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ARE YOU A LESBIAN, MISS?

**BEING LESBIAN: A BARRIER
IN EMPLOYMENT
IN NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of
Educational Administration**

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2003**

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that the research paper entitled Being Lesbian: A Barrier to Employment and Promotion in New Zealand Secondary Schools? and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Educational Administration is the result of my own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

Signed: ... *Carol Bartlett*

Carol Bartlett

Date: *29th May 2003*

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the perceptions of secondary school teachers who are lesbian, specifically their perceptions of how sexual orientation affects their appointment to positions and also affects their promotion within New Zealand schools. A postal questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from 67 self-selected participants. Their responses form the basis for the research findings. These responses are considered using various perspectives but mainly those of lesbian feminism. The research reveals that, even when it is illegal to discriminate in employment on the grounds of sexual orientation, many participants perceive that there are barriers to their appointment and promotion based on sexual orientation. This is particularly so in schools which serve small urban and rural areas. It is also so in schools of special (religious) character, which are exempt from the legislation. The study also highlights the many ways that teachers who are lesbian manage their sexual identities within their workplaces. Based on these findings, recommendations for using this study, and for change, form the final section of this thesis.

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CONTENTS

Abstract		iii
Acknowledgements		iv
Contents		v
List of Figures		ix
List of Tables		xi
List of Appendices		xii
Glossary		xiii
Annie		xvii
Chapter One	Introduction	1
	1.1 Reasons for this Study and Background to the Researcher	2
	1.2 Scope	7
	1.3 Research Objectives and Questions	8
	1.3.1 Research Objectives	8
	1.3.2 Research Questions	9
	1.4 Language	10
	1.5 Thesis Outline	11
Chapter Two	Theoretical Perspectives	13
	2.1 Introduction	13
	2.2 Lesbian Feminism	14
	2.3 Gay and Lesbian Studies	15
	2.4 Queer Theory	16

Chapter Three	Literature Review	18
	3.1 Introduction	18
	3.2 Patriarchy	19
	3.2.1 How the Patriarchy Evolved	22
	3.3 Male Hegemony	25
	3.4 Heterosexism	26
	3.5 Homophobia	28
	3.5.1 Causes of Homophobia	30
	3.5.2 Effects of Homophobia on Lesbians and Gay Men	31
	3.5.3 Internalised Homophobia	32
	3.6 Lesbian Identity and the Effects of Coming Out	34
	3.7 Homophobia and Coming Out in the Workplace	40
	3.8 The Effects of Teachers Coming Out	41
	3.9 Lesbians at Work	43
	3.10 The Australian Experience	48
	3.11 The New Zealand Literature	50
Chapter Four	New Zealand Employment Law	59
Chapter Five	Methodology	66
	5.1 Introduction	66
	5.2 The Sample	66
	5.2.1 Snowball Sampling	66
	5.2.2 Profile of Sample	68
	5.3 Validity and Reliability	72

	5.4	Survey Research	74
	5.5	Data Gathering: Choice of a Postal Questionnaire	76
	5.5.1	Disadvantages of a Postal Questionnaire	78
	5.6	Questionnaire Design	79
	5.6.1	Question Evaluation	80
	5.7	Piloting the Questionnaire	82
	5.8	Ethical Considerations	86
	5.8.1	Anonymity and Confidentiality	88
	5.9	Database Design	90
	5.10	Data Analysis	91
Chapter Six		Research Findings	93
	6.1	Introduction	93
	6.2	Findings: Univariate Data	94
	6.3	Disclosure of Orientation Related to Other Factors	139
	6.3.1	Disclosure: North and South Islands	139
	6.3.2	Disclosure: Rural/Urban, Town and City	140
	6.4	Degree of Disclosure Categorised by School Type	141
Chapter Seven		Discussion of Findings	147
	7.1	Introduction	147
	7.2.1	I used 'Mrs' on the form	148
	7.2.2	I'm certain it's why I didn't get the job	151
	7.2.2.1	I'd not work in a school that doesn't value diversity	153
	7.2.3	I would never be in a room alone with a female ...	153
	7.2.4	The B.O.T. vetoed my promotion	154

	7.2.5 I left the school because of his behaviour	155
	7.2.6 ...it's safer not to acknowledge the fact that I am gay	156
	7.2.7 In a rural school I was bullied and victimised ...	157
	7.2.8 It's none of their business	158
	7.3 Research Problems	158
Chapter Eight	Conclusion and Recommendations	161
	8.1 Introduction	161
	8.2 Recommendations	162
	8.2.1 ...for Schools	162
	8.2.2 ...for Teacher Training Establishments	163
	8.2.3 ...for School Trustees' Association	164
	8.2.4 ...for the Education Review Office	164
	8.2.5 ...for the P.P.T.A.	165
	8.2.1 ...for future Research	165
References		167
Appendices		187

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Literature Review – Diagrammatic Overview	20
Figure 2	Lesbian and Gay Educators – Identity Management Strategies	39
Figure 3	Q6 Degree to which Participants were Out at School	98
Figure 4	Q7/8 Gender of Interviewers Linked to their Awareness of Participant’s Sexual Orientation	105
Figure 5	Q10 Effects of Participant’s Sexual Orientation on the Way She Works	111
Figure 6	Q11 Effects of Participant’s Sexual Orientation on the Way Others Relate to Her	116
Figure 7	Q12 Effects of Participant’s Sexual Orientation on Previous Job Applications	118
Figure 8	Q13 Effects of Participant’s Sexual Orientation on Promotion	122
Figure 9	Q14 General Effects on Participant’s Work Environment	124
Figure 10	Q17/18 Effects on Participants Who Came Out After Commencing Teaching	130
Figure 11	Q19/20 School Location Data	132
Figure 12	Q21/22 Schools Categorised by Gender/Type/Decile Rating	135
Figure 13	Q22 Schools Categorised by Type	135
Figure 14	Q23 School Decile Rating	138

Figure 15	Q24 Participant's Personal Data (Age Group)	138
Figure 16	Q19a Location (North or South Island) Linked to Degree to which Out at School	139
Figure 17	Q20a Location Linked to Degree to which Out at School	140
Figure 18	Q22d School Type Linked to Degree Out at School	143

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Number of State Secondary School Teachers, Designation and Gender	29
Table 2	Sample Characteristics – summary Tables	72
Table 2A	Position in School Hierarchy	72
Table 2B	Number of Years in Teaching in Secondary Schools	72
Table 2C	Number of New Zealand Secondary Schools in which Taught	72
Table 2D	School Types	72
Table 2E	School decile rating	72
Table 2F	Geographical Location	72
Table 2G	School Types (Student Gender)	72
Table 2H	Age Group	72
Table 3	Comparison of Participants' Designation with that of State School Teachers	96

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Information Letter	188
Appendix 2	Pass-on Flyer	190
Appendix 3	Questionnaire	191
Appendix 4	Articles: <i>PPTA News, express, Tamaki Makarau Lesbian Newsletter</i>	202
Appendix 5	Statistical Reports and Charts	204

GLOSSARY

Bisexual/Bi: Someone who is or is capable of being attracted to members of both sexes or genders as prescribed by the binary gender system (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Board of Trustees (B.O.T.): Set up by “Tomorrow’s schools reforms, an elected group of parent representatives who, with an elected student and staff representative, and the principal, govern their school.

CAPNA: Curriculum and Pastoral Needs Analysis. This is an exercise completed in schools to identify projected staffing needs for the following year. The process precedes the identification of areas of surplus staffing. Individuals who will be redeployed (made redundant) are then identified.

Closet: The metaphorical space occupied by those who are aware of their same-sex orientation, but who are unwilling to declare them. Thus to be “in the closet” is to live life ostensibly as a heterosexual, and to be “out of the closet” or “out” is to acknowledge one’s sexual orientation (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Coming out: The process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others. Because of heteronormative assumption this is a continuous and never ending process..

Compulsory Heterosexuality: This presupposes and prescribes gender. It is based on the belief that the male/female couple is natural and so this is demanded by patriarchal society (a power hierarchy based on gender). On this basis, straight sexuality prescribes behavior patterns (active male, passive female), with the sexual act always interpreted as being done by the male to the female by penetration. Lesbian existence is rendered fully deviant or invisible for the purpose of men safeguarding their right to women’s sexuality. Women defining their sexuality on their own terms, or in terms of other women, are punished within patriarchy because they threaten the most primary intuitions: marriage and heterosexuality. (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Decile Rating: For administrative purposes, the Ministry of Education has ranked each state school into decile (10 %) groupings. Schools described as Decile 1 draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage; those in Decile 10, from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage.

Dyke: Used as a derogatory term applied to lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

Faggot/Fag: Used as a derogatory term for gay, bisexual and queer men. Some have reclaimed this word as a symbol of pride and strength.

Gay: A man whose primary emotional, sexual, social and political commitments lie with men. Gay also sometimes used in a gender non-specific way to describe a homosexual person.

Gender: A. In its most accepted definition, gender refers to the social roles (e.g. men, women) and characteristics that develop through cultural interpretations of biological or anatomical sex. In this definition, sex is seen as natural, and gender as the social construction that stems from readings of sex. B. A societal construct referring to roles, characteristics, behaviours, appearances, and identities that develop through cultural interpretations of genetic sex. One's sense of being woman, man, girl, boy, androgynous, or something else entirely, or of being perceived as woman, man, etc. (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Hegemony (Hegemonic): The processes by which dominant cultures maintain a dominant position: for example, the use of institutions to formalise power; the employment of a bureaucracy to make power seem abstract (and, therefore, not attached to any one individual); the inculcation of the populace in the ideals of the hegemonic group through education, advertising, publication, etc.; the mobilisation of a police force as well as military personnel to subdue opposition (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Heteronormativity (Heteronormative): Those punitive rules (social, familial, and legal) that force us to conform to hegemonic heterosexual standards for identity. The term is a short version of 'normative heterosexuality'.

Heterosexism: The concept that heterosexuality and only heterosexuality is natural, normal, superior and required. This can refer to any institution or belief system that excludes or makes invisible, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and gay people, as well as any system that constructs queer sexualities as deviant, wrong, or immoral. Heterosexism is deeply rooted in the culture and institutions in our society. Homophobia (see glossary entry) stems from and is supported by heterosexism (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Heterosexual: A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of a gender or sex which is seen to be 'opposite' to or other than the one with which they identify or are identified.

Homophobia: The irrational fear or hatred of gays, lesbians, or queer-identified people in general. This can be manifested as an intense dislike or rejection of such people, or violent actions against them.

Homosexual: A person who is primarily and/or exclusively attracted to members of what she/he identifies as her/his own sex or gender. Because the term can have connotations of disease and abnormality, some people do not like to identify as homosexual. Others do not feel that it accurately defines their chosen identity.

Integrated Schools: Under the Private Schools Conditional Integration Act, 1975, the Government permitted the incorporation of private schools into the state school system. These schools are called "integrated schools" and deemed to be of "special character". They receive public funding. More than 250 of the 303 such schools are Roman Catholic. As schools of "special character" they are exempt from some sections of the Human Rights Act.

Internalised Homophobia: The fear or hatred of, or discomfort with one's own non-heterosexual sexuality. Internalised homophobia is linked to low self-esteem and presumed to be a contributing factor in the high rates of suicide among non-heterosexual teens.

Intersex: An anatomical variation from typical understandings of male and female genetics. The physical manifestation, at birth, of genetic or endocrinological differences from the cultural norm. Also a group of medical conditions that challenge standard sex designations. Intersex and transgender people share some overlapping experiences and perspectives, but the terms are not synonymous, and the issues are not the same. 'Intersex' or 'intersexual' is used today rather than the term 'hermaphrodite' especially by the people themselves (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Lesbian Invisibility: Lesbians become invisible as a result of heterosexual assumption. Like institutional racism and sexism, heterosexism (see glossary entry) pervades societal customs and institutions. It operates through a dual process of invisibility and attack. Homosexuality usually remains culturally invisible; when people who engage in homosexual behavior or who are identified as homosexual become visible, they are subject to attack by society.

Lesbian: A woman whose primary emotional, sexual, social and political commitments lie with women.

Out: Shortened version of "out of the closet".

Outed: Being 'outed' is having someone else tell another person of your sexual orientation without your knowledge and/or permission.

Passing: Shortened version of "passing as heterosexual", which means not disclosing one's sexual orientation. Passing may involve lying, dressing in gender-conventional clothes, adapting language use to avoid the use of a personal pronoun when talking of a lover or partner, etc.

Patriarchy: Literally, 'rule by the father'; hence, any social or political system that grants privileged status to males and permits or encourages their domination of females. Most Western cultures have been, and continue to be, patriarchal in this sense.

Queer: An umbrella identity term encompassing lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered people and anyone else who does not identify as heterosexual. 'Queer' originated as a derogatory word. It is currently being reclaimed by some people and used as a statement of empowerment. Some, however, reject its use due to its connotations of deviance and its tendency to gloss over and deny the differences between these groups (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Report: As a database term, report refers to the presentation (text and/or graphical) of specific data drawn from an underlying table (or tables) via a query.

Select Query: (Database term) The means by which data stored in a table (or tables) is used to ask a question specifying data inclusion, sequence and summary parameters.

Sexual Orientation, Sexual Preference, Sexual Object Choice: These terms refer to categories of sexuality, as indicated by the object of one's sexual desire (e.g. members of the opposite sex/gender, member of any gender, etc.). 'Sexual orientation' may imply biological roots of sexual attraction, whereas 'sexual preference' and 'sexual object choice' may connote an element of choice. Some people who see all these terms as loaded prefer the more general term 'sexuality' (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Sexuality: Can be used to refer to sexual orientation, object choice, or preference.

Straight: Heterosexual person.

Table: As a database term, table denotes a repository for a collection of data about a specific topic. Tables provide the record sources for queries and reports.

Transgender: This term has many definitions. It is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who deviate from their assigned gender or the binary gender system, including intersex people, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites and others. Some transgendered people feel they exist somewhere between, beyond, or outside the two standard gender categories. The term can also be applied exclusively to people who live primarily as the gender 'opposite' to that which they were assigned at birth. These people may sometimes prefer the term 'transsexual' (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Transsexual: A person who has altered or intends to alter their anatomy through surgery, hormones, or other means, to better match their chosen gender identity. As a medical term transsexual was coined in the 1950s to refer to individuals who desire to change their bodies through surgery to reflect the gender that feels more 'natural' or authentic. The people in this group are often divided into pre-operative, post-operative, and non-operative transsexuals. Due to the high cost, not all transsexuals can have genital surgery. Others do not feel that surgery is necessary, but still maintain a transsexual identity (Felluga, 2003, n.p.).

Units: Part of the Secondary Teachers' Collective Employment Contract. Boards of Trustees are entitled to a number of units generated by a Ministry of Education formula who allocate them to individuals, either permanently or for a fixed term, in recognition of responsibility. At the time of writing, each unit merits an annual payment of \$2,900.

Annie

Annie's up at seven on a work day
Brews herself a cup of peppermint tea
Gathering her papers and lesson plans she grabs her keys
Teaching arithmetic and Africa, geology and girls' basketball
All the kids in her class will tell you she's the best
But she's heard the other teachers in the hall
Saying

Chorus

"What are we going to do about Annie?
Pretty girls like her shouldn't be alone
If she took our advice, dressed up real nice
She could find a man to take her home."

Monday come questions of couples
"Where and with whom did you go?"
Avoiding the personal pronoun, she hopes it doesn't show
Shopping with her lover in the city
Two women holding hands don't get a stare
But what if the kids knew, what would they do
Would they hate her? Why should they care?
Singing

Chorus

Never getting too close to her students
Never letting out too much of her life
Keeping her delights and disappointments tucked out of sight
Annie takes herself to the Christmas party
The principal whispers with a smile
"you're vivacious and bright, if you play your cards right
There's some men here tonight worth your while
Thinking

Chorus

Work that you love is hard to come by
The kids she could never bear to lose
So she makes conversation out of silences and half-truths
But at night by the fire with her lover
She looks out at the wind-driven snow
And dreams of the day when she'll look in their faces
And tell everyone she knows
She'll say

Last Chorus

Don't you worry about Annie
She don't lie awake and pine
She's got love to fill her heart
Flowers growing in her garden
Annie's doing just fine

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