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Can't See The Forest For The Trees...

Insider/Outsider Perspectives on the Wellington Lesbian Community(s)

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts
In
Social Anthropology

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2007

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Abstract

Any collection of people who suffer common discrimination from those around them must work to define what they have in common, despite their in-group differences. This is focused by naming themselves, or dealing with names others give them.

(Kepner, 2006)

Lesbian communities are a complex network of women from diverse backgrounds, with multifarious belief systems and experiences of identifying as a lesbian. This paper examines the characteristics of the Wellington lesbian community(s) through the methodology of a focus group and on-line blog, and consequently puts forward an analysis of lesbian legitimacy, community in-group membership and the informal hierarchy of this community(s). The invitation to participate in this research was met with silence from the core, visible, lesbian subgroup of the wider lesbian community; instead, the lesbian participants are self-identified as outsiders to this core subgroup. The need to find a working definition of the Wellington lesbian community(s) has not come from within the core, visible, subgroup that meets at bars, plays in sports teams, attends lesbian events; it has come from outside this subgroup of the community(s). This thesis identifies the insider/outsider binary that exists both within the Wellington lesbian community(s) and in the maintenance of a community of self-identified lesbians from those outside its amorphous boundaries.

Acknowledgements

The body of work in this thesis has arrived at a readable state very quickly, due in no small way to the assistance and supervision of Dr Jeff Sluka. Jeff has guided me with a gentle hand from the infancy of this research, suggesting changes in direction when I met with hurdles that seemed insurmountable. I was reminded at the initial stages of preparing this thesis that an appropriate supervisor was paramount in producing a sound piece of work that contributes original thought to the field of study. Thank you Jeff, for your wisdom, guidance, and lack of knowledge about the inner workings of a lesbian community! My thanks also to the participants in the focus group discussion for this research. You both offered valuable insight into your truth about the Wellington lesbian community. It took courage to take part in this research, and I am grateful for your honesty and commitment. Likewise, my thanks also to the on-line blog contributors for this research. You raised some interesting and challenging points that were gratefully received. I would also like to acknowledge the lesbians of the Wellington lesbian community core, visible, subgroup who did not speak through this research; your silence has been heard. Thanks also to my partner and family who have put up with my moaning and whinging for over a year. Love is patient and kind indeed. Lastly, I would like to thank those of you who have assisted me from Massey University in Wellington. Jasmine Robins and Fred LeBlanc, in the administration offices, and Christy Parker, your patience, guidance and advice have been ever forthcoming and mostly received with grace. A special thanks also to Dr Robin Peace. Although it was somewhat frightening to have you read a very small section of this thesis and offer your opinions, your wisdom of lesbians and lesbian communities, and the support you have offered me in continuing with this thesis has been invaluable and is greatly appreciated.

Glossary

There are terms used throughout this research that may be unfamiliar to the reader. This glossary is a reasonable explanation of these terms in a simple and generalised manner. It is important to acknowledge however, that each of these terms involves complex identity issues and the explanations given should be viewed as simplified guidelines rather than definitive definitions of their meanings and symbolism.

- Baby-Dyke:** A young or inexperienced lesbian, particularly of high school or college age.
- Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to both males and females. Some may prefer the terms omnisexual or pansexual instead, because "bi" means two, and there may be more sexes than two (see transsexual, transgender, queer).
- Bull Dyke:** A very tough, usually butch, lesbian.
- Butch:** A masculine woman, usually a lesbian.
- Butch-Femme:** Describes a relationship in which one person is femme and one is butch, and describing the dynamic between them. Butch-Femme is also the social structure prevalent in working-class lesbian bars up through the early 1970s. This structure was strictly enforced by peer pressure. One had to be either a butch or a femme, and butches only dated femmes and femmes only dated butches. There was a lot of backlash against this structure in the 1970s when lesbian feminism emerged, and for a long time butches and femmes were absolutely politically incorrect, and were likely to be shunned by the feminist lesbian community.

- Closeted:** A person who does not wish to be known as gay, lesbian, bisexual etc, is often said to be "in the closet".
- Corporate Dykes:** A woman who may identify as either butch or femme and who would usually participate in the corporate world wearing attire that is common for that workplace.
- Diesel Dykes:** A very truck-driver-like butch.
- Femme:** A feminine woman, usually a lesbian.
- FTM:** Female to Male Transsexual.
- LGBT:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered.
- Lipstick Lesbian:** A lesbian who behaves in a feminine manner and presents as 'straight' in both lesbian and heterosexual environments. These women may not even like the word "lesbian" and may be very closeted.
- MTF:** Male to Female Transsexual.
- QBNL:** Queer but Not Lesbian.
- Queer:** Gay, lesbian, bisexual, omnisexual, pansexual, transgendered, or transsexual.
- Sports Dykes:** A usually butch woman who plays and enjoys sports.
- Stone Butch:** A very masculine woman, usually to the point that she is frequently mistaken for a man. The term comes from African American slang, in which "stone" means "very". It has come to have other meanings as well. A butch can be sexually stone, as in not being able to permit herself to be touched on the genitals for sex; emotionally stone, meaning that she has locked away her emotions and has trouble acknowledging or expressing them; or physically stone, having trouble being touched at all. A stone butch is usually some combination of all of these.
- Stone Femme:** A femme lesbian who never tries to change or "melt" her stone butch lover, but prefers to pleasure her lover by taking

a passive role in sex. And/or a femme lesbian who does not like to be touched, much like a stone butch.

Transgendered: A person who crosses gender boundaries, including, but not limited to, transsexuals and transvestites. And/or a person who lives mostly or completely in the gender not associated with their birth sex, but who does not identify as a transsexual.

Transguy: A term for a male crossing gender or sex boundaries.

Transsexual: A person whose birth sex is viewed by themselves as incorrect or incompatible with the image of themselves, and who takes steps (including but not limited to physical and/or hormone therapy, and surgery) to make their outer self match their self-identification.

Transwoman: A term for a female crossing gender or sex boundaries.

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