
Items at register	Books, zines, prints, pins, stickers	Books, zines, stickers, prints, pins	Zines, books, prints, pins, stickers
Posters on walls	Mostly past events, literary awards (Jhalak Prize)	Past events, upcoming events	Upcoming events, past events

## Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations

### *Discussions, Conclusions, and Insights of the Results, Including any Relationships Between Variables*

Based on the collected data in Tables 1 and 2, Glass Bookshop (Table 1) and Lighthouse Bookshop (Table 2) had different ideas of how to effectively market to their customers. Glass Bookshop preferred a light colour palette, minimalist layout, and some direct purchase options for products, depending on where one was on the website. These choices highlight the effects shown by Miller (2006), where chain bookstores promoted clear layouts and signage for specific books, even if it is in an online setting (p. 93). Glass Bookshop's subpages were broken down more granularly than Lighthouse Bookshop's, so some observations included two separate subpages on the website. Glass Bookshop's website matches the in-store aesthetic, which was also light and airy with minimalistic accents.

Lighthouse Bookshop preferred bold colours for its website design, usually using green, yellow, and light blue. Lighthouse Bookshop followed the more traditional highbrow independent bookshop layout strategy (Miller, 2006). As Sayer (2005) cites Bourdieu during an approach to class definitions, the reduction of the visibility of class in British society, along with a lack of class mobility, does not mean that class is disappearing in modern British society (p. 80). The subpages examined were always busy looking, as if Lighthouse Bookshop was trying to cram as much information as possible on each page. Considering that Lighthouse Bookshop did not have a functioning website until March 2020, after the COVID-19 pandemic started, the store may still be trying to refine its website design (Agnew et al., 2020). Purchasing options were available everywhere on Lighthouse Bookshop's website, and it was as if the shop was trying to shout at the viewer to purchase something from them. Lighthouse Bookshop's website also matches the in-store aesthetic, with its packed shelves and information and books covering every available surface.

In-store observations of Glass Bookshop were detailed in Tables 3 and 4. The researcher completed in-store unobtrusive observations for one hour at a time, three times a week, for two weeks. Wednesday and Saturday's unobtrusive observations were completed in the afternoon, and Monday's unobtrusive observations were completed during the last hour to an hour and a half of the store's opening. Saturday afternoons were frequently the busiest time at Glass Bookshop. Monday evenings and Wednesday afternoons varied in how busy they were, but they were generally much less busy than Saturday afternoons. This was a deviation from the usual independent bookstore observations, where socializing is the most intense in the evenings and on weekends (Miller, 2006). General observations of customers' behaviour were that most did not stay in the store for longer than ten to fifteen minutes, which is in direct opposition to the attempts of most independent bookstores to encourage customers to stay awhile (Miller, 2006).

Staff picks, fiction, and some non-fiction books were the broad categories most often seen on the first table. The second table frequently held zines, poetry, and non-fiction books. There appeared to be no focused curation for either table, with each table holding only a few copies of each book. Books featured on the tables were also not usually found on the shelves

lining the store. The front window display of books was frequently the same and seemed to mismatch the interior. Coffee table books were shown in the front window but were not available in the rest of the store, almost as if Glass Bookshop staff wanted to carry the titles but did not have enough clearance height space on the shelves for shelving them because they were oversized. Zines, stickers, and candles were frequently on display at the front counter. Partway through the first week, the researcher noticed the tea towels available for purchase on the side of the counter. However, the tea towels were off to the side and were only noticed if one went between the front window and the other side of the counter. Customers usually did not venture to that side of the counter because there were occasionally boxes on the floor, blocking the way to the tea towels. There was usually only one poster up at a time, and it was taped to the glass beside the door. It featured upcoming events within the community.

In-store observations of Lighthouse Bookshop were detailed in Tables 6 and 7. The researcher completed in-store unobtrusive observations for one hour at a time, three times a week, for two weeks. Unobtrusive observations were completed in the late afternoon or early evening on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and before off-site store events. The store was usually consistently busy, with Monday evenings and the last Friday of April being the busiest times. General observations of customers' behaviour showed that most tended to linger in the store. Conversations between staff and customers occurred frequently, and some customers browsed for forty-five minutes to almost an hour.

The store is divided into four rooms, with one room accessible directly behind the main area with the front door and cash register, and a second door to the left-hand side, leading to the third and fourth rooms of the store. For the purposes of this study, the first table was defined as the table seen as soon as one walked in from the street. The second table is defined as the table in the room directly behind the main front room, as this room would be the most obvious to customers after entry. Additional tables were in the third and fourth rooms but, for the purpose of this study, were not included in the unobtrusive observations.

Staff picks, some fiction, non-fiction books, and books focused on the global and community impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were most frequently found on the first table. These choices reflect the social narrative of the store, and the refusal to brush the impact of the pandemic aside (Miller, 2006). The second table included fiction, memoirs, essays, and short stories. The tables seemed highly curated with the message the store was attempting to convey about its values. New releases, BIPOC authors, translated books, and local authors were frequently found on the second table. The store was packed with books covering every surface, so the researcher was unable to determine whether books on the tables were also found on the shelves. The front window changed frequently, with fiction, non-fiction, books related to upcoming store events, posters, mugs, zines, and tote bags frequently on display. There were no unusually sized books in the front window, as all appeared to be standard British book sizes. Oversized, coffee table-style books were frequently found in the third room, which focused on art culture and critique.

The front counter held books, prints, zines, pins, and stickers. A shelf was set up in front of the counter to contain the books and zines, and the prints were hung on a side pillar. Pins

and stickers were in a tray, and there was a Plexiglass shield between the cashier and the customer, most likely a holdout from previous pandemic safety precautions. One wall had a bulletin board full of Pay It Forward vouchers, where people of low/no income could take a voucher to redeem for a book of their choice (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-c; Agnew et al., 2020). Posters were on every available inch of space not covered by either bulletin boards or bookshelves. Most posters were for previous local events, LGBTQ organizations in Edinburgh, literary events, and upcoming community events. It seemed like the store staff forgot to take down previous event posters and instead continued to add to the posters covering the walls.

Unobtrusive observations for events hosted by Lighthouse Bookshop and Glass Bookshop occurred in February and March 2023. Lighthouse Bookshop's event was an online book club focused on non-English women authors' English-translated books. The chosen book for the month was *Never Did the Fire* by Chilean author Diamela Eltit. Twelve people attended the event, which was held online. Most people attending sat in either their kitchens or living rooms. The atmosphere was friendly and warm, with most people clearly knowing each other already. The event started with introductions and stating your favourite children's book. Broad themes discussed at the event were the history of the Chilean revolution, general confusion about the book and the book blurring the expectations of what a book "should" be like, and questions about the nuances of translation. Everyone stayed on the Zoom call until they were kicked off, which reflects the idea that independent bookstores are meant to be community centers that provide meaningful services and enjoyable diversions (Miller, 2006).

Glass Bookshop held a physical in-store pop-up shop event featuring the Little Plant Shop in March 2023. The researcher attended the event for an hour and saw about 40–50 customers enter the shop during the event. Most customers did not stay longer than ten to fifteen minutes, and most customers came to purchase a plant or a book and left. The event was relaxed, and most discussions were about plants, with the occasional comment of having seen a book before. Customers seemed to be making a day of visiting the local businesses in the neighbourhood.

### *Conclusions*

The first research question, "How do Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop contribute to their respective community's fabric and book culture?" is answered by stating that Lighthouse Bookshop feels more established in its community fabric and book culture than Glass Bookshop. There was almost a transience to Glass Bookshop's establishment within its community's fabric and book culture, which was supported by the bookshop having multiple locations before it ultimately closed in February 2024. Lighthouse Bookshop's social narratives appeared more defined compared with Glass Bookshop's, where the social narratives appeared to be almost fragmented or, at the very least, not followed through. This is partially because Lighthouse Bookshop has been in operation longer than Glass Bookshop, which was only in operation for about five years. These observations are further expanded when examining observations related to the more granular research questions.

Glass Bookshop was somewhat of a peculiarity in the lack of lingering by customers. Multiple bookshop owners discussed the importance of making their stores "destination" or "third

space” stores to encourage customers to stay and purchase from them (Liddle, 2019; O'Brien, 2017; Laing, 2020). However, Glass Bookshop seemed to have a transience to its customer base, with most customers not staying longer than fifteen minutes. The lack of customers lingering may also have been attributed to the Glass Bookshop staff, who would say hi when a customer walked in, but otherwise did not attempt to interact with customers until they went to buy a book at the register. There were a lot of good ideas behind the positioning and promotion of events, such as the Little Plant Shop pop-up shop. However, it could have been better executed with something like a book display about plants accompanying the plants' table. It was unclear whether this hesitancy to linger was an after-effect of the pandemic or descriptive of Glass Bookshop's culture as a whole. Glass Bookshop's contributions to the fabric of its neighbourhood communities also felt undefined. There would be attempts to promote community events on posters near the front door; otherwise, Glass Bookshop felt disconnected from its neighbourhood fabric.

Lighthouse Bookshop seemed to be more of a space where customers would linger, with customers staying longer than fifteen minutes. Lighthouse Bookshop's culture felt more established, possibly because the store has operated longer than Glass Bookshop (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-a). The store as a whole appeared more grounded and did not appear to be as affected by the after-effects of the pandemic. However, the staff made attempts to keep the impact of the pandemic at the forefront of customers' minds with the front table displays. Lighthouse Bookshop also promoted initiatives such as Pay It Forward, where customers posted tokens for specific books and genres that could be redeemed by less fortunate customers (Lighthouse Bookshop, n.d.-c; Agnew et al., 2020). This added to the community aspect of Lighthouse Bookshop, which Glass Bookshop seemed to lack, and, as a result, Lighthouse Bookshop's contributions to the fabric of its neighbourhood communities felt more defined.

This case study comparing Glass Bookshop and Lighthouse Bookshop's book cultures was worthwhile for several reasons. First, there was limited research examining the culture of independent Canadian bookstores to the point of nonexistence. This case study created new information and added new data to the pool of research. Second, examining each store's book culture broadened the knowledge of independent Canadian and Scottish bookstores and gave further insight into how independent bookstores become part of the fabric of their communities. Third, this case study also helped fill gaps in knowledge about the operation of independent bookstores post-pandemic and how stores changed their operations to adapt to new health concerns. Independent bookshop culture continually evolves, and this study examined those practices during a particular snapshot in time.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

There are several recommendations for further research. Even though Glass Bookshop closed in February 2024, a former Glass Bookshop owner and a former Glass Bookshop bookseller opened a new independent bookstore called Magpie Books in Glass Bookshop's previous space (Magpie Books, 2024). Magpie Books is intended to be a community space that uplifts social and political movements and is modeled after a worker's co-operative, with everyone having a

say in decisions affecting the store (Magpie Books, n.d.). Unobtrusive observations could be made in the new store to examine its culture and compare it to Glass Bookshop's culture. There is also the possibility of extending the body of research by choosing another Canadian independent bookshop to study and learn more about their book culture. The More Canada Steering Committee (2020) report references the insight that independent bookshops and libraries influence each other. Libraries are also considered important community centers, and connections between independent bookstores and libraries could be studied.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author thanks Dr. Lucille Mazo for mentorship and supervising the initial independent study in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and the field research in Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom. The author also thanks Dr. Leslie Vermeer for mentorship and guidance. Thanks go to the Glass Bookshop staff for participating in this study. Thanks also go to the staff of Lighthouse Bookshop for their participation. This study was supported in part by the MacEwan University Office of Research Services USRI Project Grant (RES0000994).



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## Appendix A: Blank Tables

Table A1: Blank Data Information Sheet for Content Analysis of Website Pages

Name of subpage	Colour scheme?	Layout?	Internal links?	External links?	Content?	Purchase options?
Home						
Browse						
Contact / FAQ						
Events / Videos						
Merch / Subs						

Table A2: Blank Data Information Sheet for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 1—Glass Bookshop

Observations—Week 1	Wednesday, March 8, 2023	Saturday, March 11, 2023	Monday, March 13, 2023
Number of customers			
Layout of front table 1			
Layout of front table 2			
Books in front window			
Items at register			
Posters on walls			

Table A3: Blank Data Information Sheet for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 2—Glass Bookshop

Observations—Week 2	Wednesday, March 15, 2023	Saturday, March 18, 2023	Monday, March 20, 2023
Number of customers			
Layout of front table 1			
Layout of front table 2			

<b>Books in front window</b>			
<b>Items at register</b>			
<b>Posters on walls</b>			

Table A4: Blank Data Information Sheet for Event Unobtrusive Observation

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Glass Bookshop</b>	<b>Lighthouse Bookshop</b>
<b>Number of people</b>		
<b>Topics discussed</b>		
<b>Atmosphere of event</b>		
<b>Environment of event</b>		

Table A5: Blank Data Information Sheet for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 1—Lighthouse Bookshop

<b>Observations—Week 1</b>	<b>Monday, April 17, 2023</b>	<b>Wednesday, April 19, 2023</b>	<b>Friday, April 21, 2023</b>
<b>Number of customers</b>			
<b>Layout of front table 1</b>			
<b>Layout of front table 2</b>			
<b>Books in front window</b>			
<b>Items at register</b>			
<b>Posters on walls</b>			

Table A6: Blank Data Information Sheet for In-Store Unobtrusive Observation Week 2—Lighthouse Bookshop

<b>Observations—Week 2</b>	<b>Monday, April 24, 2023</b>	<b>Wednesday, April 26, 2023</b>	<b>Friday, April 28, 2023</b>
<b>Number of customers</b>			
<b>Layout of front table 1</b>			

Layout of front table 2			
Books in front window			
Items at register			
Posters on walls			