LADY-HUSBANDS AND KAMP LADIES

**PRE-1970 LESBIAN LIFE IN
AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND**

by

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Abstract

This study explores pre-1970 lesbian life and lives in Aotearoa/New Zealand before the impact of women's and gay liberation and lesbian-feminism, using written sources and oral histories. The thesis argues that before 1970 most women could make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives only through the strategies of discretion and silence.

Despite apparent censorship, many classical, religious, legal, medical and fictional discourses on lesbianism informed New Zealand opinion, as regulation of this material was one thing, but enforcement another, and most English language material was available here. These discourses functioned as cautionary tales, warning women of the consequences of disclosure, while at the same time alerting them to lesbian possibilities. Though lesbian sexual acts were not criminalised in New Zealand, lesbianism was contained, regulated and controlled through a variety of mechanisms including the fear of forced medical treatment, social exclusion and disgrace, as well as the loss of employment, housing and family relationships. Class and race affected these outcomes, and this study concludes that learning how to read a wide variety of lesbian lives is essential to furthering research into lesbian histories in New Zealand.

The study examined pre-1970 published and unpublished writing suggesting lesbian experiences by selected New Zealand women, within a context informed by writing from contemporaries who have been identified as lesbian, and oral histories from pre-1970 self-identified lesbians.. Many of these women led secretive, often double lives, and of necessity deceived others through silence and omission, actual denial, or sham heterosexual marriages and engagements. The lies, secrecy and silence of self-censorship has often meant the deliberate destruction of written records such as letters or diaries, by women themselves, or later by family members and friends. The study concludes that the private lesbianism of most pre-1970 lesbian lives cannot be understood in isolation, and that scholars must move beyond the women's necessary masquerades to place their lives into a lesbian context in order to recognize and understand them. Each life informs an understanding of the others and by considering them together the study provides a picture

of lesbianism in pre-1970 New Zealand, with the stories of the narrators illuminating the written experiences.

Silences should not be mistaken for absences, or heterosexuality assumed for all pre-1970 New Zealand women. The stories of resistance and rebellion told by the self-identified lesbian narrators indicate that the women whose lesbian experiences are suggested by their writings similarly resisted societal expectations and prescriptions. Learning how to interpret and understand these materials is essential for moving beyond superficial and heterosexualised accounts of their lives.

Towards the end of the period, influenced by other social changes, some lesbians in this study began to resist the need for caution and discretion, providing the basis for the liberation movements of the 1970s.

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Preface

This thesis is dedicated to “Aunty Andy and Aunty Pearce” – Matron Elizabeth Anderson and Sub-Matron Sophy Pearce, English nurses who came to New Zealand during WW1 and ran the Willard Home, Palmerston North, from 1923 until their retirement during WW2. Aunty Andy and Aunty Pearce were friends of my mother, who had been a relief nurse at the Willard Home and they visited us frequently. As a child I was fascinated by this first glimpse of devoted, domestic companionship between two unmarried career women.

The Willard Homeⁱ, founded by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU),ⁱⁱ was an orphanage from 1920.ⁱⁱⁱ From 1964 it became the Presbyterian Social Services Association Willard House for the Elderly,^{iv} with Aunty Pearce, alone after Aunty Andy's death, as the first resident.^v The Willard Home was named for WCTU American founder, Frances Willard (1839–1898), unmarried activist for temperance, women's education and suffrage,^{vi} who had several close women companions including Anna Gordon, described as her “loved and last” and widely regarded as her “widow” by WCTU members (Faderman 1999, p.35). Willard wrote revealingly on “Companionships” and love between women in her autobiography:

Other attachments followed, so much less restful than friendships, that I cannot fairly call them by that consoling name. Their objects were good women all, thank God! and the only trouble was not that we loved unwisely, but too well...The loves of women for each other grow more numerous each day, and I have pondered why these things were. That so little should be said about them surprises me, for they are everywhere. Perhaps the "Maids of Llangollen" (in Wales) afford the most conspicuous example; two women, young and fair, with money and position, who ran away together...and spent their happy days in each other's calm companionship within the home they there proceeded to establish...In these days, when any capable and careful woman can honourably earn her own support, there is no village that has not its examples of "two hearts in counsel", both of which are feminine...The friendships of women are beautiful and blessed (Willard 1889 in Katz 1983, pp.217–218).

Whether or not they would have called themselves lesbians, Aunty Andy and Aunty Pearce were certainly New Zealand examples of “two hearts in counsel”, with a “beautiful and blessed” friendship. However, when I realized that I wanted a similar relationship, I did not approach them, but searched the Wellington Public Library for information, where I found several novels as well as medical writing. Meanwhile a

woman I met in a Wellington coffee bar lent me *The Well of Loneliness* (see Chapters 5 and 6). Later, visiting Auckland, I found the Ca d' Oro coffee bar and a community of teenaged “kamp boys”, and eventually also found “kamp girls”^{vii} in Wellington. Similar journeys of discovery are described by narrators in the present study.

The books and magazines I was able to obtain are an example of how almost everything published overseas was brought into New Zealand. I borrowed works by Donald Webster Cory from a male homosexual friend. In these books I read of the US organisations Mattachine Society and One Inc. I wrote to them for a free sample copy of *One* magazine, in which I learned of the existence of the US Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) and *The Ladder* and, from this, the British lesbian organisation, the Minorities Research Group (MRG) and their magazine *Arena Three*. Overseas currency restrictions made it easier to subscribe to British publications using postal orders, and consequently lesbians in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch read *Arena Three*, copies being passed from hand to hand. This history is an example of how a pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian could obtain information from overseas (see Chapter 8 for information about these organisations).

I left New Zealand for London, where I found numbers of other “expatriate” lesbians from New Zealand and other countries were MRG members, and became involved in this organization before moving to Copenhagen and later Oslo. I joined the Forbund af 1948 (F-48) and Det Norske Forbund av 1948 (DNF-48), and became involved in European homophile politics for several years. After visiting US lesbian-feminist and gay liberation groups, I returned to New Zealand and helped found the Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE) and the first lesbian magazine *Circle* (later *Lesbian Feminist Circle*) in 1973. As I have lived as a pre-1970 lesbian, I am in some ways an insider within this thesis (see Chapter 3). I personally experienced how the early 1970s became a watershed, an intersection between the old strategies, and the new possibilities for lesbian life. I wanted to capture and bring together pre-1970 lesbian experiences while this was still possible, making visible relationships often hidden or deliberately disguised at the time. Those who seek visibility or physical evidence of past lesbian experience are obviously unaware of the punishments and restraints used to contain and control lesbianism, and of the necessary discretion, silence and disguise women used to protect their relationships from the risk of discovery.

Despite the difficulties involved in resisting the prescriptions of compulsory heterosexuality, women like Aunty Andy and Aunty Pearce managed, through careful strategies of silence to enjoy “each other’s calm companionship” throughout their lifelong pre-1970 relationship. I hope this study will help provide a sense of a New Zealand lesbian past, by these glimpses of similar experiences in this study, and will contribute to unsettling the bleak heteroreality presented by most accounts of New Zealand history.

ⁱSee Palmerston North (PN) City Archives, Series A175/5 Box 32.

ⁱⁱFrom 1917-1920 it was used as accommodation for the families of WW1 Awapuni military personnel, at the original Fitzherbert Street premises. *Manawatu Evening Standard*, Thursday October 11, 1917, p.5.

ⁱⁱⁱIt became an orphanage at new premises in 17 Russell Street, PN, and was maintained by contributions from WCTU branches throughout the country, with enlarged facilities from 1927. *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 24 May 1933, p.12: May 23, 1928, p.2.

^{iv}The Willard Home was gifted to the Presbyterian Social Services Association in 1961, becoming a home for the elderly. *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 19 April 1961, p.19: 3 May 1961, p.21: 6 October 1961, p.21.

^v*Manawatu Evening Standard*, 6 April 1964, p.12.

^{vi}See Faderman (1999), Katz (1983), Sidney L.Reed *A Great Pioneer - Frances Willard* (undated) in PN City Archives, Series A175/5 Box 32.

^{vii}Kamp/camp was the main term used for homosexual in pre-1970 New Zealand. Spelt “kamp”, it was reputedly derived from police slang in Australia, as an abbreviation for “known as male prostitute”. Spelt “camp” it had strong associations with male homosexual culture and style (see Weeks 1977, p.42).

PART ONE

THE FRAMEWORK

Chapter 1

Introduction

The technology of silence
The rituals, etiquette

The blurring of terms
Silence not absence

Of words or music or even
Raw sounds

Silence can be a plan
Rigorously executed

The blueprint to a life

It is a presence
It has a history a form

Do not confuse it
With any kind of absence
(Rich 1978, p.17)

Purpose

This is a thesis about New Zealand women who led lesbian lives before the development of gay liberation and lesbian feminism in the 1970s.

The study is intended as a step towards creating histories of pre-1970 New Zealand women who led lesbian lives, and who developed lesbian relationships. It brings together for the first time oral histories from self-identified New Zealand lesbians with written materials suggesting lesbianism in the lives of other New Zealand women, previously scattered through books and archives, and searches for common themes and patterns. My purpose is to move beyond the unquestioned hetero-reality constructed by dominant cultural discourses and the consequent heterosexualisation of the New Zealand past. One assumption of this study is that all sexuality is a construct with historical

“conditions of existence” (Weeks 1981,p.10). Accordingly I survey the pre-1970 context, including knowledge about lesbianism, and the material circumstances of New Zealand women’s access to education, employment and housing which determined how or whether they could lead lesbian lives or develop lesbian relationships. The London-based Lesbian History Group calls lesbian history, “an approach to history” revealing, among other things, “how anti-lesbianism has operated” (Lesbian History Group 1989, p.16); this survey illustrates how these forces have operated here.

Some approaches to the past, while providing welcome constraints on interpretations that categorise people in ways perhaps unknown during their particular periods, can result in an unwillingness to explore whether earlier women led lesbian lives, or developed lesbian relationships, from the fear of attributing to women lifestyles claimed as unimaginable for them. However, all auto/biography is only one or perhaps several versions of a life, and all history – not only lesbian history – is a selection of fragments which, even when painstakingly pieced together, at best provide incomplete and partial pictures of the past. All history is “created” rather than “discovered” (Macdonald et al., 1991, p.x), and no history or biography may be claimed as definitive.

By placing together accounts based on oral histories with New Zealand written materials suggesting lesbian experiences, a lesbian context is created for experiences not previously read within a lesbian framework. Ronald Grele argued for oral history, “only the larger context...makes the information conveyed in an interview unambiguous” (Grele 1998, p.48). Regarding any story in isolation does not enable lesbian meanings to be easily extrapolated, and I have used the experiences of the self-identified lesbian narrators in this study to elucidate and illuminate the experiences suggested in the written sources.

Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald claim that women’s late nineteenth- century intense friendship “never carried any expectation that it would be the organising principle for one’s life” and that “Sexuality existed within marriage and was subsumed within reproduction”, giving John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman (1988) as one of their sources (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.187). However D’Emilio and Freedman argue that during the nineteenth century sexuality came to be regarded as “a personal choice and not simply a reproductive responsibility...increasingly fused with a romantic quest for emotional intimacy” and the “exultation of pure physical pleasure”, and that both

men and women contributed to the “long-term transition of sexuality...from the context of reproduction to the realm of romantic love and physical passion” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988, p.84). Michel Foucault argues that during the nineteenth century the middle-class began to regard sex as “a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs” (Foucault 1990a, p.121) and which was “worth dying for” (ibid. p.156). In this context, why would late nineteenth and early twentieth century women who loved other women not want to make their relationships the “organising principle” of their lives? Especially when, as Colette remarked, “these pleasures which are lightly called physical” can, as Janet Flanner added, “shake the soul” (Flanner 1968, p.6).

This thesis argues that it was not because women saw their sexuality as existing only “within marriage and...subsumed within reproduction” (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.187) that they failed to make lesbian choices, but rather because the available information on lesbianism, whether hinted at or more openly revealed, was negative and frightening, and also because they were unable to support themselves financially to the degree needed to establish independent homes and lead lesbian lives. Only women who were economically independent could make this choice, though others wished it were possible. Charlotte Bronte wrote wishfully to Ellen Nussey, “If we had but a cottage and a competency of our own” (see Chapter 9). Frances Willard thought, “any capable and careful woman” could now “honourably earn her own support” and live happily with a woman companion “within the home” they had established, like the “Maids of Llangollen” (Willard 1889 in Katz 1983, pp.217–218). Mary Taylor argued in 1870 that it was “the first duty” of every woman to earn her own living. Virginia Woolf, in a lesbian relationship with Vita Sackville-West at the time of writing, asserted that for a woman to write, she needed, “money and a room of her own” (Woolf 1945, p.6). For women to organise their lives around love for other women, they needed access to money and to housing. Women could and did hide lesbian relationships within apparently heterosexual and married lives, but without the material circumstances enabling them to be economically independent they could not lead lesbian lives.

Material progress for women means progress for the possibility of lesbian expression (see, for example, Faderman 1981, 1991, Hyman 1994, Hamer 1996). This study asks what the material conditions were that enabled some pre-1970 New Zealand women to become economically independent and to make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives, and argues that these conditions included inheritance or access to paid work

through class, education or training, the resources to rent or purchase housing, pay the bills, obtain credit, and opportunities to meet women who could be potential partners.

In order to obtain and retain employment and housing women needed to live, as Brenda Wineapple suggests was the case for Janet Flanner, private lives “devoted to concealment” (Wineapple 1989, p.267). Liz Kennedy argues that during the 1920s and 1930s in South Dakota, Julia Boyer Reinstein and her friends made discretion the “organising principle” of their lives (Kennedy 1996, p.35). This thesis takes up that point to argue that in pre-1970 New Zealand, even given favourable material circumstances, discretion was a necessary and fundamental strategy enabling lesbianism to become the organising principle of women’s lives. Foucault argues, “silence itself...functions alongside the things said...within overall strategies”, and there is no binary division between what “one says and what one does not say” (Foucault 1990a, p.27). Discretion allowed women to protect their livelihood, their relationships and their lesbian existence in a more complex pattern than the simple binarism of being in or out of the closet (see Sedgwick 1990, pp.67–69). When women deny they are lesbians, they may simply mean that sexual life is private (see Kennedy 1996, p.19). The present study suggests that for some women, discretion meant not only privacy and silence, but also actively presenting themselves as not-lesbian, and leading double lives of deception and duplicity. As Adrienne Rich pointed out, lying is “done with words and also with silence” (Rich 1979, p.186), and is “described as discretion” (ibid. p.190). She adds that, “all silence has a meaning” (ibid. p.308). Julia Penelope suggests “Lying...is a *survival skill* we have developed...to get by in most heterosexual contexts” (Penelope 1990, p.95, original emphasis). Michelle Cliff remarks on “passing” and “camouflage” in relation to race that “I am not what I seem to be” (Cliff 1980, p.3); also the case for women in the present study, in relation to lesbianism. Renate Duelli Klein comments that researchers must take account of women’s need to “‘fake’ as an important part of their strategy to survive” (Klein 1983, p.95). It is more comfortable for many New Zealand historians to accept camouflage and deception at face value, to ignore the gaps, and to indeed confuse “silence” with “absence” (Rich 1978, p.17). They refrain from interpretations that might unsettle what Janice Raymond calls “hetero-reality”, which she defines as “the world view that woman exists always in relation to man” (Raymond 1986, p.3). The pre-1970 women in the present study needed to live cautiously and discreetly; if their lesbian identities existed as such, they were secret selves revealed to very few people, and only in safe settings.

The study addresses the pre-1970 legal, medical, religious and popular discourses that influenced New Zealand ideas on lesbianism, and shaped the prevailing ideologies forcing women into heterosexuality and discouraging lesbianism. Though there was no legislation prohibiting lesbian sex acts, this study considers how various other laws were used to control women's sexuality, and how these were used against young women or women in public places to contain lesbianism. Despite censorship, this study concludes that all published material on lesbianism in English was available here, as regulation was one thing, and enforcement another. Even where women did not themselves read the material, it influenced the attitudes of people around them, revealing proscriptions through veiled hints or silences. Though these discourses were intended to act as constraints, they did make women aware of lesbian possibilities, and unsettled heteroreality by suggesting the existence of alternatives. In this way cautionary tales and warnings about lesbianism could encourage the rebellion they were intended to dispel. Though most rebellion went no further than discreetly living in a forbidden relationship in the private domain, some women led lives on the edge, occupying the interstices between respectability and criminality, and mingling in the shadowy worlds of publicly visible male homosexuality and prostitution in hotel bars.

The study asks how pre-1970 New Zealand women could live as lesbians, by exploring New Zealand material circumstances including lesbian cultures, and focusing on selected individual accounts constructed from written and oral sources. It considers how these women were able to live independently, through exploring their access to education, employment or family support, to housing, and to information on lesbianism, including the use of terminology, as well as asking how they met partners and what seems to have motivated their lesbian lives and relationships.

Scope and limitations

This study is limited to pakeha and Maoriⁱ lesbian relationships after the late nineteenth century and does not address earlier relationships, or the post-1970 emergence of the women's movement, gay liberation, and lesbian feminism. The period extends from the late nineteenth century through to the end of the 1960s. There were many changes for women during this quite long period, but not before the 1970s and second-wave feminism was positive information on lesbianism available to many women, or relatively equal access to education, employment and housing achieved. In this sense, pre-1970

New Zealand women who led lesbian lives were all the “exceptional women” that Joy Hooten (1992) suggests are the subjects of biography, as they defied the prescriptions of compulsory heterosexuality and resisted the social constraints forcing most women into marriage through limiting other possibilities. Rather than a sociological inquiry gathering representative samples or a psychological inquiry gathering case-studies, this study is based on accounts constructed from written texts and oral histories, not intended as complete life-stories, but focusing on the women’s lesbian experiences and the circumstances enabling them to lead lesbian lives. Though there is quite a range of material, I do not claim that the experiences discussed here are typical or representative of all possible pre-1970 lesbian experiences in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I have included the voices of some working-class and Maori lesbian narrators, but it is difficult to find written records of earlier working-class New Zealand lesbians except for media accounts and trial records of women who transgressed against societal regulations. Since published auto/biographies and archival collections predominantly reflect the lives of upper and middle-class privileged women, part one of this study is constrained by the limited availability of other records.

This study is about New Zealand women. The selected women were either born in New Zealand, or lived in New Zealand for substantial periods. Overseas lesbian contextual material is included, as there have been strong overseas, particularly British, influences on New Zealand culture generally, as well as on lesbian cultures. Additionally, some of the selected women travelled, lived overseas, or read overseas publications.

Permeable boundaries of identity in the present suggest even more complex and contestable identities in the past. This study does not argue for a grand lesbian narrative, for cohesion between the fragments of lesbian experience presented here, or suggest an essential lesbian identity, unchanged through culture or time. Women living in the remote past may have understood sexual relationships differently to women in nineteenth or twentieth century New Zealand but, as Emily Hamer points out, generally all scholars are unanimous that most twentieth-century women were “sexually aware and had sex” (Hamer 1996, p.10). The New Zealand women whose experiences are explored here lived after the medicalisation of same-sex behaviours by sexologists, and they and the society around them were already influenced by the new medical discourses as well as by earlier religious and popular accounts of lesbianism (Foucault 1990a, Jeffreys 1985, Faderman 1981, 1991, 1999, Katz 1976, 1983, Halperin 1990).

Organisation

Part one of this thesis contains the formal elements, including the literature review, focusing on current issues and definitions of identity and difference and some of the research on lesbians previously undertaken and relevant to the present study. This review indicates that the study adds a new dimension of knowledge to previously existing scholarship on lesbianism in New Zealand, especially as the major New Zealand histories either ignore lesbians altogether, or complain that “it is very hard to write much meaningful about the history of New Zealand lesbianism before the 1970s” (Belich 2001, p.513). The lesbian and feminist theoretical approaches, frameworks, perspectives and methodologies informing this study and enabling pre-1970 lesbian life to be researched are discussed, including an explanation of how women were selected, the methods by which information was obtained, the ethical procedures, and problems encountered during the research process.

Part 2 contains research on the pre-1970 lesbian context, beginning in Chapter 4 with an outline of the climate of legal and medical opinion surrounding lesbianism and male homosexuality from antiquity to pre-1970 New Zealand, explaining the mechanisms by which lesbianism has been regulated and controlled. Laws and regulations addressing women’s gender conformity and moral conduct, functioned as deterrents and in some cases as punishments for transgressors, influencing how or whether women could live lesbian lives and develop lesbian relationships. Women were also controlled through medical treatments and procedures, and though the focus is on lesbian material, male homosexuality is included in the discussion of medical literature, where theories were applied to both sexes. Chapter 5 surveys pre-1970 information on lesbianism influencing the culture brought into New Zealand and shaping attitudes here. This was predominantly British, incorporating classical, biblical and literary discourses, added to by the popular media that continued to be imported into New Zealand, both officially and unofficially. The chapter considers the effect of censorship, concluding that probably all material on lesbianism was available here; the fact that it was forbidden making it seem more desirable. Material contributing to the construction of gender and the reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality in New Zealand is too extensive to include though, obviously, increased literacy, the popularity of novel reading, the development of romantic fiction, and representations of romance in film and television contributed to heterosexual ideologies influencing women’s sexuality and the gendering of society.

New Zealanders were affected and constrained by the imported cultural heritage promoting hetero-reality and contrasting its desirability with the deviancy and abnormality of same-sexual attraction. Foucault argues that “instances of discursive production” also “administer silences” (Foucault 1990a, p.12), and Chapter 6 considers where pre-1970 locally produced discourses on lesbianism were located and how silences were maintained. Chapter 7 examines the specificity of pre-1970 New Zealand women's historical place and the material conditions relevant to their sexual choices, enabling or constraining their ability to live lesbian lives, including the role of urbanisation, and improvements in communication. The pre-1970 lesbian cultures and communities existing overseas and in New Zealand are outlined in Chapter 8, including how restraints on women's participation in public spaces affected their ability to meet others, and how they were able to use recreational, cultural and occupational networks to meet other women.

Parts 3 and 4 focus on the stories of individual women and their lesbian experiences. The stories in Part 3 are based on written sources, including letters, diaries, auto/biography, newspaper accounts, obituaries, headstones, official documents and fiction, and though I do not dispute the possibility of other readings for these texts, I consider all sources open to lesbian readings (see Jay and Glasgow 1990, p.1). Chapter 9 provides shorter “glimpses” of lesbian life, from friendships suggested in published and unpublished auto/biographical sources, to female cross-dressers who came to public attention through court appearances and newspaper reports, to a glimpse of a lesbian friendship circle and pre-1970 attempts by New Zealand women to find contacts through the media.

Later chapters contain more detailed accounts of relationships between selected women, and describes their partners, networks and communities, demonstrating how these New Zealand written records require re-interpretation, re-focus and re-reading from lesbian perspectives. There has been research into the expatriate American lesbian community in early twentieth century Paris, but little research on New Zealand women leading lesbian lives who made similar choices to live overseas in greater anonymity. For example, Frances Hodgkins lived outside New Zealand as an “expatriate”, a term used by her biographer E.H. McCormick, himself homosexual, supporting herself through painting, teaching, and the generosity of her lesbian and male homosexual friends. Her lover Dorothy Kate Richmond, though living overseas for periods, returned here and was able to support herself as a teacher. The poet Ursula Bethell and her “consort” Effie Pollen

lived as expatriates before returning to Christchurch, where Bethell, who had private means, wrote poetry describing their home, garden and life together. The expatriate Katherine Mansfield had a twenty-year relationship with Ida Baker alongside her two marriages and other relationships with men and women, including love affairs in New Zealand with Maata Mahupuku and Edith Kathleen Bendall. I argue that her prominent Wellington family exiled her as a “remittance woman”, fearing scandal because of her lesbianism. Elsie Andrews and Muriel Kirton supported themselves as primary school teachers, remaining in New Zealand, with links to overseas lesbian communities through the Pan Pacific Women's Association and conferences. Feminist and pacifist activists, they were part of a network of women leading lesbian lives and living in lesbian relationships around the provincial city of New Plymouth. The story of English-born Elizabeth Pudsey Dawson, known as “Peter”, who lived here for over thirty years and who called herself a lesbian, illustrates the influences and information brought by lesbian immigrants. The last chapter in Part 3 overviews commonalities in the women’s lives, comparing them with overseas contemporaries to provide a wider lesbian context, and showing that economic independence, coupled with the strategy of discretion, enabled these women to lead lesbian lives.

There is some overlap between the period of these women’s experiences and the experiences of the self-identified lesbian narrators in Part 4, whose stories are based on edited oral histories. The first chapter in Part 4 provides “lesbian glimpses” based on the stories told among lesbians, comments from informants, personal knowledge, gossip and the grapevine. Later chapters give more detailed accounts from narrators who led lesbian lives and lived in lesbian relationships before 1970, some within lesbian networks and communities. Freda Stark was at the centre of the 1935 Mareo case, when her lover Thelma was murdered by her husband Eric Mareo. Stark’s story illustrates the kind of pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian life possible in a theatrical world, with connections to overseas networks. Stark had “affairs” with married women, married a gay man in a “white” marriage, and is the only narrator for whom published biography exists.

Betty Armstrong and Beatrice Arthur lived in a committed lesbian relationship for 57 years, supporting themselves through professional qualifications as a stenographer and nurse, respectively, making lesbianism the organising principle of their pre-1970 lives through careful strategies of discretion. Emily, a South Islander, and educated at a catholic girls’ school, trained as a shorthand typist, and lived in England for many years,

returning after retirement with her long-term partner. She had several secret lesbian relationships, including one with a married woman, and had a child adopted within her family, before deciding she could live more freely and support herself more securely overseas. Katie Hogg, another South Islander, catholic, and with no secondary school education, married early, and had several children before realizing she was attracted to women. Her marriage ended violently, and she struggled in a pre-benefit era to purchase a bed and breakfast business to support her children, before establishing a lesbian relationship with Julie Evans, a secondary school teacher, and moving to Auckland where they purchased a house together. Frances Kinney, twelve years younger, grew up in a middle-class Auckland home, received secondary education and then trained as a bookkeeper and shorthand typist, before becoming a broadcasting technical operator. She had several relationships with women, knowing it was a “night-time thing” she must keep hidden. Despite the difficulties and risks of living a life on the edge, she socialised during the 1950s and 1960s in publicly visible lesbian communities in Auckland and Wellington, as did Raukura (Bubs) Hetet, a Maori narrator, from Turangi, in the North Island. After leaving secondary school Bubs worked for the New Zealand Post Office and later the New Zealand Air Force. She was typical of the many post-WW2 Maori lesbians who moved to the city, obtaining employment in government or military service, and forming urban lesbian communities. Tighe Instone, from a middle-class Wellington family, attended a private girls’ college before training as a nurse, and socialising in the women’s hockey circle of lesbians. After an early lesbian relationship ended, she became an unmarried mother with a son, supporting them both, eventually purchasing a home with a later lesbian lover. Morrigan Severs, from a middle-class Christchurch family, was educated at a private girls’ school, trained as a primary school teacher, and also married early, having two sons. After several relationships with women Morrigan decided that she could not continue a life of deception, and eventually left her marriage to live in a lesbian relationship. The last chapter in Part 4 overviews commonalities from these accounts, before the concluding chapter of the entire study draws together the main themes and arguments.

As this thesis is based on auto/biography and oral history it contains considerable detail that could be removed to reduce the length and provide a broader sweep of the material. I decided not to do this, because only by collecting and placing together the small details of each life, could I build up a picture that allowed glimpses of how the women lived, and why they were unable to be public about their lesbian relationships and lives. I use

extensive quotations from the oral histories and from letters and diaries to enable their voices to be represented as fully as possible, and to do justice to the material.

Use of the term lesbian

*this is the oppressor's language
yet I need it to talk to you.*
(Rich 1984, p.117).

Identity is what you can say you are according to what they say you can be
(Johnston 1974, p.68)

Though the term “lesbian” remains the oldest term still in use for women’s same-sexual relationships, the meaning changed following the influence of lesbian feminism. Even by 1973 lesbian writer Jill Johnston could claim that within two years “the meaning of the word lesbian has changed from private subversive activity to political revolutionary” (Johnston 1974, p.275), with New York Radicalesbians defining it politically as “the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion” (Radicalesbians 1972, p.172). I use the term “lesbian” as Terry Castle suggests, in the dictionary sense of a woman “whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance” is to other women (Castle 1993, p.15), and my use is not intended to suggest post-1970 political meanings or forms of self-identification for the women in this study.

Rich (1980) used the idea of a “lesbian continuum” to include “woman-identified-experience” whether sexual or not, and though some scholars regard this as too broad, others including Jacquelyn Zita applauded it as illuminating women's struggle against the institution of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy, showing us what “needs to be named from the past” (Zita 1981, p.186). Judith Butler thinks “lesbianism defining itself in radical exclusion from heterosexuality deprives itself of the capacity to resignify the very heterosexual constructs by which it is partially and inevitably constituted” (Butler 1990, p.128). Renate Klein critiques this as “defeatist”, arguing that Butler and other postmodern theorists reproduce “outdated and unproductive (sexual) sameness/difference discourses”, and fail to eliminate the hetero-reality central to their writing (Klein 1996, pp.351-352). Hetero-reality perpetuates homophobia, regarded by Suzanne Pharr as the principal “weapon of sexism”, that forced pre-1970 lesbians like herself to “live a life of invisibility” within a world that hated and feared them (Pharr 1988, p.xiii).

Definitions of lesbianism that do not take account of the strategies of invisibility, silence, deception and discretion necessary for pre-1970 lesbian survival, prevent scholars from locating earlier lesbian lives. With echoes of Mary Daly, Penelope urges the use of the “lesbian perspective” which is “as much a process of unlearning as it is learning”, and an act of “furious self-creation” (Penelope 1990a, p.106), an approach I found useful for re-interpreting the written records in this study. Sarah Hoagland defines lesbian separatism as “a refocusing, a focusing on lesbians and a lesbian conceptual framework” (Hoagland 1988, p.63), and I also incorporated these ideas as a way to move forward from definitional restraints.

I therefore use the term lesbian in a broader sense than the specifically sexual, though not as broadly as in Rich’s continuum. My usage is particularly informed by Emily Hamer and by Lillian Faderman. Hamer argues that “one is a lesbian if the life that one lives is a lesbian life” suggesting identifying the life as lesbian, rather than the woman (Hamer 1996, p.10). She recommends that scholars should decide women were lesbian, when that is “the best explanation of their lives”, pointing out that, “the standard of visibility is not a universal prerequisite for knowledge”, for example in the case of the existence and effects of electricity (ibid. pp 2–3). Faderman uses lesbian as an adjective for women’s relationships, rather than as an identity for women who may not have identified themselves as such (Faderman 1999, p.3). US sex researcher Alfred Kinsey also used homosexual as an adjective for “homosexual relations...responses and activities” between women as well as between men (Kinsey et al.1953, p.446), thus allowing more experiences to be included than would have been possible using an identity based label. An earlier definition by Faderman defined lesbian as describing relationships where “two women’s strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other”, adding that “sexual contact may be a part of the relationship...or it may be entirely absent” (Faderman 1981, pp.17–18). Later, she suggested that earlier women, who did not identify as lesbians, may have “recognized themselves...as belonging to other categories with which they were familiar, and which do not exist today” (Faderman 1994, p.viii). Many women whose lives she examined were engaged in a necessary performance of heterosexuality by “donning women’s drag (both literally and figuratively)”, in order to allay societal suspicions (Faderman 1999, p.10). Like women in the present study, they lived lives of invisibility and silence to protect their lovers and their relationships. Despite this, as Blanche Wiesen Cook remarks of lesbian history, “the evidence is really there” (Cook in Schwartz 1979. p.8).

One reason for using the term lesbian in this study to describe lives and relationships, even of women who did not identify themselves this way, is because discarding it “is to collaborate with silence and lying about our very existence; with the closet-game, the creation of the *unspeakable*” (Rich 1979, p.202, original emphasis).

ⁱPakeha is a term for New Zealanders of European ancestry, as distinct from New Zealanders of Maori, or indigenous, ancestry.

Chapter 2

The Literature

Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of debates from recent lesbian, gay, feminist or queer scholarship concerning questions of identity, community and difference relevant to the present study. Present research must address the questions raised by postmodern scholarship concerning the stability of all identity and how this affects the assumptions of scholarly investigation. Research on lesbians requires clarification as to who or what the researcher means by the terms “woman”, “lesbian” and “identity”, and this chapter examines the implications of this for the present study.

There is little previous research on pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians, and a general paucity of New Zealand social or public history until comparatively recently. I consider the nature of lesbian history, categories of earlier lesbians, including romantic friends and cross-dressers, and survey existing overseas and New Zealand research on pre-1970 lesbians or relevant to New Zealand lesbian existence. This places the present study within a context of similar research and scholarship, indicating how it contributes to existing knowledge through a unique focus on pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian existence. It is part of what Rich calls, “the long process of making visible the experience of women” (Rich 1979, p.204), and to adapt Joan Scott’s views, “making [lesbians] visible [is] not simply a matter of unearthing new facts; it [is] a matter of advancing new interpretations” (Scott 1996, p.3).

Identity

*if they ask me my identity
what can I say but
I am the androgyne
I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language.*
(Rich 1973, p.19).

In discussing New Zealand women during this time period, I do not suggest they were an homogenous group, and agree that the term “woman” does not constitute a stable or biologically essential or genetically based universal identity pre-existing culture or

language. Since Simone de Beauvoir described “woman” as “Other” to “man”, arguing that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 1972, p.295), there have been many contributions to the debate. Denise Riley argued that the category “women”, is “historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change” (Riley 1988, pp.1–2). Though every society distinguishes physically between biological females and males, Butler asks whether the body itself may not be a “cultural performance...constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body” (Butler 1990, p.viii). She regards gender as produced by performance within language and “a doing”, though not by “a subject who might be said to preexist the deed”. Here she follows Nietzsche’s claim that “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (Nietzsche in Butler 1990, p.25). She suggests that if one is not born but becomes a woman, then the term is “in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (Butler 1990, p.33). Earlier, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis had similarly argued that people’s perception of the world was determined by language, and that categories like gender were “systematically elaborated in language and are not so much discovered in experience as imposed upon it”. Sapir suggested it was an illusion that people could adjust to reality “without the use of language”, as the “real” world was “unconsciously built on the language habits of the group” (Sapir 1970 in Livia and Hall 1997, p.9).

The identities of the New Zealand “women” in this study were produced in this country, constructed by both imported and local discourses. However, people perceived as and perceiving themselves as “women” experience different expectations and outcomes from people perceived as “men”, and gender, together with race and class affected the material choices available to the pre-1970 women in this study. Most found it difficult to achieve economic independence, and regarding their experience only as discursive practice does not adequately explain their material realities. De Beauvoir thought that only “through gainful employment” could women attain “liberty in practice”, though she believed that only in a socialist world would this be possible (de Beauvoir 1972, pp.689–690).

One of the ways gender affects the development of sexual identity is because material conditions and financial independence are necessary preconditions for the formation of lesbian identity. In her response to Rich (1980), Ann Ferguson describes “the weakening of the patriarchal family” as creating “the material conditions needed for the growth of

lesbianism as a self-conscious cultural choice for women” (Ferguson 1981, p.168). John D’Emilio dismisses the myth of an “eternal homosexual”, arguing that gay men and lesbians are a “product of history” associated with the historical development of capitalism, allowing them both to seek economic independence and “call themselves gay...as part of a community of similar men and women” (D’Emilio 1993, p.468). He does not adequately consider the consequences of the more limited opportunities to achieve economic independence available to women, as compared with men, or how this was further influenced by race, class, ethnicity, age, health or disability. New Zealand “woman” is not a unified or coherent identity, and some women in this study had greater material opportunities than others to lead lesbian lives.

In New Zealand, migration to the cities created an urban Maori working-class as well as bringing more Maori into contact with pakeha and fuelling increasing levels of racism (see Chapter 7). Maori formed the basis of post-WW2 lesbian and homosexual city communities, with significant class and race differences between these groups and the more private friendship circles of, for example, women like Ursula Bethell and Effie Pollen (Chapter 11). Divisions between New Zealand women were later explored at the 1978 Piha Women’s Liberation Conference, where Maori women challenged pakeha women to acknowledge racism, working-class women challenged middle-class women to acknowledge class privilege and lesbians challenged heterosexual women to acknowledge heterosexual privilege (Dann 1985, pp.33–35). Several Maori women have considered the intersections of gender, sexuality, class, race, colonization and oppression in their writing (Awatere 1984, Te Awekotuku 1991, Smith 1999).

In the US, Black, Jewish and women of colour critiqued uses of “woman”, which hid the multiple identities and multilayered experiences of diverse groups of women (Lorde 1984, Moraga and Anzaldua 1981, Hull et al. 1981, Beck 1982). Sisterhood can never be assumed, as women’s histories are never identical. Cherrie Moraga remarks of the poverty and discrimination many women of colour have experienced in the US, “the materialism...lives in the flesh of these women’s lives” (Moraga 1981, in Moraga and Anzaldua 1981, p.xviii). Audre Lorde, affirming her multiple identities as Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother and member of an inter-racial couple, warns there is “a pretence to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word ‘sisterhood’ that does not in fact exist”, as all identity is complex and composed of differences (Lorde 1984 pp.114 –116).

Penelope suggests, “Marx's framework and his resulting analysis don't accurately describe how we experience class”, as class among lesbians is not based only on money (Penelope 1994, p.15). Privilege determines aspirations, as access to resources, social, economic, educational shape any imagined future (ibid. p.53). Karen Chaney suggests, “differences in clothes, manners, the way you speak and carry your body are external dimensions of class”, but that even greater are the “internal differences...in life expectations, aspirations, horizons” (Chaney 1994, p.178). Though some pre-1970 working-class New Zealand women, like Katie Hogg (Chapter 20), lacked the aspirations and education to immediately seek independent lives as lesbians, others may have felt they had little to lose, like Eugenia Falleni or Mr. X (Chapter 9). However upper or middle-class women, like Katherine Mansfield (Chapter 12), were constrained by the expectations of family and social class.

How may difference be accommodated within lesbian research such as the present study? Bonnie Zimmerman warns the “power of diversity has as its mirror image...the powerlessness of fragmentation” (Zimmerman 1985, p. 268). Ellen Lewin wonders how “lesbian” can ever be “generalized beyond immediate and personal experience” (Lewin 1996, p.1), arguing that identifying as a lesbian may have a particular meaning in one context, which may “shift rapidly as the individual takes into account the other dimensions of her identity” (ibid. p.7). Biddy Martin concludes that “a consequence of such fragmentation is that lesbianism ceases to be an identity with predictable contents” (Martin 1993, p.289). Klein has pointed out that “At its most extreme, post-modernism disappears women” (Klein 1996, p.350), and there may well be an even greater risk of disappearance for lesbians. However, recognising national, racial, class, age and other differences among lesbians need not disappear the idea of lesbianism or inhibit research based on both difference and commonality. Interaction of these factors creates very different lesbian lives. The present study considers the common requirements all the women needed to live as lesbians, and addresses difference through adding the factors of class and race to gender and sexuality as further constraints on women's access to resources in the New Zealand context.

In what sense are the women in this study lesbians? Monique Wittig argues that lesbians are not “women”, as the word has meaning “only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems” (Wittig 1992, p.32). Sarah Hoagland suggests that “the category ‘woman’ is not a reflection of fact but instead tells us how to determine fact” (Hoagland 1988, p.15) She suggests that “the values of lesbian existence emerges not

through regulation or preservation, but rather through imagination and creation” (ibid. p.300). Most women in this study lived outside heterosexual marriage, creating and imagining other possibilities for themselves, so that Wittig and Hoagland’s work explains their lives more clearly than the less imaginative medical frameworks.

Some scholars argue that the idea of particular sexual identities originated in the nineteenth century with, as Fradenburg and Freccero describe “the organisation of sexuality into medicalised categories of deviant identity – hysterics, onanists, homosexuals”. Earlier, they explain, sexual activities were classified by the churches in an “ethico-judicial form of permitted and prohibited acts” as everyone was considered susceptible to sexual temptations (Fradenburg and Freccero 1996, p.vii). Foucault dates the idea of sexual identity to Westphal, famously claiming that from being a “habitual sin”, homosexuality became a “singular nature”, and from a “temporary aberration” the homosexual became “a species” (Foucault 1990a, p.43) and “homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf” (ibid. p.101). However, it spoke in a male voice for much of the pre-1970 period. Zita points out that Foucault's view of history as “the absence of a continuous revolutionary subject” obscures “the hard-fought and continuous struggles of women against male tyranny” (Zita 1981, pp.183–184), while Janice Raymond regards women’s friendships and resisting women as central to these struggles (Raymond 1986), and Rich argues that the history of lesbian existence is therefore very different from that of male homosexuality (Rich 1980, p.649).

John Boswell (1980) and Emma Donaghue (1993) suggest that same-sex relationships and experiences in earlier times were in fact labelled in ways indicating the idea of sexual identity, though Jonathon Katz (1983) and Randolph Trumbach (1994) think these labels reflected gender transgression rather than sexual desire. Media accounts of early cross-dressing New Zealand women using terms like “man-woman” (see Chapter 6) suggest gender transgression, but this runs alongside other representations of “lewd women” forming part of an extensive discourse on lesbianism (see Chapter 5).

Alfred Kinsey thought there were no differences of kind in sexuality but rather of degree, and that the “categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality are obviously meaningless, except perhaps as ideal types” (Robinson 1976, p.68). Ken Plummer believes only “fragments” of homosexual experience exist, and seeking “a unitary phenomenon designated ‘homosexual’ is discredited”, because

feelings, genders, behaviours, identities, relationships, locales, religions, work experiences, reproductive capacities, child-rearing practices, political disagreements and so forth... have been appropriated by a few rough categories like 'homosexual', 'lesbian', 'gay' (Plummer 1992, p.15).

Steven Seidman points out that the 1970s liberationist movements portrayed homosexuality and heterosexuality not as mutually exclusive, but as “universal aspects of humankind” (Seidman 1993, pp.111-115). Martha Shelley told heterosexuals that gay liberation wanted to “reach the homosexuals entombed in you, to liberate our brothers and sisters, locked in the prisons of your skulls” (Shelley 1972, p.34). However, Steven Epstein thinks that gay liberation, despite this aim, promoted the idea “among both gays and straights, that gays constitute a distinct social group”, thus helping to produce an essentialist model (Epstein 1987 in Whisman 1996, p.18). Vera Whisman argues that lesbian-feminism consistently rejected the ethnicity model, always portraying “sexual preference as potentially a choice, and the lesbian as Everywoman” (Whisman 1996, p.19).

Lesbian-feminist models applied to history assist researchers to shift beyond ideas of fixed identity, or having to first establish that women themselves understood their relationships as lesbian, before the researchers may regard the relationships in this way. From a lesbian-feminist perspective, lesbian identity itself is not just a female form of male homosexual identity, or a homosexual version of female heterosexual identity. Hoagland (1988) suggests lesbians are women who invent new ways of being within a different paradigm. Sedgwick sees Rich's lesbian continuum as found in its purest form in Faderman's work, which “de-emphasised the definitional discontinuities” (Sedgwick 1990, p.36). However, Celia Kitzinger and Rachel Perkins note that though the idea of “chosen lesbianism” may break down the boundaries between heterosexuality and lesbianism, these “are *not* equivalent options” (Kitzinger and Perkins 1993, p.51, original emphasis).

Though some women resisted societal prescriptions and lived as lesbians, this study does not argue that they did so for reasons of an innate sexual identity, or that women who did not choose this life were therefore heterosexual. The patriarchal framework of compulsory heterosexuality, defined by Raymond as an institutionalised system of “hetero-relations” including “traditional family roles, sexual division of labour, and gender-defined child-rearing and education” (Raymond 1986, p.57), constrained all New Zealand women's choices. Hoagland defines heterosexualism as “a way of living that normalises the dominance of one person and the subordination of another” (Hoagland 1988, p.7), and Jeffreys argues that heterosexual desire is “the eroticised subordination of women and

dominance of men” (Jeffreys 1993, p.45). In this setting, regarding lesbianism as simply a sexual preference would be Penelope’s “heteropatriarchal semantics” (Penelope 1986, p.62). Many lesbian-feminist theorists regard women’s sexual and social subordination as reasons why most women could not choose to lead lesbian lives. Penelope believes that “inside each lesbian is the headstrong, willful core of Self that enabled her to choose to act on her lesbianism” (Penelope 1990a, p.99). Doing this requires “each of us to conceive ourselves as someone other than what male society has said we are” (ibid. p.105). Raymond argues the “dismembering of female friendship is initially the dismembering of the woman-identified Self ... women who do not love their Selves cannot love others like their Selves” (Raymond 1986, p.4). Both these writers use Mary Daly’s capitalised Self to capture the idea of “the authentic centre of women’s process, while the imposed/internalised false ‘self’, the shell of the Self, is in lower case” (Daly 1991, p.26). I do not interpret this as referring to an essential Self, but rather to the processes of resistance and rebellion. In Chapter 25 I consider how resistance to the societal ideologies of domesticity and to the constructed identity of heterosexual “woman” enabled the women in this study to lead lesbian lives, even if they were not aware of sexual identity as such in the pre-1970 period. Many women resisted labels. Barbara Ponse reports a woman in a lesbian relationship refusing to define herself as lesbian, and asking, “why can't I just be - just me?” (Ponse 1978, p.173). Similarly some pre-1970 women in the present study may not have wanted their identity to be based solely on their lesbian relationships, before the insights of the 1970s liberation movements enabled them to conceptualise lesbian identity less fearfully and in a more positive manner. When speaking of women it is possible to see how both the view that lesbians existed in the past, and the argument that lesbian identity is of recent origin, are valid descriptions of how women leading lesbian lives and seeking lesbian relationships have always been viewed. It seems that in every society these women were regarded as troublemakers out of control, and in need of regulation and containment as women, not simply to prevent particular sex acts.

Private and public worlds: the closet and the community

The political notion of “coming out of the closet” was developed in the US, and does not seem to have been a factor in pre-1970 New Zealand. In the US, the original meaning of “coming out” appears to have been simply that of entering a lesbian social scene (Whisman 2000, pp.186-187). Even in recent times, the notion of coming-out or revealing lesbianism to outsiders is not unproblematic. Sedgwick suggests that openly gay people also have to deal with heterosexist presumption in each new encounter, never knowing whether

knowledge of their homosexuality is important, and regards the epistemology of the closet as giving “overarching consistency to gay culture and identity” (Sedgwick 1990, p.68). For Sedgwick the homo/heterosexual binary marks not only sexuality but also other significant categories including secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, same/different, or in/out (ibid.11). Paula Bennett discusses the effects of being in the closet both as a Jew and as a lesbian, calling the closet a “void”, with people

Caught between silence on one side and fear on the other...[living] in a state of constant duplicity, internally and externally divided by a lie that is not spoken, by an act of deception that is never acted out...To live in the closet, in this void, is to be constantly aware of what one is not saying, not doing, is not experiencing or receiving, because you are afraid to be fully, publicly yourself (Bennett 1982, p.5, original emphasis).

Rich points out that life “in the closet” means that “lying” described as “discretion” becomes “a strategy so ingrained” that it affects all relationships, and that “the liar leads an existence of unutterable loneliness” (Rich 1980, pp.190-191). However, in her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt (born in 1884 and a contemporary of several women in this study), Blanche Wiesen Cook points out that, for many of these women, the closet was

entirely satisfying and intensely romantic – its very secrecy lent additional sparkle to the game of hearts. The romance of the closet had a life of its own.

She also suggests that, “In the closet, romance between women developed its own ceremonies, coded words and costumes, pinky rings and pearls, lavender and violets” (Cook 1992, pp.13-14).

For women in this study, both the negative and romantic aspects of the closet could be true. Some regarded inhibiting their speech and actions as a necessary part of protecting their lives and relationships, explaining that it felt like belonging to a “secret society” (see Chapter 24). Not before the end of the period does it appear that significant numbers of women began to feel they no longer were prepared to dissemble or lead double lives. Biographers of lesbians who were contemporaries of women in this study stress their fear of exposure – for example, Janet Flanner lived an “eminently private [life], devoted to concealment” (Wineapple 1989, p.267). Foucault explains how social controls are achieved not only by scrutiny, but also by people policing themselves.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault 1977, p.202).

Self-policing is part of the internalised homophobia described by Pharr (1988). Lesbians internalise negative ideas about themselves, as well as remaining publicly silent and invisible to avoid societal punishments. In her biography of Virginia Woolf, Phyllis Rose remarks that “Bloomsbury's social radicalism was to consist not so much in novel and shocking behaviour as in talking openly about the things people had been doing all along in private” (Rose 1978, p.24). Most New Zealand women of the time would probably have found Bloomsbury's uninhibited sexual discussions as unsettling as did Katherine Mansfield (see Chapter 15).

The distinction between private and public life had been brought to New Zealand by British settlers, promoting “the doctrine of the separate spheres” prescribing that women's “personal lives centre around home, husband and children” (Freedman and Hellerstein 1981, p.118). Erik Olssen suggests that with the separation of home and work, New Zealand families became more private, and “a refuge from the world” (Olssen 1981, p.258). This reinforced the Victorian middle-class cult of domesticity and the idealisation of women as “the angel of the house”, promoting the home as woman's private sphere and the public world as a male domain (Coney 1993, pp.14-15). Women's increasing emancipation disrupted and blurred the private/public divide, as more women moved to cities and entered the paid work force (see Chapter 7).

The distinction between public and private did not hold for working-class life. Judy Giles suggests that the concept of privacy for some groups means only “not public” (Giles 1995, p.18), and that “keeping yourself to yourself” requires understanding “the concepts of a 'private' self and an 'inner' life”, raising questions about how women from different classes “represent themselves sexually as well as socially” (ibid. p.29). Middle-class women understand privacy, and what is their own business, as involving “a private self that might be distinguishable from another 'public' self” (ibid. p.100). Working-class heterosexual courtship did not take place in “the ‘privacy’ of the home” but always in “the public arena of the street” (ibid. p.105). Giles does not discuss lesbians but, for working-class women in lesbian relationships, public meeting spaces were also necessary for pre-1970 lesbian courtship. Faderman discusses the emergence of early lesbian bars in the US as a result of working-class patronage (Faderman 1991, pp.79-81). Liz Kennedy analyses “the structures of lesbian discretion” in her account of middle-class lesbian teacher Julia Boyer Reinstein's “private lesbianism”. Kennedy had stereotyped Reinstein as “not out” before the interviews, but later realised that during

the 1920s and the 1930s Reinstein was an active lesbian in a private scene. Although her family knew, she never “publicly disclosed” or talked about being gay (Kennedy 1996, p.16). Kennedy points out that such private lesbian life is difficult to identify, as letters, diaries and memoirs also “continue the pattern of discretion”. Reinstein's story suggests that when women in life-long relationships denied they were lesbians, this

should be interpreted as an assertion that their sexuality was not a public matter, rather than as a denial that they have a sexual interest in women (ibid. p.19).

Kennedy reports that Reinstein and her friends thought discussing love between women was inappropriate except within intimate love relationships, and that even lesbian friends rarely discussed lesbianism. They avoided the subject because naming themselves lesbian “would hasten the naming of themselves as a distinct kind of person and the inevitability of her emergence in the public world”, causing the loss of “social privileges” and “acceptance by family and society” (ibid.p.35). Kennedy notes that the women lived “hidden lives governed by fear of exposure” or left “lesbian life completely”, like Reinstein herself, who married “after almost thirty years as an active lesbian” when “circumstances left her isolated” (ibid.p.39).

Acceptance in all private lesbian circles and communities was contingent on conforming to the requirements of discretion and privacy. Faderman quotes Mary, who recalling her 1930s lesbian circle, explained that “you didn't belong if you were the blabbermouth type” (Faderman 1991, p.109). Communities can be both private, and also public. Sociologists first used the term “lesbian community” in the 1960s, to mean “not actual spatial communities but loosely organised groups of lesbians whose prime function was mutual support” (Schuyf 1992, p.53), and small cliques and informal groups were recognized as a basis for early lesbian communities in the US as well as in Germany (Ponse 1978, Schuyf 1992, Kokula 1983). Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) report that American lesbian culture was learned in the publicly visible communities of the lesbian bars, where lesbians learned appropriate behaviours and interactions.

Weeks points out that “homosexuality has everywhere existed, but it is only in some cultures that it has become structured into a subculture” (Weeks 1977, p.35), and “only in contemporary cultures that these became public” (Weeks 1981, p.110). Benedict Anderson argues that all communities are imagined by their participants, and that they may all be “joinable in time” (Anderson 1996, p.145). Communities may be “imagined on a number of

levels including the ways in which researchers themselves imagine the communities which they study” (Walters in Queen 1997, p.237). Dennis Altman agrees with Anderson that communities “are constantly created and re-created through human imagination” (Altman 1997, p.5), adding that while he sees it as “important to constantly decentre and deconstruct assumptions about identity, there is as much a need to construct positive myths that help create and unite communities” (ibid, p.68). In one sense, as Birch Moonwomon-Baird suggests, community is “always, somehow, speech community” (Moonwomon-Baird 1997, p.204), and in this sense pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians created their communities through telling stories of resistance similar to those in Part 4.

Lesbian history

Historians took little interest in New Zealand social history until quite recently. Jock Phillips, in acknowledging this lack before the 1990 New Zealand sesquicentennial, pointed out that though New Zealanders were “hungry for useful information about the evolution of their ways of life...what history could we give them?” (Phillips 1990, p.119). Our “cultural cringe” meant that British history was the focus of university history courses, and undergraduate New Zealand history was not taught until the 1960sⁱ (ibid. pp.120–124). Oral history developed during the 1970s, becoming a primary source for social history. After 1990 there was a growth of social and public history, including trade-union history, and during the 1993 women’s suffrage centennial year, there was a growth in women’s history. In her edited collection on New Zealand women’s organisations Anne Else (1993) included a chapter on lesbian organising by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Julie Glamuzina, Alison Laurie and Shirley Tamihana. In her edited collection on women's social history, Sandra Coney (1993) included a short article by Alison Laurie on earlier lesbian life. Earlier edited collections by Barbara Brookes et al. (1986, 1992) included articles on sexuality and birth control, but nothing on lesbians. Charlotte Macdonald (1990) admitted that some women in her study of nineteenth century single immigrant women chose never to marry, but did not mention lesbians. Prue Hyman in her consideration of the economic position of twentieth century New Zealand women, comments, “the increasing possibility of education and economic independence ...is a major reason for the emergence of a separate lesbian culture and identity” (Hyman 1994, p.180).

The major New Zealand histories hardly mention lesbianism, including Keith Sinclair (1969, 1996), W.H.Oliver and B.R. Williams (1981), Geoffrey Rice (1992) and James

Belich (1996, 2001). Sinclair (1996) mentions lesbians once, in the context of the 1970s women's movement, and Belich complains that for "lesbianism in particular", sources are "very hard to come by." He mentions "women with suspected lesbian dimensions to their lives", naming Ursula Bethell and Freda Stark, and as noted in the introduction, thinks it "hard to write much meaningful about the history of New Zealand lesbianism before the 1970s" (Belich 2001, pp.512–513). Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, in their edited collection claim, without discussing possible reasons, "the absence of essays on homosexuality, lesbianism and trans-sexuality reflects the fact that these issues are only slowly being researched historically" (Daley and Montgomerie 1999, pp.12–13). There are no chapters on lesbianism in recent collections on social and public history, Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips (2001) or Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum (2000). Melanie Nolan (2000) provides historic information on single women, work, and unemployment, without mentioning lesbians.

Julie Glamuzina argues that to counter the sexism and racism of traditional New Zealand historians, New Zealand histories must be rewritten, "unveiling hidden rules, prescriptions and assumptions and examining their implications for women" (Glamuzina 1992a, p.43). Aorewa McLeod (2001) uses Castle's (1993) idea of "ghosting" lesbians to inform her study of New Zealand's "lost lesbian writers and artists", giving as examples the lives of Margaret Escott, Jane Mander and Ngaio Marsh. These scholars urge researchers to go beyond the restraints of denial, distortion and destruction, when locating and interpreting materials on earlier lesbian lives.

A small but growing body of New Zealand research on the experiences of post-1970 lesbians includes Miriam Saphira's (1984) *Amazon Mothers*, based on her research on lesbian mothers, Kathleen Quinlivan's (1994) thesis *Ten lesbian students reflect on their secondary school experiences*, on homophobia in New Zealand schools and Allison Kirkman's (1996) thesis *Ways of Being Religious: Lesbians and Christianity* on the intersection of sexuality and religion. Other research on post-1970 lesbians addresses mothers, organisations, and discrimination in the work place, economics and literatureⁱⁱ.

The Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research (Sydney) and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (Melbourne) have promoted research on gay men and some lesbians through conferences and a series on Australia's homosexual histories, edited by

David L. Phillips and Graham Willett. Research on lesbians includes work by Lucy Chesser and Ruth Ford (discussed below). The Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington held New Zealand's first Lesbian and Gay History Conference in 2003, together with the exhibition *Outlines: lesbian and gay liberation in the 1970s*, encouraging new research on pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian history.

What is "lesbian history", and which women should be included? Emily Hamer suggests "lesbians have not been written out or missed out of history; it is rather that their lesbianism has not actually been written into their lives" (Hamer 1996, p.1).

Martha Vicinus points out that

conceptual confusion is perhaps inevitable in regard to lesbians, given the historical suppression of female sexuality in general...we need to be sensitive to nuance, masks, secrecy, and the unspoken.

She adds that lesbian history is "fragmentary and confusing", as it must include "teenage crushes, romantic friendships, Boston marriages, theatrical cross-dressing, passing women, bulldykes and prostitutes", commenting, "we rarely know precisely what women of the past did with each other in bed or out" (Vicinus 1996b, pp.235-236). She stresses the importance of historical context when researching lesbian lives (Vicinus 1994) as do the Lesbian Oral History Group, suggesting that while lesbian history is "unlikely to be institutionalised...its understandings are still influenced by cultural and social representations" (Lesbian History Group 1989, p.223). Stanley emphasises the importance of social relationships, critiquing the "spotlight" approach to historical biography and stressing the need for research on women's friendships and social context. As we cannot understand the past as those who lived it did, we must not "impose a theoretical structure on the lives and experience of historical people", but recognise instead that "love between women could take many shapes and meanings" (Stanley 1992b, p.210).

Sometimes records are deliberately hidden or destroyed by women anxious to conceal their lesbian lives, by their family or friends, or by later scholars. Faderman describes the techniques used to deny lesbian attractions as "bowdlerization, avoidance of the obvious, and *cherchez l'homme*" (Faderman 1979, p.74). In later work Faderman gives as an example of this censorship, Emily Dickinson's letters to Sue Gilbert, her sister-in-law, and the later editing by Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Phrases like

“be my own again, and kiss me as you used to”, and “cannot wait, feel that now I must have you” were deleted from the letters by Bianchi, aware of the discourses on homosexuality when she published the letters in the 1920s (Faderman 1981, pp.174-176).

Doris Faber admits she tried to have Eleanor Roosevelt's love letters to Lorena Hickok suppressed by the National Archives because, as “effusively affectionate letters”, they could harm Roosevelt's reputation (Faber 1980, p.331). The Archives ruled they could not lock up the letters, so Faber published them herself in a biography unsympathetic to Hickok. Cook discusses ER's relationship with Hickok and addresses the criticisms of those seeking to exclude this material by pointing out the limitations of not considering “the nature of passion, lust, and love in a woman's life” (Cook 1992, p.12). Earlier, Cook argued that despite what Judith Schwartz described as “the problems of censorship, definitions, and labelling” (Schwartz 1979, p.1), she thought that “the evidence is really there. One has to deny, distort, and contort a great deal to ignore it”, concluding “fear, homophobia, DENIAL” are the strategies used to hide lesbian history (Cook 1979 in Schwartz 1979, p.8). The present study notes how the lives of Katherine Mansfield, Frances Hodgkins and Ursula Bethell, in particular, have been subjected to these strategies.

Fortunately, much lesbian history cannot be removed or censored. Hamer points out that the “major resource of social history is still *public* documentation” (her emphasis). Though most lesbian history is unrecorded in official documents as it “lies outside” a legal framework – in modern times British women were not charged with having sex with other women, and lesbians cannot marry – many documents and records nevertheless exist in the public domain. Hamer argues that the “records of lesbian history are the minor details of ordinary life: whom a woman lived with, who her friends were, what books she read, the clothes she wore, the work she did and her political and moral beliefs”. She admits “this may seem to elide history with biography” (Hamer 1996, p.4). Stanley also agrees that “in a sense it is *only* biography which can make available the detailed processes of historical change” (Stanley 1992b, p.210). Accordingly, the present study uses the auto/biographies of individual women as the best available technique for capturing pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian history.

It is important to collect and combine whatever disparate materials exist. Nancy Adair and Casey Adair produced *Word is Out Stories of Some of Our Lives* (1978) based on their documentary film. They videoed 150 interviews, selecting 26 for the film, and transcribed stories for the book, including nine of lesbians. The Andrea Weiss and Greta Schiller documentary film *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community*, (1988) presented aspects of US lesbian and gay communities from 1900 - 1969, with an illustrated historical guide based on the film. They included interviews, clips from newsreels and Hollywood movies, newspaper, magazine and television reports, photographs, scrapbooks, home movies and personal memorabilia. Jonathan Ned Katz (1976, 1983) interweaves news reports, diaries, letters, medical case records, trial testimonies, laws, fiction, songs, cartoons and reviews of books, movies and plays, collecting and assembling them to provide an understanding of homosexuality in the US. Alison Oram and Annemarie Turnbull (2001) assemble a wide range of materials, including court records, newspaper reports, letters and extracts from magazines, to build a tapestry of British lesbian life. No such projects have been attempted yet in New Zealand, but by bringing together a selection of different materials the present study starts a similar process for New Zealand lesbian life.

Romantic friendships and lesbian sex

The idea of platonic “romantic friendships” has been used to disallow interpretations of historic lesbianism, though this was not the intention of the lesbian scholars originating the discussion. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg studied women’s correspondence and diaries, concluding that the nineteenth century “cultural environment” allowed individuals to move “across the spectrum” of “emotions and sexual feelings” (Smith-Rosenberg 1985, p.76). She suggests that “the central question is not whether these women had genital contact and can therefore be defined as homosexual or heterosexual” (ibid.p.58), because within homosocial nineteenth-century American networks “devotion to and love of other women became a...socially accepted form of interaction” (ibid.p.60). Nancy Sahli thought it important to look at how “women defined their parameters themselves”, rather than “whether these relationships were sexual” (Sahli 1979, p.18, note). Faderman in her landmark study suggested that “in an era when women were not supposed to be sexual, the sexual possibilities of their relationship were seldom entertained”. She thought however that many romantic friends would have “felt entirely comfortable in many lesbian-feminist relationships had the contemporary label and

stigma been removed” (Faderman 1981, p.414). Debates developed about whether these friendships were celibate and on the meaning of lesbian sex.

These writers believe women’s “romantic friendships” were socially acceptable before nineteenth century sexology stigmatized them as deviant, though Smith-Rosenberg has said since that though at the time she wrote she did not directly claim the women had genital sex, she later decided some didⁱⁱⁱ. Sheila Jeffreys also thinks that the impact of sexology was negative, arguing “to fit women's passionate friendship into the category of lesbianism, it was necessary to categorise the forms of physical expression quite usual in these relationships as homosexual behaviour” (Jeffreys 1985, p.109). This occurred “in response to a concatenation of social and economic circumstances which offered a real threat to men's domination over women” (ibid.p.111). Jeffreys agrees that intimate female friendships were socially acceptable, and suggests that “it is not the existence of love between women that needs explaining but why women were permitted to love then in a way which would encounter fierce social disapproval now” (ibid. pp.103-104). In later writing Jeffreys points out that “the history of heterosexuality...does not rely on proof of genital contact”, as heterosexuality is “an institution...and a cultural universe”, and regarding “heterosexuality or homosexuality...simply [as] sexual practices, is to ignore politics entirely” (Jeffreys 1989, p.23). She thinks it possible that some women “engaged in passionate embraces as a usual part of a passionate friendship, might discover the interesting sensations attendant on genital friction” (ibid.p.27), but worries that if lesbians are “defined by genital contact” they will remain “a tiny minority of women” (ibid.p.28).

Stanley critiques Faderman’s view as based on assumptions that “sexual” means the same now as in earlier centuries, and that she “makes a distinction between the ‘sexual’ as genital acts... and the ‘non-sexual’, thereby defining much erotic behaviour as non-sexual”, and defining “as ‘lesbian’ only a very narrow set of genital sexual relationships” (Stanley 1992b, p.196). Esther Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony (1993) point out that some contemporary lesbians live in “Boston marriages”, or relationships which are no longer sexual or where there is little sex, but regard themselves as lesbians without considering genital contact essential for their self-definition. Marilyn Frye argues that the idea of sex is defined solely from a male, heterosexual perspective. She questions whether lesbian sex can be likened to heterosexual sex at all, suggesting that what “85% of long-term heterosexual married

couples do more than once a month takes on the average 8 minutes to do” (Frye 1990, p.306) and asking how lesbians should count their “sexual acts. By orgasms? By *whose* orgasms?” (ibid.p.308, original emphasis).

Lisa Moore enters this debate by critiquing the claim that women’s romantic friendships were ever “widely approved of and idealised and therefore were never conceived of as sexual, even by romantic friends”. Instead, she argues, there was “conflict between approving accounts of the chastity of these relationships, virulent denunciations of the dangers of female homosexuality, and self-conscious representations of homosexual desire by women”. She thinks Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg’s studies “obscure the wariness and even prohibition that sometimes surrounded women’s friendships”, because they rely on “the category of gender” rather than a “systematic consideration of sexuality” in attempting “to understand women’s intimate friendships” (Moore 1996, p.23). This is consistent with Rich’s view of lesbianism as “an act of resistance” (Rich 1980, p.649) and that history may “lead to misconstrual when it obliterates acts of resistance or rebellion” (Rich 1993, p.249).

A classic story of romantic friendship is that of the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who eloped to Wales from Ireland in 1778 and lived together for fifty years. Elizabeth Mavor dismisses “the obvious Freudian interpretation” arguing (without evidence) that their relationship was “innocent” (Mavor 1971, p.xvii), and following, as did Colette (1968, pp.117–131), the traditional desexualisation of the Ladies. Castle points out that the Ladies themselves were aware of societal disapproval of lesbianism, and threatened to prosecute a newspaper for suggestively depicting their relationship (Castle 1993, p.94). It seems most likely that society only approved of women’s romantic friendships if they were able to present them as sexually chaste.

Even Anne Lister (1791-1840) took care to hide her sexual relationships with women. Helena Whitbread’s edited diaries of Lister, an unmarried upper class Englishwoman, provide explicit accounts of Lister’s sexual relationships with women, and indicate she was self-consciously aware of lesbianism.^{iv} Educated and familiar with Greek and Latin, Lister pondered her erotic lesbian passions in ways suggesting she saw herself as special, referring to her “oddities” (Lister 1821 in Whitbread 1988, p.156) and Whitbread describes her “sexual liaison” with the married Marianne Lawton, among

other women (Whitbread 1988, p.7). Similarly to modern lesbian historians Lister and Lawton themselves speculated about the sexual relationship between the Ladies, Lawton asking Lister if she thought it “had always been platonic”, to which Lister replied

I cannot help thinking that surely it was not platonic. Heaven forgive me, but I look within myself & doubt. I feel the infirmity of our nature & hesitate to pronounce such attachments uncemented by something more tender still than friendship. But much...depends upon the story of their former lives, the period passed before they lived together, that feverish dream called youth (Lister 1822 in Whitbread 1988, p.210).

Moore concludes from this passage that for Lister “sexual love between women was not only possible but also likely in the context of romantic friendship” (Moore 1996, p.33). Castle suggests “kiss” is Lister’s code word for orgasm, as she knew French, and must have known “the double sense of...baiser, which means both to kiss and to fuck” (Castle 1993, p.100 note). Lister wrote “Went to M – but somehow did not manage a good kiss” (Lister 1821 in Whitbread 1988, p.159), and “Two last night: M- spoke in the very act...All her kisses are good ones” (Lister 1824 in Whitbread 1988, p.351). Jill Liddington points out that during an argumentative period in her relationship with Ann Walker, Lister “regularly opened her daily diary with ‘No kiss’” (Liddington 1998, p.235). Liddington believes Lister’s “lesbian flirtations were well-known, tolerated and by some even admired” within her own social circle because “there was a tolerance of sexual peccadilloes - so long as the form of conventional marriage was preserved” (ibid. p.17). However, Lister’s caution and unwillingness to acknowledge her relationship with Lawton confirm Moore’s view that women had to present their friendships as celibate because sexual relations between women were not acceptable. Lister denied all knowledge of lesbian possibilities when it suited her. When she first met “Mrs Barlow” in Paris, with whom she later developed a relationship, Anne responded disingenuously, when Mrs Barlow

Began talking of that one of the things of which Marie Antoinette was accused of was being too fond of women. I, with perfect mastery of countenance, said I had never heard of it before and could not understand it or believe it. Did not see how such a thing could be...I could go as far in friendship...as most but could not go beyond a certain degree & did not believe anyone could do it. We agreed it was a scandal invented by the men (Lister 1824 in Whitbread 1992, p.31-32).

This illustrates how even though protected by her fortune, Lister was still cautious when women made coded approaches. She had reason for concern; her relationship with Eliza Raine, an Anglo-Indian heiress had ended when Eliza was pronounced insane and committed to a mental institution in 1814, at the age of 23 (Liddington 1998, p.15-16).

After Lister's death, her domestic partner Ann Walker inherited a life-tenancy at Shibden Hall, but was forcibly removed as being of "unsound mind" by doctors and the constabulary, designated "a lunatic" and committed to a private asylum (ibid. 238). Fear of such consequences continued into twentieth-century New Zealand (see Chapter 4).

Emma Donaghue argues historical "eroticism between women ... was neither so silent and invisible as some have assumed, nor as widely tolerated as others have claimed" (Donaghue 1993, p.7). She challenges the assertion that there was no language about erotic passion between women, giving examples of specific labels not confined to "isolated sexual acts", but to the "emotions, desires, styles, tastes and behavioural tendencies that can make up an identity". Nineteenth-century sexologists created "the stereotype called 'the lesbian' ... however, a wide variety of lesbian types had been described in [earlier] texts" (ibid. p.3). Donaghue points out that "attitudes varied... the same woman could be considered by different observers an innocent 'romantic friend', a 'pseudo-hermaphrodite' or 'tribade' ... or a sinful 'Lesbian', 'Sapphist' or 'tommy' (ibid. p.6). Expressions including " 'lewd women', 'lustful elves', 'abominable women' and 'female Fiends' may sound vague... but in the texts... each makes a perfectly clear reference to women-lovers" (ibid. p.6).

Moore gives Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel *Belinda* as an example of the disapproval of lesbianism, where "Harriot Freke", a cross-dressing "man-woman", is used to warn women about their "choice of female friends" (Moore 1996, p.27). She suggests this is because of "anxieties" underscoring "the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of policing the boundaries of romantic friendship". Though "female friendship could ... guarantee female virtue" by fixing attention on other women, it "could also result in a dangerous female autonomy from men" (ibid. p.28).

It seems likely, as Rich (1980) and Raymond (1986) suggest, that male supremacist societies always disapproved of women's friendships and love for one another, and punished them accordingly. The twentieth-century British women whose lives Hamer explores were, except for wealthy lesbians like Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, reticent and careful, as no earlier lesbian could safely "speak as a lesbian" (Hamer 1996, p 24, original emphasis). The Ladies hoped to portray themselves as "the epitome of celibate devotion" (Castle 1993, p.94), and without doubt other women constructed similar images for fear of the consequences. Anyone who did not, might vanish as a

Victorian “madwoman in the attic”, like Ann Walker. As Liddington points out “It is as if Ann Walker never was” (Liddington 1998, p.241).

The scholarly debate on romantic friendship and lesbian sex was developed by lesbian theorists to further the understanding of the circumstances and context of lesbian history. However, their ideas have been taken up and used by heterosexual historians of women, and even by some lesbians, to deny their subjects’ lesbianism. Research intended by lesbians to open up new possibilities for lesbian history is used to close down lesbian study by excluding almost every prominent woman of the past from lesbian existence. For example, Frances Porter, though including material on the friendships of the Richmond women Dorothy, Mary and Margaret, argues that such “close bonding between women was part of the ambience of the age”, and therefore cannot be regarded as sexual (Porter 1995, p.337). This theme is continued in Frances Porter and Charlotte MacDonald, who though including a chapter on “bosom friends”, insist (without evidence) that this “language of intimacy” does not refer to “sexual activity” (Macdonald and Porter 1996, pp.186–187). For the purposes of this study, I re-visit these and other materials, placing them into a lesbian context, and arguing they may be interpreted as evidence of sexually expressed lesbian relationships. I include “romantic friendship” within the range of lesbian lives and experiences and regard “proof” of genital sex as an unworkable requirement.

In her later work Faderman has suggested using the term lesbian “as an adjective” to describe women’s “committed domestic, sexual, and/or affectional experiences” rather than using it as a noun “to describe their identity” agreeing with postmodern views of identity as “precarious” and unstable ((Faderman 1999, pp.1–2). She suggests earlier women “may even have invented categories (or refined the older ones of “romantic friendship” and “Boston marriage”) that have been lost to us in the pat classifications of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual...current in more recent generations” (ibid p.73).

Cross-dressers

Other scholars dispute whether earlier women who cross-dressed should be regarded as lesbians. Leslie Feinberg argues many cross-dressers should be regarded as female- to-male transgendered men, not as lesbians (Feinberg 1996). Judith Halberstam (1998) suggests theorising a range of female masculinities indicating multiple genders as well

as sexual desires would better explain cross-dressing women than the term lesbian. Julie Wheelwright (1989) argues many female cross dressers were actually heterosexual, and cross-dressed only in order to join their husbands in all-male environments. However, Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull suggest it is far more likely women cross-dressed in order to escape their husbands, or to avoid marriage (Oram and Turnbull 2001, p.12). Working-class communities may have sympathized with women who “needed to survive” by “gender transgression” and cross-dressing (Townsend in Oram and Turnbull 2001, p.14), but whether these communities accepted cross-dressers who were sexually involved with other women is unclear.

Trumbach believes the paradigm of two sexes and two genders dates only from the early eighteenth century and is related to the beginnings of modern equality between men and women. He considers sexual relations between women were not “tied to cross-dressing” in eighteenth century London, though some “sapphists” began to cross-dress as “a way of attracting women” (Trumbach 1994, pp.121–122). Donaghue wonders how Trumbach could “know what were the intentions of women as they chose their clothes” (Donaghue 1993, p.90). I regard the cross-dressers in this study as having led lesbian lives, though note that Amy Bock and Bertha Victor (Bert Rotciv) also married men. Given the unequal economic circumstances of women, cross-dressing to access male employment opportunities (Falleni and Mr. X) is understandable. Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol (1989) researched 119 female cross-dressers from criminal records in the Netherlands between 1550 - 1839, concluding that though most were motivated by economic advantage through access to male opportunities, many were also motivated by love for other women. They point out that successful cross-dressers left no records, and that their study was limited to women who came to official attention.

Lucy Chesser discusses Australian cross-dressing cases pointing out that the wide reporting of the exposure of Mrs. Edward de Lacy Evans as a woman, brought “to the forefront the issue of sexual desire between women” (Chesser 1998, p.54). She argues that though in the Australian setting “cross-dressing, sex impersonation, and same-sex marriage” were dealt with as matters of law, ordinary nineteenth-century people possessed “knowledge about desire between women that is more diverse and extensive than available sources...indicate” (ibid. pp.72-73). Ruth Ford examines the case of Annie “Harry” Payne, who lived as a man for thirty years, and was discovered to be a

woman when admitted to hospital in 1939. Annie Payne and Harriet Brown had worked as female domestic servants in Newcastle, before moving to Maitland and marrying in 1911, Annie re-naming herself “Harry Frederick”. After Harriet’s death Harry married Louisa Adams, who probably knew s/he was a woman. On discovery, Harry insisted s/he was not a woman, and was admitted to the Orange Mental Hospital. Ford concludes Payne posed a threat to “fixed gender boundaries and normative heterosexuality”, and was “incarcerated on a gender-normative insanity classification” (Ford 2000, pp.61-62).

Some women may have felt they could not give themselves permission to love other women unless they cross-dressed or imagined themselves to be male in the relationship. A seventeenth-century example of psychic cross-dressing is discussed by Judith Brown (1986), in her account of Sister Benedetta Carlini, who claimed she was possessed by Splenditello, a male angel, during a sexual relationship with Sister Bartolomea. The nuns and their inquisitors had been in religious life since childhood, so the idea of possession was familiar, though the inquisitors decided that the women were deceived by a demon masquerading as an angel, as an angel would not cause Benedetta to commit “immodest acts”. Benedetta may have believed she was a male angel, or may have convinced other sisters of this for sexual purposes.

Though cross-dressers must be understood in the context of their own times, I believe most pre-1970 New Zealand cross-dressers in this study are best understood within a lesbian context. It is difficult to justify why these women should be eliminated from the supposedly ahistoric category of lesbianism, only to be placed within other modern categories of transgender or heterosexual transvestism.

Criminal cases

Women leading lesbian lives sometimes came to public attention through their involvement in criminal cases, as perpetrators or victims, and lesbianism is seldom denied in these negative circumstances. Lisa Duggan discusses the case of 19-year-old Alice Mitchell, who murdered 17-year-old Freda Ward in 1892, depicted by early US newspapers as an “Unnatural Crime” and “love-murder”. She suggests the newspapers constructed stories about lesbianism, that were then appropriated by sexologists, and reworked by the women themselves as “identities”, and that these sources must therefore be read “against the grain”. As lesbians do not come from outside culture or

history, Duggan argues that retelling “our culture’s dominant stories” is a form of “lesbian resistance”, suggesting that these stories “re-present and re-make the world ...in an ongoing process of re-vision” (Duggan 1993, p.809).

Julie Glamuzina and Alison J. Laurie (1991) re-tell the 1954 case of Pauline Parker and Juliet Hume, who murdered Parker’s mother, Honora, allegedly because they were in a lesbian relationship and wanted to avoid being separated. They examine how the girls were represented by the courts and by the media as “mad” or “bad”, and were demonised within a context of connecting lesbianism with murder and insanity, rather than any attempt being made to understand the girls as juveniles committing a family murder. Glamuzina (1992b) re-presents the 1967 Raewyn Petley and Ellen Davis murder case, where Davis was found not guilty of murdering her lover Petley, depicted by the defence as “a hunting lesbian” who killed herself. This study re-visits these cases as examples of how the New Zealand media has depicted lesbianism (Chapter 7).

Lesbian oral history and auto/biography projects

Oral history is an important source of lesbian history. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis (1993) collected 45 oral histories from working-class lesbians in Buffalo, New York over 13 years, as trusted insiders with substantial access to these communities. These interviews are the basis of their account of the growth of lesbian identities and communities in Buffalo from the mid 1930s to the early 1960s. No informants are identified and the information is organised thematically, in chapters on sex, relationships, monogamy, coming out, butch/femme roles, motherhood, ageing, racism, work, oppression and lesbian pride. The project describes bars and house parties, demonstrating how oral history can retrieve previously undocumented cultures through retrospective accounts and memory. Though there are considerable differences, in that New Zealand did not have the large and publicly visible lesbian communities that developed in US cities, there were occupational groupings and small urban communities here, and this study has application to the New Zealand situation.

Esther Newton (1993) interviewed nearly 100 men and women associated with Cherry Grove, the oldest holiday resort on Fire Island, New York, used by lesbians and gay men since the 1930s. Newton was part of these communities, giving her access as a trusted participant to their unique histories and cultures, which are predominantly gay, lesbians comprising a quarter of her narrators. Newton attributes the growth of this

recreational community and meeting-place to the development of the American vacation. Belich has discussed New Zealand holidays, linking them to the New Zealand bach, or holiday home, and to improved transportation (Belich 2001, p.528), but there has not yet been research on pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian or homosexual holiday resorts.

The Brighton Ourstory Project (1992) edited collection is based on a “living memory archive of material”, including oral histories, transcripts, photographs, pulp fiction, newspapers and magazines. The project comprised forty oral histories of lesbians and gay men edited to provide extracts woven together with photographs, with narrators recounting the isolation and difficulties of the 1950s and the gradual social liberation of the 1960s. The stage show *Like Mills and Bleedin’ Boon*, based on the Brighton interviews was produced in Wellington by Ourstory Project visitor Linda Pointing, inspiring a local theatre production using New Zealand stories collected for this purpose from lesbians.

The London-based Lesbian Oral History Group (1989) was part of the Hall Carpenter Archives oral history project that interviewed over 60 lesbians and gay men about the period 1930–1980. They then edited the transcripts of the lesbian interviews into 5000 word pieces for an anthology, selecting 15 stories to appear in separate chapters, an example of editing oral histories to manageable length and producing them as written accounts. A New Zealand lesbian oral history project has been done by Lois Cox and associates, who interviewed sixteen older lesbians, archived at the Oral History Centre of the Alexander Turnbull Library under a twenty-year embargo.

Garry Wotherspoon used a combination of oral histories and archival research to trace the development of Sydney’s “homosexual sub-cultures since the 1920s”. There is little information on lesbians, Wotherspoon explaining this as a result of the “forces shaping lesbians’ lives” in Australia being different to those of gay men, making the history of Australian lesbians “more properly part of women’s history” (Wotherspoon 1991, p.9). Wotherspoon uses oral history to uncover antipodean homosexual cultures, and provides local context to distinguish the specificity of Australian gay cultures and their difference from those of North America and Europe. The catalogue of Ruth Ford, Lyn Isaac and Rebecca Jones (1996) is based on nine edited oral histories from Australian lesbians, which accompanied their lesbian exhibition of Australian lesbian culture.

Most research on earlier lesbians is auto/biographic. Auto/biographies, published diaries and letters of individual women who experienced lesbian relationships or identified as lesbians as well as auto/biographies of some earlier homosexual men, illuminate earlier lesbian cultures, and I refer to some of these for comparative purposes in this study. Collective auto/biographies include Suzanne Neild and Rosalind Pearson (1992), who collected nineteen autobiographies written by older British lesbians, an example of how collective auto/biography may be used to illuminate and contextualise specific lesbian cultures and communities.

Unfortunately, many biographers eliminate references to lesbianism. For example, *The Book of New Zealand Women* edited by Charlotte Macdonald et al. (1991) contains three hundred short biographies, but indexes only two under lesbian,^v though others in the collection are known to have had lesbian relationships,^{vi} including Katherine Mansfield and Maata Mahupuku, whose relationship is mentioned in both their respective entries (Boddy 1991, p.416; Angus 1991, p.401). Entries in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, include women who led lesbian lives, for example Ursula Bethell and Elsie Andrews, and though reference is made to their close friends, lesbianism is not mentioned.

Hilary Lapsley (1999) is a New Zealand scholar who has researched the lesbian relationship of the American anthropologists Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. In her in-depth study Lapsley describes Mead's relationships with both women and men, regarding her as bisexual and as a woman who led both lesbian and heterosexual lives.

Some biographies of New Zealand homosexual men provide insights into lesbian life. In the biography of her homosexual father Norman Gibson, Miriam Saphira describes his relationship with Roy Ayling and their reputation as the "nude farmers of Inglewood", mentioning a circle of homosexual men and lesbians in New Plymouth (Saphira 1997, p.3). Toss Woollaston, who knew Gibson and Ayling, believes they were not homosexual "in a physical sense", explaining that his own family saw their relationship as "perfectly natural", as they had been brought up on the story of David and Jonathan, whose (supposedly) platonic love "exceeded the love of women" (Woollaston 1972, p.187).

These collections of oral history, and of auto/biography raise questions about the role of memory and of retrospectively creating meaning from the experiences of others. The oral historians were part of creating reminiscences together with their narrators, and their interpretation is necessarily different from that of biographers who had no part in creating the materials they discuss, though did of course select and place them together. I return to a consideration of these questions as they relate to the present study, in the following chapter.

Summary

Questions of what constitutes gender, difference and lesbian identity and community are central to research on lesbian lives and relationships. In this study, I explore lesbianism in the lives of pre-1970 New Zealand women, seeking commonalities and shared experiences, while recognising their differences, including race and class. However, the vexed question of whether sexual identities are of recent origin or not is irrelevant to the study, as the selected women lived after the medicalisation of same-sex desire. Lesbian identity is not identical with homosexual male identity, and lesbianism and heterosexuality are not equivalent life-style choices, given the political controls placed on women through the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality.

Most overseas and New Zealand research on lesbians is on the post-1970 period, with little material on pre-1970 lesbians. General New Zealand history received little attention before the 1960s, and most social and public histories were published after 1990. Because much information on earlier women's lives has been deliberately hidden or distorted in order to deny their lesbianism, lesbian history is difficult to research. In order to eliminate women from lesbian history, some scholars have claimed that romantic friendships cannot be claimed as lesbian relationships, because they may have been celibate, and that cross-dressing women were not lesbians either, as they were either heterosexual transvestites or female-to-male transgendered men. However, despite these denials and distortions, documentary records are a primary source for uncovering lesbian lives or experiences, and oral history a primary tool with which to capture lesbians' own accounts. The following methodology chapter discusses how this study has applied these methods of research.

ⁱThe *New Zealand Journal of History* began only in 1967, and the New Zealand Historical Association not before 1979 (Phillips 1990).

ⁱⁱFor example, see relevant chapters in Laurie 2001a.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg interview by Alison Laurie 1988, Lesbian Community Radio Programme, Wellington Access Radio.

^{iv} Lister wrote in a cipher decoded by Helena Whitbread, using a code-key made by family member John Lister. Liz Stanley considers Whitbread's reliance on his code-key may detract from the accuracy of the *Journals*; personal discussion 1995.

^v They are “Prudence Gregory (1925-1986)”, by Julie Glamuzina, and “Belinda Trainor (1958-1986)”, by Pat Rosier.

^{vi} Including Mary Taylor (1817 -1893), Jane Mander (1877-1949), Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982).

Chapter 3

The Methodology

Perspectives

The approaches used in this study are feminist and lesbian frameworks of enquiry, including the view that all studies of lesbians are political and that an understanding of the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality is crucial to examining the limitations on women's friendships (Rich 1980). Studying the accounts of individual lesbians is a useful method for revealing the political aspects of lesbian identity (Kitzinger 1987, p.90).

I used feminist auto/biographic approaches to obtain information about the selected lives, and then wrote accounts of their lesbian experiences based on my interpretation of the written records, or of the oral histories I recorded. Shulamit Reinharz suggests that feminist research "blurs genres by blurring disciplines" and that feminists do not seem "alienated from fields other than the one(s) in which we have been educated" (Reinharz 1992, p.250). Carolyn Sherif predicts that feminist methodology will be realised when scholars "recognise the need for cross-disciplinary inquiry" (Sherif 1982 in Reinharz 1992, p.250). Klein points out that feminist methodology is "transdisciplinary", and can never conform to "how-to-recipes" developed by single disciplines (Klein 1983, p.90). Judith Halberstam calls her approach "a scavenger methodology", as she combines information "culled from people", with information "culled from texts", and refuses "the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam 1998, pp.12-13). Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1992) discuss the process of "breaking out" from traditional academic disciplines to encompass the range of research methods and ideas. Gerda Lerner urges women to acquire the confidence for "making new [tools] to fit our needs" (Lerner 1992, p.329).

Feminist approaches to research are systems of thinking which seek to end women's subordination (Jaggar 1983, p.5). Penelope argues that the "patriarchal universe of discourse", includes language itself (Penelope 1990b pp.xxvi). She suggests that though "men may control the information we get...we can control how we interpret and use it" (ibid p.236), arguing elsewhere that using "the lesbian perspective challenges what heterosexuals choose to believe is 'fact' " (Penelope 1990b, p.107), reminiscent of

the “lesbian conceptual framework” described by Hoagland (1988, p.63). Stanley suggests that feminist research must move into history in order to “act upon our present” (Stanley 1984, pp.24 -25). History then, is no longer a specialist area for historians, but a continuing project for all feminists, as we attempt to retrieve and understand the previously hidden lives of earlier women.

Developing new methodologies and procedures enables lesbian researchers to locate new material and to understand existing material in new ways. In this study I have collected fragments suggesting lesbian experiences from various sources, using insights from women's studies, history, literary studies, linguistics, auto/biographical studies and oral history to draw them together and illuminate them within a lesbian framework. This creates a presentation of New Zealand lesbian experiences not previously undertaken, providing for new understandings and interpretations of how pre-1970 women could develop lesbian relationships.

Insider status

Within this study I am a knowledgeable insider and have been a participant in some of the friendship networks discussed by the narrators. For the earlier women whose writings are examined I am an outsider, and did not share their circumstances and times. As Trinh Minh-ha puts it, I am “both in one insider/outsider”. Trinh suggests that a researcher who “looks in from the outside, while also looking out from the inside” behaves as an outsider when she “steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording” (Trinh 1991, pp.74–75). By employing the subjective reasoning of the outsider and the subjective feeling of the insider the researcher becomes “two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider” (ibid.p.5). Lorraine Greed writes of her research as an insider that she studied “a world of which I am part, with all the emotional involvement and accusations of subjectivity that this creates” (Greed 1990, p.145). Lather suggests “how we speak and write tells us more about our own inscribed selves... than about the ‘object’ of our gaze” (Lather 1991, p.119). All research can be seen as subjective, with representations and interpretations constructed and manufactured within researchers' own minds and expectations, and evidence and events selected accordingly (Harding 1991, Maynard 1994, Reinharz 1992, Stanley 1992a). Reinharz suggests that an important aspect of all feminist research is being an active part of it, and that problems of “self-disclosure” and “generalising exclusively from her own experience” for an insider researcher are

modified by hearing alternative stories from other people (Reinharz 1992, p.34). My insider status provided knowledge and access to community stories and accounts by others, which modified interpretations based solely on my own perception of events.

No one can be fully an “insider” for any history. We stand outside other people’s lives, and must take responsibility for how we select and judge the importance of the events we choose to record. Phyllis Rose argues that in auto/biography there is “no neutrality” but only “greater or less awareness of one’s bias”, and that if biographers do not “appreciate the force” of what they leave out, then they are not “fully in command” of their work (Rose 1985, p.77). I have selected lesbian experiences in order to write lesbian stories, and in so doing I make no pretence of being absent from the text. In this sense I am an insider within the stories I have created. Stanley points out that “historiography, biography and autobiography transmute or translate time...[while] in an oral tradition the tale or story is an event within the present” (Stanley 2000, p.12). Using Pratt’s idea of the “contact zone” Stanley suggests the researcher and her subject “are not separate but co-presences” in biography and that “their relations are interactive” (ibid. p.15).

Who is this research for?

This research is primarily intended for New Zealand lesbians. I hope to provide an alternative to the heterosexualisation of the New Zealand past, by helping to dispel myths of platonic friendship between these women, and the non-existence of earlier lesbian relationships and networks. By providing an avenue for lesbian voices to be heard, and by creating and making accessible knowledge of how pre-1970 women, without the support of publicly visible and political lesbian communities, could live lesbian lives, I hope to affirm the existence of a rich lesbian past in this country. Part of the benefit in making this information available to present and future New Zealand lesbians as well as to other interested readers, is to help counteract the negativity that has surrounded the stories told about lesbians in this country, as outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study.

Academic research frequently benefits only the researcher, or other academics. Reinharz points out that most feminists aim to create social change through their research (Reinharz 1992, p.251). Maria Mies points out that “the aim of the women’s movement is not just the study but the overcoming of women’s oppression and exploitation” (Mies

1991, p.61). However using academic tools to produce work intended to accomplish social change can be difficult; Waitare-Ang and Rahui point out that such tools are viewed by Maori as “coming from the same deficit tool-box” (Waitare-Ang and Rahui 1998, p.184), and Lorde has argued “the master's tools will never destroy the master's house” (Lorde 1984b, p.110). Nonetheless, I hope this study will contribute to social change by helping to break down the historic silence on pre-1970 lesbianism in New Zealand, and unsettle the dominant ideology of assumed heterosexuality during earlier times.

This research is also for the women whose stories are told in this study. None of these women were victims, and they courageously changed the circumstances of their lives to live as they chose. In addition some, for example Elsie Andrews (Chapter 13) or Bessie Jerome Spencer (Chapter 9), contributed to changes for all women enabling later New Zealand lesbians to live more freely. “Doing biography” Stanley comments “changes how you think about yourself, and this in turn changes how you think about the subject” (Stanley 1992, p.159). Before beginning this study I assumed that the political movements of the post-1970 period challenged the prescriptions in ways unimaginable for most of the women whose experiences I was researching from written texts. During the research I realized that because information about these women has been heterosexualised and knowledge of their lesbianism suppressed, the risks they took and the ways their lives benefited later lesbians are as yet unrecognised. This research is intended to fill in the gaps and to give these women a place in New Zealand lesbian history.

The research is particularly intended for the narrators who so generously shared their stories with me, affirming both the significance and courage of their pre-1970 experiences and lives. I hope to return this history to the New Zealand lesbian communities in various ways (see Green 1997). These include archiving the oral histories at the Oral History Centre of the Alexander Turnbull Library (see below) and publishing the research in various forms, including making it available for the pre-liberation section of the “Outlines: thirty years of lesbian and gay liberation in Aotearoa” 2002-2003 exhibition at the National Library, and through articles in community as well as academic publications.

Auto/biography and written sources

Stanley argues that feminist auto/biography must include recognition of the “labour process of the biographer as researcher” in reaching her interpretations and conclusions, thus acknowledging how we “come to understand what we do” (Stanley 1992, p.115) Accordingly, I describe the processes of obtaining information and the assumptions which underpin my interpretations of the material.

The approaches taken by Hamer (1996), Faderman (1981, 1991, 1999), the Lesbian Oral History Group (1989), Stanley (1987, 1992a, 1992b) and Castle (1993) have informed this study. As there is little previous research on lesbianism in New Zealand, I could not draw upon local academic or community lesbian histories or auto/biographies. Written sources are fragmentary, and locating them is a matter of chance and intuition.

LAGANZ, the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, at the Alexander Turnbull Library, and the Waxing Moon Lesbian Archivesⁱ, now in LAGANZ, contain little pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian material. I searched the more general archives of the Alexander Turnbull and Hocken Libraries, the Taranaki Museum, the Hawkes Bay Museum and private collections for early letters, diaries and writing by women, which might indicate lesbian relationships or women’s friendship circles and networks. I began from the assumption that some of the women whose writing was archived were in lesbian relationships. I also knew the rumours about women reputed to have been lesbian. New Zealand archival collections are mostly records of middle or upper-class Pakeha women, who were “exceptional” (Hooten 1992), as are the working-class women for whom criminal records are available.

I examined published auto/biographies and collections of letters for traces of lesbian experiences, searched newspapers and other media for references to lesbians and searched for possible subjects through the records and accounts of early women's organisations and groups. Possible candidates emerged from histories of women's organizations, especially Coney (1986, 1993), Else (1993), and MacDonald et al. (1991). Castle (1993) argues that patriarchal cultural systems “ghost” lesbians through censorship and suppression, and my readings of the material were informed by her interpretive framework of lesbian texts and contexts, using lesbian perspectives to illuminate the writing, and proceeding from assumptions rather than denials of lesbianism.

Having selected women for whom written records suggesting lesbianism were available, I needed to decide who among them could be regarded as a New Zealander for the purposes of this study. Early “New Zealand identity” was incoherent. For example, was Mary Taylor a New Zealander? She lived here for some years during the nineteenth century, but returned to England. Was her work “New Zealand writing” when much was completed after she left New Zealand? Frances Hodgkins and Katherine Mansfield (KM) spent their adult lives overseas. Australian-born Freda du Faur was famous for mountain climbs in New Zealand from 1906–1913, but left for England before returning permanently to Australia. Eugenia Falleni was born in Italy, lived in Island Bay from the age of two, but spent her adult life in Australia where she was convicted of murder in 1923. I rejected du Faur’s connection to New Zealand as insufficient for this study, but decided to include Taylor. Hodgkins and KM lived in New Zealand during their formative years, retaining close connections throughout their lives.

Having selected the subjects, I carried out research using published auto/biography where available, as part of this study includes how the women were portrayed. I used primary sources such as letters, diaries, official records including birth and death records, land titles, gravestones and interviews. I wrote accounts of the women focusing on their lesbian experiences based on this information. These accounts are not intended as definitive auto/biographies. They are snapshots revealing selected events supporting a lesbian version of these women’s lives. Stanley suggests feminist biography includes

the traversing of the subtle and shifting borders between fact and fiction in the biographic subject’s life... because of the happy coexistence of many versions of this from the perspective of different observers of it and of participants in it. (Stanley 1987, p.21).

Stanley’s “kaleidoscope” effect means that the observer sees “one fascinatingly complex pattern; the light changes, you accidentally move, or you deliberately shake the kaleidoscope, and you see a different pattern composed by the ‘same’ elements” (ibid. p.30). Many heterosexual biographers of women search for and magnify the importance of men in their subjects’ lives (*cherchez l’homme*). Carolyn Heilbrun points out that many biographers have “actually to reinvent the lives their subjects led, discovering from what evidence they could find the processes and decisions, the choices and unique pain that lay beyond the life stories of these women”, especially if they did not “make a man the centre of their lives” (Heilbrun 1988, p.31). Stanley regards “doing biography” as “intimately connected with the biographer’s own autobiography and to omit this is to distort” (Stanley 1987, p.21). My desire to locate past lesbian lives and experiences is

connected to my own earlier search for other lesbians (Laurie 1990) and I believe this assisted my understanding of the material.

Biographic subjects exist within the language that constructed them, with written fragments revealing “a series of glimpses and reflections” of their lives (Grogan 2000, p.91), and women’s writing a record of how the subject attempted “to represent herself” (Middlebrook 1990 in Grogan 2000, p.91). I read the women’s letters referred to in this study as representations constructed with particular recipients in mind. For example, Alla Atkinson wrote several unnumbered letters marked “private” to her sister Dorothy Kate Richmond, indicating she was responding to letters from Dorothy that could not be passed around and read by others as was customary in the Richmond/Atkinson and Hodgkins families. The numbered letters were intended for broad reading, and writers seemed careful to “represent” themselves only within the limits of what could be acceptably read aloud in a Wellington living room.

Heilbrun suggests Adrienne Rich’s “autobiography is to be found...in her poems and in diverse parts of her prose works” (Heilbrun 1988, p.66), an insight I found useful when considering the poetry and prose written by women in Part 3 of this study. My readings of Mansfield’s, Bethell’s and Andrews’ confessional poetry taken alongside their letters or journal entries created autobiographies revealing strong lesbian passions, which I then used as texts. For the diaries, I appreciated the insights of Anira Rowanchild, who notes that for Anne Lister, writing her diaries meant that because she knew in advance that she would record an event, she was able to “frame, construct and interpret it” in a “self-narrating process” (Rowanchild 2000, p.203). This was helpful for reading Andrews’ journals, especially considering that like Lister, who provided her close women friends with a key-code so that they could read her diaries (even though probably none did), Andrews wrote her journals with particular recipients in mind. I realized that as Andrews enjoyed particular events and experiences, she must also have analysed them at the time, and have carefully constructed them in language so as to convey the sense of this to readers. Readers of such diaries have “the imaginative experience of participating in the diarist’s life as, day by day, in the same formless manner of life, the story unfolds” (Blodgett 1989 in Rowanchild 2000, p.205). This was also my experience of KM’s journals, despite the omissions. Had I been physically present in their lives, I may have known less of their experiences than is revealed in these published diaries.

Stanley argues that researching lesbian history and biography must reject “the spotlight approach” to single individuals and recognise the importance of informal friendship networks as well as the social context in which individual lives were located (Stanley 1992b). Dale Spender critiques the “myth of the isolated achievement”, and the way the lives of exceptional women are seldom placed within women’s “interconnected and collaborative context” (Spender 1986, p.145). Where possible I have placed the accounts in Part 3 of this study in context by including additional information on their homosexual and lesbian friends, networks and in some case contemporaries. In Part 4, the narrators’ descriptions capture aspects of the pre-1970 New Zealand kamp communities and networks. Part 2 of the study includes contextual material on lesbian existence during the period, as well as the general conditions of existence for New Zealand women.

What are the ethics of uncovering hidden aspects of women’s lives, and lesbian relationships they concealed and kept private? In law, the dead have no privacy, and in a moral sense, many reasons for concealment (retaining employment, housing etc.) cease on death. In my view, auto/biographers who continue the distortions and denials of historic lesbianism are complicit in a project of homophobia which cannot assist the dead and may damage the living by perpetuating the view that lesbianism is shameful and should remain hidden. Also, we cannot assume that women would not have wanted to discuss it themselves, solely because they did not find a way to do so during their lives, for example, as the narrators could for this study. Enabling the heterosexualising of the past reinforces the alienation many lesbians experience when they do not see their own realities reflected anywhere.

Oral history

Oral history is an ideal method for capturing the stories of cultural minorities like lesbians. Commenting on the stories of African-Americans, Harrison cites the African proverb “when an elder dies, a library burns to the ground”, and suggests that oral history is a “pathway to the people’s cultural memory” (Harrison 1989, p.3). New Zealand lesbians have little published history, and our libraries too, are the memories of elders.

Oral history makes no claim that constructing cultural memory captures factual truth, as historical truths as such do not exist. Historians have traditionally privileged written evidence over oral testimony, believing that it is somehow more “accurate”. However, as Grele points out, this does not address questions relating to the accuracy of written documents, which are originally based on oral sources. The usefulness of any source, he adds, depends on “the questions one seeks to answer” (Grelle 1998, p.41).

What oral histories do provide are insights into how narrators select their experiences, construct their stories and present themselves (see for example Grele 1979). Based on memory, oral history can explore subjectivity and interpretations of the past (Kennedy 2000). Alistair Thomson et al. point out the value of the “process of remembering” for an exploration of the “subjective meaning of lived experience” (Thomson et al, 1994, p.33). Elizabeth Tonkin suggests “it is not easy or even always possible to say how far tellers are authors or authored by their telling” (Tonkin 1992, p.132). Through telling stories about themselves, narrators construct and create a self for their listeners, as well as making sense of their own experiences.

Alessandro Portelli examines the significance of “uchronic dreams”ⁱⁱⁱ, defined as “no-when” events that are misplaced chronologically or invented, and considers how these reveal important subjective rather than factually accurate truths (Portelli 1988, 1991). What is important is not “what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli 1981 in Damousi p.115), and Passerini suggests there is a sense in which “all autobiographical memory is true” (Passerini 1989, p.197). These perceptions inform my use of and discussion about the narrators’ stories in this study, and I return to this discussion in Chapters 16 and 25.

Oral histories contribute to our knowledge of how individual lesbians experienced the lesbian networks and communities in which they socialised. Caroline Daley explains “What women remember and retell, and how they tell it, tells us much about their individual experiences and their understanding of their cultural place within their community” (Daley 1998, p.344). Further, understanding “how women explain, rationalize and make sense of their past offers insight into the social and material framework within which they operated” (Sangster in Daley 1998, p.343). However, narrators can only tell us what they themselves knew about at the time, or have since learned. I kept in mind that my narrators could not report what they did not know, and

that a lack of information was therefore not authoritative. For example, no-one reported knowledge of pre-1970 lesbian clubs here, but that does not disprove the existence of such clubs. Other narrators with different memories and stories could illuminate new areas of research, enabling the construction of more knowledge about pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian culture. This issue becomes even more significant in communities where knowledge is not recorded, but is passed on orally. Those who were not “in the know” at the time might never get to know.

Oral history interviews are not simply information obtained as a source for historians. Grele points out that they are constructed by “the active intervention of the historian”, and therefore “unlike written sources such as letters, records, archival materials or other manuscript sources, oral history interviews are created after the fact” (Grele 1998, p.42). They are “recorded conversations” which are “joint activities, organised and informed by the historical perspectives of both participants” He suggests that the interaction between interviewer and narrator “can be classified as performance”. Though narratives are constructed as “chronological tales of personal remembrances of events” they are not an autobiography or “literary product” created alone, and therefore “cannot be divorced from the circumstances of [their] creation, which of necessity is one of audience participation and face-to-face confrontation” (ibid.p.44).

Toni McWhinnie points out that though researchers may listen to tapes, these can never convey “the wealth of non-verbal information that is available to the interviewer”. Not only are “facial expressions” and “body language” important, but also the interviewing environment provides a “context of meaning for the spoken word”, with the interview a “unique performance between two social actors” dependent on “the relationship between them at the time” (McWhinnie 1997, pp.8-9). As the interviewer, I shared in the construction of the recorded interviews and the recording environment. Together, we produced a recording event, preserved in recorded speech on audiotape. I was not a silent recipient of the narrators’ stories, but actively elicited them.

Ethics and method

I obtained ethical approval from the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee to undertake oral history interviews for this study, and used the National Oral History Association (NOHANZ) Code of Ethical and Technical Practice. Among other requirements, interviewers must use quality equipment, must undertake technical

training to ensure interviews are well-conducted and recorded, must prepare themselves adequately on the topic prior to each interview, and must hold every interview as a confidential conversation, elements of which should not be taken out of context and discussed with others, as the integrity of the entire interview is important. I have undertaken extensive and advanced oral history training, and for this study used professional recording equipment. My knowledge of lesbian communities in New Zealand was one preparation for the interviews as was the research on lesbianism generally and the New Zealand context reflected in Parts 1 and 2 of this study. In addition, I carried out specific research for some interviews, for example, before interviewing Freda Stark, reading newspaper accounts of the Mareo case and, before interviewing Bea Arthur reading histories of New Zealand nursing.

In order to locate subjects for interview, I approached older lesbians personally known to me and asked if they would record an oral history for this study. I informed each narrator that if she wished, her oral history tapes could be archived at the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand, in the Alexander Turnbull Library, with whatever restrictions regarding access she wanted. I also asked permission to write an account based on the interview, to name her, and to include this in the thesis. Everyone agreed to be interviewed, and I made appointments to interview them, at home or other convenient locations. Everyone was informed that they would have the opportunity to delete or change material, or choose to withdraw from the project.

I taped the interviews using a recording Sony WMD6C with Sony ECM144 lapel microphones, on TEAC C60 cassette tapes. I ensured that the recording environment was as noise-free as possible, and that the narrator was comfortable and relaxed. I endeavoured to produce recordings to the highest possible technical standards. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked narrators to sign the standard Oral History Recording Agreement Form recommended by National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ), setting out the conditions under which the tapes could be archived and any restrictions. The narrators could decide these matters after the interview was recorded, so as to take into account information disclosed during the interview, before making a final decision.

I copied the tapes and had listening copies transcribed. The person who transcribed the tapes signed an agreement form, providing for the safekeeping and confidentiality of the

tapes and transcripts during this process. When completed, I sent each narrator copies of the written account intended for the thesis, and other pages referring to her, with a covering letter inviting her to make changes or to delete material, and including the agreement form giving permission for use of the edited material. Finally, I sent a letter of thanks to each narrator, providing closure.

All but one narrator agreed to archive their tapes, some under restricted conditions, and all but one agreed to be named and identified in the thesis. I have used a pseudonym for this narrator. I have also included information and stories from other lesbians who did not want to be recorded or identified, and reference these as “personal communication”. Stories from these informants were noted and pseudonyms used where requested. In these cases records were destroyed. Some narrators and informants were in possession of personal records and files, including military or patient records, and gave me permission to quote from these. As a participant in some of the early lesbian communities described by narrators, I also include information based on my own recollection, referencing this as “personal knowledge”.

When narrators related stories about other living persons, I did not include names or identifiable details in the written accounts, but did not erase this information from the recorded interviews. The 1993 Privacy Act covers only living persons. Third parties identified on archived tapes may ask if information is held about them, may be informed about what is held, and may place their own version of events alongside the archived version.

Some women knew one another, and their stories interconnect, as is often the case when recording members of lesbian or gay networks (Kennedy and Davis 1993, Newton 1993, Lesbian Oral History Group 1989). Speakers tell interviewers what others, perhaps dead, have told them, and the biographies and words of these people become part of both the speaker’s autobiography and that of her listeners. Do these re-tellings reflect the words of absent speakers, and how should oral historians regard such material? Cushla Parekowhai believes every story is part of the “korero” which narrators use to communicate with listeners beyond the interviewer, to pass on the words of the dead. One of her narrators quoted the late Nanny Whiu, and though no-one present had ever physically heard this elder, quoting her provided an opportunity where “her korero speaks directly to us all” (Parekowhai 1992, p.4). I also recorded an oral

history with Judy Maiden about her aunt Elsie Andrews, for Part 3. Like Nanny Whiu, Judy's recollections brought Elsie's words into the interview.

Ann Oakley (1981) has discussed the empathetic relationship, which can arise between women in an interview situation. In response to this, Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack warn that an interviewer

must always remain attentive to the moral dimension of interviewing and be aware that she is there to follow the narrator's lead, to honour her integrity and privacy, not to intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back (Anderson and Jack 1991, p.25).

Shurlee Swain points out that this is complicated in practice as all interviews involve "a personal interchange, the therapeutic potential of which is beyond the control of the interviewer" (Swain 1997, p.16). Interviewers cannot know the potential force of uncomfortable or painful recollections. Alistair Thomson, who interviewed Great War veterans in the 1980s, explains that at times he had to stop a line of questioning because it was "too painful" and that, unlike therapists, oral historians might not be around "to put together the pieces of memories that have been deconstructed and are no longer safe" (Thomson 1994, p.34). I endeavoured to be sensitive to the pain of some stories my narrators told, for example in relation to the murder of Thelma Mareo, in my interview with Freda Stark (Chapter 17).

Swain reminds us that "however stringent the process through which the interview is negotiated, narrators can never be sure of how we will use their information" (Swain 1997, p.19). The recorded narratives were produced jointly, but I would edit them and use them in written form for this thesis. What control would the narrators have?

Katherine Borland discusses the effects of using a feminist interpretation of an incident in her grandmother's life, when writing up the interview for her research. Her grandmother objected to this interpretation because "The story is no longer MY story at all. The skeleton remains, but it has become your story" (Borland 1991, p.70). Since I needed to edit the stories, how could I ensure that narrators' recollections were faithfully reported, and reproduce the narratives without forcing them into my own version of New Zealand lesbian life? What was an ethical way to treat the stories, which were, as one narrator remarked, "a gift for you which is precious and which I know you appreciate".

I have based the narrators' chapters on their recorded stories. I use direct quotations as fully as possible to ensure the centrality of each narrator's voice, though the stories needed to be edited for length, sequence and narrative sense. I condensed and deleted material from the oral histories to construct the stories and make the final versions manageable. I deleted repetitions and moved material for easier reading (see Lesbian Oral History Group 1989, Neild and Pearson 1992) and, though the interviews were produced collaboratively, did not include my questions, except where required for sense, unlike Adair and Adair (1978). Most of the tapes are archived, and are available as the full record of what narrators said, including the sequence, inflections, repetitions, sounds of body movement, hesitations, interruptions, and minimal responses typical of recorded interviews. Depending on access and restrictions, other researchers may compare the tapes with the edited accounts extracting further meanings and other interpretations from them.

Researching the context

I needed a wide range of contextual information, including studies on pre-1970 material circumstances and social conditions for New Zealand women. New Zealand public and social history studies are not extensive (see Chapter 2). With few secondary sources, it was difficult to provide a context without undertaking original research into areas of peripheral relevance to this study. For example, wider research on pre-1970 single women who obtained mortgages would be useful for understanding how lesbians purchased housing, but I could not undertake primary research into all such areas. I selected the most relevant aspects of pre-1970 New Zealand women's material conditions, as these affected lesbians, using secondary published sources, including standard New Zealand histories, feminist research and government reports. I obtained information on overseas contemporary lesbian cultures, conditions and communities from a range of secondary sources including histories, biographies and other accounts, using primary sources including early magazines where available.

I obtained information on the overseas "stories" that influenced New Zealand knowledge of and attitudes to lesbianism, by consulting secondary materials, supplemented by some primary sources, including pre-1970 lesbian fiction. For the New Zealand produced "stories", I used mainly primary sources, including newspaper and magazine archives, and secondary sources where these were available.

Arranging the material

I had to decide how to use the written texts, oral histories and contextual materials. I decided not to merge individual lives by combining women's experiences within themes. Thematic methods lose individual lives, as the subjects' words are submerged and their experiences fitted into categories. However, I also needed to draw individual experiences and accounts together, to find commonalities. I have attempted to retain some of the integrity of individual lives, and have discussed themes in the overview chapters at the ends of Parts 3 and 4.

I had difficulty deciding on start and end points for the period of the study. I began with written materials in English suggesting lesbian relationships. These were all from Pakeha women. Because of the difficulty of obtaining information and considerations of cultural appropriateness, I decided that the experiences of pre-twentieth-century Maori women were outside the scope of this study. The study ends in 1970, just before the development of women's liberation, gay liberation and lesbian-feminism changed New Zealand lesbian lives. Kennedy and Davis suggest in their research into pre-Stonewall lesbian bar culture in Buffalo that the "expanded public presence" and "increased pride" of earlier lesbians and their "desire to end the double life" can be regarded as "pre-political because of the challenge they presented to the repressive social order" (Kennedy and Davis 1993, p.68), and I return to this discussion in Chapter 25.

I had difficulty deciding how to group the women, as there were a number of possibilities. Grogan (1994) discusses how she approached the life of Flora Tristram, trying first a chronological structure and then a thematic one. Similarly, I tried ordering the lives chronologically, finding this unwieldy; then tried grouping the lives into two fifty-year periods, but found no satisfactory dividing point. I discarded categorising the women as influenced by first or second-wave feminism as simplistic, as there has "always been a women's movement this century" (Spender 1983), and, for example, the Pan Pacific Women's Association in which Elsie Andrews was involved was active during the 1930s. There are no natural start or end-points for first or second-wave New Zealand feminism. All women were affected by improvements in the status of women, but the situation for lesbians is more complex. A history of feminism is not the same thing as a history of lesbianism.

Another solution was using a decade for each chapter, and splitting the lives up chronologically using episodes from each decade. I rejected this because the multiple lives did not fit easily into a sequence of decades, or a general time-line, and many lives over-lapped. The ends of WW1, when the “long nineteenth century” finished, and of WW2 were important. Both periods resulting in social changes affecting women, such as increased urbanisation, especially for Maori women after WW2. I tried using 1918 and 1945 as points of separation, but again found many lives overlapped. I abandoned chronological approaches and divided the lives into two parts, one for stories based on written sources and the other for stories based on oral histories, calling these “written” and “spoken” respectively.

Summary

Lesbian feminist, auto/biographical and oral history theoretical frameworks inform this study. The research process is a multidisciplinary and “scavenger” approach consistent with feminist and queer methodologies. The assumptions of the study are that fragments of lesbian experience collected and analysed can provide insights into pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian lives, identities and communities, and help explain how these women could lead lesbian lives and have lesbian relationships. The research is based on selected published and unpublished written materials, on oral histories from selected narrators who were self-identified lesbians, and on a variety of primary and secondary source material for contextual background.

ⁱ Created by Zoe Aitchison Windeler in Hamilton, these archives were donated to LAGANZ in 1998.

ⁱⁱ Portelli defines “uchronia” as a “no-when event”, patterned after “utopia” (Portelli 1988, p.46).

PART TWO

THE CONTEXT

Chapter 4

Regulating lesbianism: the bad, the mad and the dangerous

Introduction

Without Paul, we cannot understand twentieth-century Christian responses to lesbians. Without Roman-period depictions of Sappho, we...do not fully comprehend how moderns were able to use Sappho to oppose female poets and to define female deviancy. Without knowledge of the selective clitoridectomy performed on women with “masculine” desires, we might erroneously see nineteenth-and twentieth-century lobotomies and hysterectomies performed on lesbians as absolute innovations (Brooten 1996, p.18).

The focus of this chapter is the way lesbianism has been regulated, contained and controlled through religion, laws and medicine. The British culture imported into New Zealand with the colonists had well-developed mechanisms of control. This chapter describes the early ecclesiastical regulation of lesbianism, that provided the basis for the later civil laws against homosexuality, as well as providing an ongoing discourse of anti-lesbianism through the centuries. This is followed by an account of the British laws against male homosexuality brought to New Zealand, the British attempt to criminalise lesbianism and the pre-1970 law reform proposals in New Zealand. The criminalisation of any form of homosexuality affects all other forms by association. The laws against male homosexuality created the framework within which lesbianism was viewed, regardless of whether there were specific laws prohibiting sex acts between women.

The chapter considers the covert regulations and laws used to control and contain lesbianism and women's sexuality generally. New Zealand did not criminalise lesbian sex acts, instead outlawing lesbians through a complex web of regulations and strategies. The law could punish women who transgressed against gender-codes by cross-dressing or by unacceptable sexual behaviours. By connecting lesbianism with promiscuity and

prostitution the law contained and controlled women's access to public spaces and to self-determined sexual expression. It contained young women's sexuality by classifying them as out of control and requiring institutionalisation for their own protection. It controlled any expression of lesbianism through vaguely worded occupational regulations allowing employers to dismiss lesbian teachers, military personnel and others for so-called disgraceful behaviour.

Where these methods proved inadequate on their own, lesbianism was contained by the medical profession who from the earliest times classified it as a disorder. The imputation of insanity and pathology enabled harmful and frightening treatments to be used as deterrents, sometimes willingly sought by lesbians internalising depictions of themselves as abnormal or deranged. For the unwilling, there were committals and contrived diagnoses enabling unruly women to be shut away. Many madwomen in the attic, or in asylums were undoubtedly lesbians dispatched by families keen to avoid scandal. Lesbianism could be used as a medical excuse to be rid of undesirable women and gain control of their property (see Chapter 2).

The medico-legal background structured the climate of opinion surrounding pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives or in lesbian relationships, and demonstrates how anti-lesbianism operated in New Zealand.

Early background

The regulation of sexuality has a long history in European society. This section discusses the explicit prohibitions against lesbian sexuality, and the contradictions apparent in this discourse influencing how lesbianism was regarded in pre-1970 New Zealand. Christianity defined and controlled sexual activities in Europe through ecclesiastical laws, and eventually state legislation to control sexual behaviours replaced that of the church (Boswell 1980, Foucault 1990a, Altman 1982, Weeks 1977, 1981, Rubin 1984, Brown 1986, 1989). It remains unclear what early English law against sodomy actually was as, though thirteenth-century law books prescribed the death penalty, they were textbooks rather than legal codes, and no actual legislation or examples of enforcement survive (Karras and Boyd 1996, p.113, n.10). Boswell notes that though even the detailed records of the Crown of Aragon record no proceedings on charges of sodomy before 1500 (Boswell

1980, p.293, n.74) during the period 1150-1350 perceptions of homosexual behaviour appear to have changed “from the personal preference of a prosperous minority...to a dangerous, antisocial, and severely sinful aberration” (ibid. p.295).

Brown argues that in pre-modern Europe, women were regarded as “much more lustful than men and easily given to debauchery” which could lead them to “adultery and fornication with the devil as well as men” (Brown 1989, p.67, p.495, n.2). However, nearly all sexual accusations against women involved men, as Europeans held a phallocentric belief that “nothing a woman could do...would long satisfy the sexual desires of another woman” (ibid. p.67). Saint Paul had stated “God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature” (Romans 1:26). This was interpreted in the fourth century by Saint Ambrose as meaning “it came about that a woman would desire a woman for the use of foul lust” (St Ambrose in Brown 1989, p.68), and by Saint John Chrysostom as “it is even more shameful that the women should seek this type of intercourse, since they ought to have more modesty than men” (Saint John Chrysostom in Boswell 1980, p.360). Saint Augustine wrote to nuns that the love between them should be “spiritual” rather than “carnal”, and that married women and virgins should both refrain from the “shameless playing with each other” in which women “with no regard for modesty” indulged (St Augustine 423 in Boswell 1980, p.158); the thirteenth-century councils of Paris and Rouen forbade nuns sleeping together and required a dormitory lamp to burn all night; nuns had to stay out of one another’s cells, leave their doors unlocked, and avoid “special ties of friendship” (Brown 1989, p.69). Saint Thomas Aquinas gave four categories of unnatural vice which included “copulation with an undue sex, male with male and female with female” (Aquinas in Brown 1989, p.68; in Boswell 1980, p.323). The Constitution of the Holy Roman Empire, by Charles V in 1532 stated “If anyone commits impurity with a beast, or a man with a man, or a woman with a woman, they have forfeited their lives and shall, after the common custom, be sentenced to death by burning” (Brown 1989, p.72). Brown points out that the authorities lacked a “precise vocabulary and precise concept...to describe what women allegedly did”; terms such as “mutual masturbation, pollution, fornication, sodomy, buggery, mutual corruption, coitus, copulation, mutual vice, the defilement or impurity of women by one another” were all used, as were “fricatrices” and “Tribades” for those who did “these terrible things” (ibid.p.74). Sex between women was called “the silent sin” and an unnatural sin where “women have each other by

detestable and horrible means which should not be named or written” (ibid.p.75). Colladon, the German jurist, advised the Genevan authorities in the sixteenth century that in such cases the death sentence could be read publicly, as for male sodomy, but that the description of the crime should be omitted because “A crime so horrible and against nature is so detestable and because of the horror of it, it cannot be named”. Colladon believed that because women had “weaker natures” they were “more susceptible to suggestion” so that sexual relations between women were best “left unmentioned” lest women learn of them (Colladon in Brown 1989, p.75). This concern is repeated through the centuries.

Sinistrari, an Italian cleric, wrote on what he called “female sodomy” in the eighteenth century in order to clarify matters for priests. He defined sodomy as “carnal intercourse in the wrong vessel” and asked, “how can one woman lie with another in such a way that their rubbing against each other can be called Sodomy?” He concluded that only women with an “excessively large clitoris” could do so, and recommended examination by competent midwives to “determine if she was physiologically capable of committing the act”. A sentence of death by hanging followed by burning at the stake was the punishment. Sinistrari recommended that confessors use caution when interviewing female suspects because women “with their abundant capacity for lust and their limited capacity for reason, might develop ideas if they heard of such goings on” (Sinistrari in Brown 1989, pp 74-75). Brown suggests that sodomy between females was “the sin which cannot be named” even more than male sodomy and “crimes that cannot be named, thus, literally had no name and left few traces in the historical record” (Brown, p.75).

Most cases involving women concerned gender behaviour and female transvestism rather than sexual object-choice, including that of Joan of Arc (Brown 1989, Dekker and Van de Pol 1989, Faderman and Eriksson 1980). It was believed that males were above females in a biological hierarchy (Boswell 1980, p.326). Brown points out that this produces a paradox, in that “while such reasoning did not condone sex between women, it placed it within a long Western tradition in which women, like all other creatures, tried to ascend to a more perfect state of nature” (Brown 1989, p.71). St Jerome believed

as long as a woman is for birth and children, she is as different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she ceases to be a woman and will be called a man (Jerome in Brown 1989, p.497, n.27)

This tradition produces the contradiction that while women were to be admired for renouncing their inferior femininity and for aspiring to manhood in some circumstances, they were nonetheless to be punished for usurping male privileges when this deception angered male authorities, as in the case of Joan, or of transvestite women executed in eighteenth century Germany (Faderman and Eriksson 1980). From the later sixteenth century the legislation against male offenders, including being burnt alive, was extended to women, especially in Catholic countries, though English law did not criminalise sexual acts between women as sodomy. Daston and Park suggest that the new emphasis on female sodomy signalled male anxieties about “female pretensions to masculine status and prerogatives that is so visible in the popular literature” (Daston and Park 1996, p.129). They note “English law was almost unique in not criminalising lesbian acts as sodomitical” (ibid. p.132, n.32).

The 1533 Act of Henry VIII was the most significant piece of legislation for the criminalisation of homosexual acts in England, replacing earlier ecclesiastical laws and using the same criterion to condemn acts of sodomy between men and women, men and men, or men and animals as “unnatural”. Lesbianism was ignored. The original penalty was death and the law remained in force until 1885, the death penalty being “tacitly abandoned after 1836”, and finally abolished in 1861 in England and Wales and in 1889 in Scotland, and replaced by penal servitude from 10 years to life (Weeks 1977, pp.12–14, Hyde 1972, pp.51–53). The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act originally made no mention of homosexual acts, its purpose being to provide for “the suppression of brothels”, and protect women and girls by raising the age of consent. However, Henry Labouchere, a Liberal-Radical Member of Parliament, introduced an amendment criminalising all male homosexual acts, with a penalty of two years imprisonment with or without hard labour for each offence. This became law in 1886 (Hyde 1972, pp.153–156). Oscar Wilde was tried and convicted under this law in 1895, with a profound effect on many people during this period including the youthful Katherine Mansfield.

New Zealand

Female and male homosexualities appear to have been accepted among Maori during the pre-European period (see Chapter 7). Following colonisation, male homosexuality was not

illegal until the passage of the English Laws Act of 1858 by the General Assembly of New Zealand, stating that all English laws in force on 14 January 1840 applied to New Zealand. These laws included the prohibitions against sodomy. In 1867 the General Assembly of New Zealand passed the Offences Against the Person Act, the first locally inspired New Zealand law to criminalise buggery, which retained the English punishment of imprisonment from 10 years to life. As in British law, lesbianism continued to be ignored.

Continuing to follow the British lead, the General Assembly passed the 1893 Criminal Code Act, replacing the 1867 Act. The new Act was based on the 1885 English Criminal Law Amendment Act and included the British Labouchere Amendment. Section 136 of the Code prohibited buggery and indecent assault on other males (for which there was no definition) with punishments of life imprisonment with hard labour and flogging, and Section 137 criminalised sodomy, making all sexual relations between men illegal. Consent was no defence.

The Crimes Act of 1908 reaffirmed Sections 136 and 137 of the Criminal Code 1893, again defining the penalties for sodomy and indecency between males. This law remained in force until 1941, when the Crimes Amendment Act reduced the penalties by removing flogging from the sentence of life imprisonment. The 1954 Criminal Justice Act subsequently removed “hard labour” from this sentence.

In 1959 H.G.R. Mason, Minister of Justice, affected by the suicide of a homosexual friend, considered reducing the penalties for male homosexual acts. Opposition to this meant that instead, he directed a revision of the 1954 Criminal Justice Act. This revision became the 1961 Crimes Act, which revisited the laws against male homosexuality. Section 141 reduced to five years imprisonment the punishment for males who committed an indecent act on another male, or allowed another male to do an indecent act on them. Consent continued to be no defence. Section 142 provided for seven years imprisonment for sodomy between male adults and 14 years if the offender was over 21 and his partner under 16. Section 140 provided for 10 years imprisonment for indecency between a male adult and a boy under 16.

The new Section 146 criminalised landlords who rented accommodation to male homosexuals and provided a place of resort for homosexual “crimes”, punishable by 10

years imprisonment. Some lesbians feared that this provision would be applied to women as well as men, as it seemed intended to hinder homosexual access to rental housing and the consequent establishment of homosexual relationships.ⁱ The 1961 Crimes Act introduced lesbianism into the New Zealand law for the first time with Section 139, which criminalised females over 21 who indecently assaulted girls under 16 (National Gay Rights Coalition 1980, Parkinson 1988, 1989).

The Wolfenden Committee in Britain was set up in 1954, and the Homosexual Law Reform Society, founded in 1958, took up the Committee's 1957 Report recommending decriminalisation (Hyde 1972, pp.255–267). Inspired by these moves, the first formally organised New Zealand homosexual group, the Wellington Dorian Society, was founded in 1962, and in 1963 a legal sub-committee of the Dorian Society was established to promote law reform.ⁱⁱ This was the precursor of the New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society (NZHLRS) founded in Wellington in 1967 (Parkinson 1989).

Law reform was achieved in Britain in 1967 but with an unequal age of consent of 20 years, in contrast to the heterosexual age of 16 (Hyde 1972, p.297). In 1968 the NZHLRS petitioned Parliament for changes to the 1961 Crimes Act, without success (National Gay Rights Coalition 1980, p.4).

An attempt to criminalise lesbianism in England

Partly because of concern about First Wave feminism, and a reaction against the New Woman and her economic independence, and partly because of a growing awareness of female homosexuality as a consequence of the medical discourses, in Britain the first two decades of the twentieth century saw a steadily increasing official desire to deal with the problem, culminating in an unsuccessful attempt to criminalise lesbianism in 1921. This attempt was sparked off by the Maud Allen case. Noel Pemberton Billing, an Independent Member of Parliament, published an article in his newspaper *The Imperialist* on 26 January 1918, in which he claimed that the Germans possessed a “Black Book” containing the names of “forty-seven-thousand English men and women” involved in sodomy and lesbianism, and were preparing to blackmail them. He claimed that the “wives of men in supreme positions were entangled. In Lesbian ecstasy the most sacred secrets of State were betrayed”. He changed the title of his newspaper to *The Vigilante* to better reflect the

campaign promoting “purity in public life”. When Maud Allen gave a private performance of Wilde's *Salome*, Billing wrote “The Cult of the Clitoris” on 16 February 1918, stating that “If Scotland Yard were to seize the list of the members [of the Independent Theatre Society]...they would secure the names of several thousand of the first 47,000 [from the Black Book]” (Hyde 1972, pp.193–195).

Maud Allen took Pemberton Billing to court for criminal libel (as Wilde had done with Queensberry two decades earlier). The case lasted for six days and contained spectacular material about homosexuality, including anti-homosexual evidence from Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's ex-lover. The jury found Billing not guilty—that is, what he had published was found to be in the public interest. Philip Hoare comments that with Billing “publicly vindicated, any possible display of homosexual feeling was now more proscribed than ever” (Hoare 1997, p.203).

Following this case, Scottish Tory Member of Parliament Frederick Macquisten moved in 1921 that the Labouchere Amendment be applied to women with a clause “Acts of Gross Indecency by Females” in the new Criminal Law Amendment Act. Influenced by Arabella Kennealy's recent book on *Feminism and Sex Extinction*, Sir Ernest Wild argued in the House of Commons that lesbianism “stops child-birth...[and] debauches young girls” (Weeks 1977, p.106). The Bill passed the House of Commons by 148 to 53 on August 4, but was rejected by the Lords on August 15 on a motion supported by Lord Birkenhead who argued that there was not “one scintilla of evidence there is any widespread practice of this kind of vice” and by Lord Desart who complained

you are going to tell the whole world that there is such an offence, to bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it, never thought of it, never dreamed of it. I think that is a very great mischief

His colleague Lord Birkenhead asserted (without a scintilla of evidence!) “that of every thousand women...999 have never even heard a whisper of these practices” (Hyde 1972, p.204). While the public visibility of identifiable lesbians contributed to legal attempts to control female sexuality, ironically it was decided not to criminalise lesbianism for reasons consistent with earlier fears of women's susceptibility to suggestion. The stories described in Chapter 5 demonstrate a wide knowledge about lesbian possibilities among women, contrary to the law lords' fond belief. The amendment was rejected, and it was not

proposed in New Zealand, nor does it appear to have been reported in New Zealand newspapers.

Regulating lesbianism in New Zealand

Before 1968 some lesbian sexual practices were criminalised in all US states (The Pink Book Editing Team 1988, p.207, Robson 1992, p.47). A few European countries also criminalised certain lesbian sexual practices. In some Australian states the consorting laws, as well as laws against vagrancy, drunkenness and prostitution were used by vice squads in several states against lesbians in public placesⁱⁱⁱ (see for example Chapter 9).

Though there were no laws prohibiting sex between women in New Zealand, other laws were used to contain lesbianism from the nineteenth century, by controlling women's sexuality generally.

The authorities made early links between lesbianism, prostitution and women and girls out of control. Weeks notes that lesbianism was assimilated into prostitution, commenting that "it was as if lesbians had to be explained and justified always in terms of a largely male phenomenon" (Weeks 1977, p.88). He fails to note, however, the long and historic tradition of this connection, and that what is always at stake, is the idea of uncontrolled (and perhaps uncontrollable) female sexuality.

In New Zealand there were suspicions that some female immigrants were engaging in prostitution as the number of brothels increased throughout the country (see Chapter 7). The 1869 Contagious Diseases Act was modelled on the British 1866 Acts, which had developed as a response to venereal disease among the military and was implemented only in garrison towns in the UK. In New Zealand, however, it applied throughout the country and to the whole population, enabling the authorities to detain and examine any female on the mere suspicion of prostitution. In practice the Act was implemented for short periods and only in Auckland and Canterbury, but though repealed in the UK in 1886, it remained on the books in New Zealand until 1910 (Macdonald 1990, p.187, Coney 1993, pp.122-123, Sutch 1974, p.93). Women's rights activists from the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the National Council of Women (NCW) campaigned against the Act for interfering "with the rights and liberties of women only to make it safer for men to sin" and condoning prostitution by ensuring prostitutes were free of venereal disease (Coney

1993, p.122). I think it likely the Act was also used to contain women suspected of lesbianism, and that in the minds of the New Zealand authorities, women involved in any kind of uncontrolled sexual activity were put together into the category of “vice” just as they had been for centuries. There is a report of Annie M., Annie J. and Jessie C. of Wellesley Street, Auckland, who gave their occupations as servant and dressmakers, who were detained but found to be free of disease; the writer suggests it likely they “were not prostitutes at all, but victims of over-zealous and indiscriminate police” (ibid. p.123). I think this may be a case of an early lesbian household that came to the attention of the police. The response of other women who were detained suggests angry lesbians to me, where several “stampeded from the building...and came downtown in a body. They paraded the wharf, singing songs”, and were finally rounded up by police “coming up Queen-street abreast” (NZ Herald 1886 in ibid. p.123)

Probably the lesbians likely to be noticed by the police were the vulnerable young, perhaps unwisely seeking adventure in public places, or reported by their families as wayward and out of control. The Te Oranga Girls’ Home was established in 1900 at Burwood, near Christchurch, to house girls and women aged eight to twenty-one years, who were rescued from “brothels, Chinese dens” or “the open streets”, and who were regarded as being in “moral (sexual) danger”, because they were “morally insane” and “oversexed” (Coney 1993, p.172). I think it probable that some girls and women were admitted to Burwood for lesbianism, based on these definitions of female sexuality. I regard it as significant that during a 1908 inquiry, it was revealed that “at night the staff supervised the girls closely, to try and prevent masturbation – or worse”. Girls were accused of “being in bed naked” together, and though the inquiry deplored the use of corporal punishment and compulsory genital examinations, it considered “indeterminate detention” for women over twenty-one was appropriate for those who were “sexually degenerate”. One consequence of this was the Industrial Schools Act passed in 1909, which saw “far more women than men...detained under the Act as moral degenerates” (ibid. p.173). Separate women’s prisons were built in 1913 for women “figured as a danger to community morals”, as criminologists thought “these women lacked the maternal instinct” which might be “revived” in separate prisons (Olssen 1992, p.268). These views reflected the ideas of Cesar Lombroso, who writing in the 1890s, considered “real” women incapable of crime and believed that only “masculine” women were capable of crime or prostitution (Daniels 1998,

pp.177-178). This undoubtedly cemented in the minds of penal authorities a connection between lesbians as biologically masculine and depraved beings attracted to sexual vice, and needing to be contained and controlled. Government run girls' reformatories existed throughout pre-1970 New Zealand, and girls regarded as delinquents out of control were consistently contained for moral as well as for criminal offences. Several inquiries related to these matters sharpened up the possibilities for detaining females.

Committee of Inquiry into Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders, 1925.

This significant Government inquiry was intended to influence societal attitudes and to regulate female and male sexuality. A Committee Of Inquiry into Venereal Disease had reported in 1922 following concerns regarding the post-WW1 increase in venereal disease. In 1924 the Minister of Health Sir Maui Pomare appointed a larger Committee of Inquiry to investigate "Mental Defectives and Sexual Perverts".^{iv} Alarmed by the "uncontrolled fecundity" of "mental defectives", this committee visited reformatories, prisons, mental hospitals and special schools, hearing evidence from over ninety medical, legal, church and educational representatives.^v The 33-page report expressed alarm about "hereditary subnormality", citing local and overseas examples, and recommended that a "Eugenic Board" be set up to authorize sterilisation for mental defectives. It further recommended closer supervision of all immigration, and that in particular, inquiry should be made into the family history of assisted immigrants (AJHR 1925, pp.17-23). Part III of the Report dealt with "sexual offenders", the Committee noting that "homosexualists" were not "confined to the male sex", though "only males come before the Court charged with this particular offence". They warned that many parents were "unaware that girls as well as boys may contract bad habits and fall into sexual abnormalities", and should become informed "in order that the danger may be guarded against", though made no recommendation as to how parents should obtain this information (ibid. p.25). They recommended that the Crimes Act be amended providing "indeterminate" sentences for all sexual offences, and that the proposed Eugenic Board discuss "sterilisation and desexualisation" for all sexual offenders as well as for the feeble-minded (ibid. pp.27-28), finally noting that of the 209 sexual offenders in New Zealand prisons in 1924, 23 were sentenced for sodomy (ibid. p.31).

In their submission to the Committee, the NCW alarmed by the falling birth rate and by "moral depravity", suggested segregated colonies to limit the fertility of the "unfit",

including females with “illegitimate” children by more than one father. They recommended segregating sexual perverts, including homosexuals, as “moral perverts” and “sexually uncontrolled persons”. NCW representative Jean Begg wanted a “census” of these “defectives”, with Effie Cardale wanting to include “consciously immoral” and “oversexed” women (Stace 1996, p.11). I think it likely that she would have included female “homosexualists” in this category. The Committee suggested adding the category of “moral imbeciles” to the Mental Defectives Act, defined as persons displaying “permanent mental defect”, and “vicious propensities” (AJHR 1925, p.15). These extreme recommendations, including marriage prohibition and sterilisation were fortunately not included in the 1928 Mental Defectives Amendment Act. A Eugenics Board with limited responsibilities was established, and attempted to create a register, but this was abandoned because it was felt that without the recommended sterilisation provisions it had “lost much of its point” (Robertson 2001, p.213). Had the more extreme recommendations of the Committee been implemented, New Zealand lesbians may well have suffered consequences similar to those in Nazi Germany, where eugenic views were implemented in legislation during this period. Regarded as “anti-socials” together with prostitutes and female criminals, some lesbians were transported to concentration camps during the Nazi regime.^{vi}

The Mazengarb Report, 1954.

This inquiry and subsequent report had far-reaching effects on young people in New Zealand. In 1954 forty-one Lower Hutt boys and sixteen girls aged from 13 years, were involved in ninety offences of carnal knowledge and indecent assault^{vii}, explained by one newspaper as a consequence of two world wars within forty years causing “social and economic upheaval”, including an increase in “juvenile delinquency”^{viii}. The investigation began when Petone police officer Frank Le Fort reported a run-away 15-year-old schoolgirl complaining, “I have had it. Sex, sex, sex. I want to get away from it.”^{ix} National Prime Minister Sidney Holland set up a Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Young People, chaired by Dr Oswald Mazengarb.^x The committee’s 78-page, 50,000-word report identified milk bars as meeting-places for juvenile delinquents, and claimed there was a rising wave of “sexual delinquency”, including homosexuality. Citing the Parker and Hulme case, it remarked that “these girls were abnormally homosexual in behaviour” (Mazengarb 1954, pp.7-8), and warned that “sexual misbehaviour can occur between members of the same sex” claiming “pupils of an intermediate school were

concerned in depravity, both heterosexual and homosexual” (ibid. p.25). The committee blamed working mothers and “precocious girls” who “corrupted the boys” for this depravity (ibid. p.15). A shortened version of the Report was sent to all New Zealand households receiving the family benefit (over 300,000 copies were distributed) strongly recommending that teenagers should receive no sex education or access to contraceptives, as the sight of condoms could be sexually exciting for young people. Although many people disregarded the Report, there were official consequences. The government implemented several recommendations: the Indecent Publications Act required registration of “publishers and distributors of any printed material”, the Child Welfare Act was broadened so that girls under the age of 16 “could be defined as delinquents if they had sexual relations with any male”, and the 1954 Police Offences Amendment Act made it an offence to give contraceptives, or information about contraceptives, to anyone under the age of sixteen (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, pp.59-60). The Mazengarb Report and subsequent regulation of youth sexuality caused “immense problems”, creating “a legacy of prudery and secrecy about sexual matters” (Coney 1993, pp.174-175). This included access to any information about lesbianism or homosexuality. Further, I think it likely that the broadening of the Child Welfare Act provisions enabled families to either threaten or to actually report young women in lesbian relationships to the authorities. This is an area difficult to research, as probably most pre-1970 so-called delinquent girls would not have identified as lesbians, and probably most would also have had sex with males, especially those running away from home.

The state seems to have made little distinction between different forms of female “promiscuity” or sexuality out of male control. The New Zealand Justice Department noted that “the traits and environment that may lead a boy into crime may lead his sister into promiscuity, fecklessness or prostitution”, admitting that “the law which is invoked against females, and particularly adolescent girls, is in many cases an attempt to regulate sexual behaviour by legal sanctions” (NZ Department of Justice 1968 in Jordan 1987, pp.186). The 1961 Crimes Act criminalised a range of offences associated with prostitution, but as it proved difficult to enforce, “ship girls” were frequently arrested on vagrancy charges and detained in girls’ homes “for their own protection” (ibid. pp.178-179). Jan Jordan points out “in the 1950s and 1960s hundreds of ship-girls were rounded up for this reason and detained” (Jordan 1987, p.186). During this period lesbians attending male homosexual

parties on ships or drinking in dockside kamp pubs risked being charged with prostitution.^{xi} Detailed research may reveal the ways in which lesbianism and prostitution were blurred, in the minds of the authorities, and in the lives of young New Zealand women caught in a system that perceived them only as sexual beings, which limited their employment options once they had criminal convictions.

Various other charges could also be used to effectively keep all women, including lesbians, out of public places. In 1907 vagrancy and drunkenness charges were brought against cross-dressing Bertha Victor, or “Boy Bertha” also known as “Bert Rotciv”, in Auckland (see Chapter 9). Simply wearing male attire in public could result in arrest. Hank Tobias, for example, was convicted of being disguised as a male in Wellington under the Police Offences Act, in 1962 (see Chapter 16). The law could also be brought to bear on situations like that of “Mr. X” who lived and worked as a man, and who was charged with fraud in Auckland for marrying another woman in 1945 (see Chapter 16).

As well as these possible consequences for rebellious young lesbians, there were other restraints. Although, apart from Section 139 of the 1961 Crimes Act, lesbianism was not mentioned directly in law, various pre-1970 occupational groups instituted codes of conduct that meant lesbians could be dismissed or removed. The Public Service Manual, Wellington, 1955, for example, used terms in the regulations like “disgraceful”, “improper”, “seriously detrimental”, which could be broadly interpreted and often were. The code of ethics of the New Zealand Educational Institute, the primary school teachers' union, defined unacceptable behaviours widely. Identifying as a lesbian before 1970 could result in dismissal or disciplinary action^{xii}. Public servants who were suspected of being lesbian were made to resign, or were transferred to unsuitable work and remote locations. Others were denied recognition or promotion, or made aware of whispering campaigns against them and pressure from co-workers to make them resign (refer Chapters 16, 18 and 21 for instances.)

Lesbians were not tolerated in the armed forces, despite the fact that many lesbians enlisted and were never detected. It is difficult to discover how many pre-1970 lesbians in the services were dismissed or asked to resign, as this information was not collected and restrictions under the Privacy Act prevent access to personal files. Some lesbians were

simply not re-enlisted, like Bubs Hetet (Chapter 22). The Police Force Regulations of 1950 required that candidates be “of unexceptionable moral character”. Police officers could be disciplined or dismissed for committing “any offence for which they could be sentenced in a court of law.”^{xiii} Lesbianism did not fall into this category, but it is unlikely that lesbians were tolerated in the pre-1970 New Zealand Police Force. However, records of lesbians who were dismissed or made to resign for this reason do not appear to exist.

A general climate of discrimination and hostility pervaded all these official codes and regulations.

Medical theories and containment of lesbianism

Medical “treatment” has traditionally been an important method of controlling lesbians. Gartrell notes that “several thousand years of religious censure created the atmosphere in which the disease model of lesbianism developed”. Homosexuality was defined as a sexual disorder under “psychopathic personality” in the 1935 Standard Nomenclature of Disease, and as a sexual deviation under “sociopathic personality disturbance” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association. It was first deleted as a pathological diagnosis in 1973, and replaced by “sexual orientation disturbance” (Gartrell 2000, pp.611-612). In 1973 the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists produced a Clinical Memorandum stating that “[m]any psychiatrists consider that homosexual feelings and behaviour are not necessarily or commonly associated with neurotic symptoms” (Matthews 1984, pp.117-118).

Brooten points out that “the modern medical diagnosis of love between women as pathological has ancient antecedents” (Brooten 1996, p.173). The Roman physician Soranos regarded “tribades” as suffering from “a chronic disease of the soul” manifested by “heavy alcohol use and impulsive quest for new forms of lust” (ibid.p.146). The abnormal “tribade” was portrayed as a woman with a large clitoris playing the “male role” and her apparently blameless partner playing “the passive, female role” (ibid. p.151). Brooten explains that though some physicians saw the “insertive sexual role” in male same-sexual acts as “natural”, there could be no complementary role in female same-sexuality because

The same phallocentric protocols that define men as the penetrators define women as

the penetrated. Women who derive sexual pleasure from contact with women, that is, outside the realm of male penetration, have to be medically problematic (ibid.p.161).

The clitoridectomy was recommended by several physicians as a treatment to prevent clitoral penetration between women and to control the disorder (ibid. pp.168-171). The question arises whether the idea of both the tribade as a type and of clitoridectomy as the appropriate treatment entered European thought through the re-introduction of these classical texts during the Middle Ages, which seems to have had a strong influence on European medical writers.

Seventeenth-century medical literature in England referred to “Fricatrices, or otherwise hermaphrodites”, arguing that lesbianism resulted from “physiological change”. Others described the classical Sappho as a well-endowed woman with a large clitoris. *The Midwives Book* described sex between “lewd women” with “their Clitoris greater, and hanging out more than others have”. *The Wonders of the Little World*, a popular children’s book, included descriptions of “Persons as have changed their Sex”, with examples of female-to-male “magical sex change” (Donaghue 1993, p.34). Eighteenth-century readers of *The Onania* learned that by using their extended “Clitoris...mistaken for a penis...Tribades...Subrigatrices and accounted Hermaphrodites [sic]...have been able to perform the Actions of Men with other Women” (ibid. pp.34-41). Other books described “Masculine-Females”, claiming that in London “many Lascivious Females divert themselves one with another.” Quincy’s medical dictionary asserted that the growth of these “hermaphroditical female members” was actually caused by “lascivious Titillations, and frictions” (ibid. 46-48). Trumbach suggests it was widely believed that female masturbation caused women to become men because manipulation “brought outside” organs “ordinarily hidden inwardly in a woman’s body” (Trumbach 1994, pp.117-118). Several writers described the enlarged clitoris, one calling “tribades” all women capable of “that Action from whence the name arose, whether they perform it or not”. James’ *Medicinal Dictionary* argued “anatomy preceeds desire”, and Arnauld in *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites* described tribades as a species “a hundred years earlier than the classification of ‘the homosexual’ described by Foucault”, challenging the argument that sexual identities are of recent origin (Donaghue 1996, pp.50-51). Trumbach argues that though the labels “sapphist” and “tommie”^{xiv} were in general use, women received

“legitimate feminine status” from their sexual relations with men, not because they avoided sex with women, and that they did not violate societal codes unless they “penetrated women” (Trumbach 1994, pp.112-113). Nonetheless, the contemporary “allegation that Marie Antoinette was a tribade” was the most “politically damaging” against her (Colwill 2000, p.486), whether or not she actually penetrated her lovers.

The question must be asked here, whether the tribades named themselves, or whether it was a term used by men to label transgressive women out of male control, seen to be usurping male pleasures and prerogatives. As may be seen from the above, women in lesbian relationships were certainly labelled by male observers, but it is unclear when they began to label themselves, and if they used these labels, or other terms, passed on through the private speech of gossip (see Chapter 5). However, from the nineteenth century onwards male homosexuals, some of whom were doctors, began to create their own names, a process interpreted by Foucault (1990a) and others as an invention of identity.

Karoly Maria Kertbeny, writing as “Benkert”, and who was himself homosexual, used biological ideas of sexuality in his 1869 open letter to the Prussian Minister of Justice arguing for changes to the Prussian sodomy laws, where he coined the hybrid term “homosexualitet” (Benkert 1869 in Blasius and Phelan 1997, p.67). The first recorded nineteenth-century medical text on lesbianism was the 1869 clinical report by Karl Westphal in *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten*, which Foucault has claimed as the first mention of “the homosexual” as a “species” (Foucault 1990a, p.43), and which presented the idea of “konträre Sexualempfindung”, or “contrary sexual feeling” (Katz 1983, p.147). Karl Ulrichs writing as “Numa Numantius” published pamphlets from 1870 theorising homosexuality as biologically based and hereditary, inventing the terms “urning” and “Uranian” within a broad classification system (Kennedy 1988, pp.167-178). Friedrich Engels, writing to Karl Marx, remarked of Ulrichs that

The paederasts are beginning to count themselves and find that they make up a power in the state. Only the organization is lacking, but...it already exists in secret...only in Germany is it possible that such a fellow...transforms filthiness into a theory (Engels 1869 in Kennedy 1988, p.134).

Ulrichs’ terms were taken up and used by some women; for example, Anna Rueling called herself a “uranian” in an address to the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (Rueling 1904

in Faderman and Eriksson 1980, pp.81-91). Richard von Krafft-Ebing's 1886 *Psychopathia Sexualis* included "Case 166" of the lesbian Sarolta, Countess V., and categorised lesbians into four deviant and masculine types (Krafft-Ebing 1886 in Newton 1985, p.16). Krafft-Ebing took up and popularised the term homosexual, with the first reported English use by Dr Kiernan in 1892 (Katz 1983, p.147).

These depictions of lesbianism as based on flawed biology were not the only nineteenth-century theories. A more popular view regarded "female sodomy" as "periodical insanity", linking it to the great nineteenth-century disorder of masturbation. Phrenologist Professor O. S. Fowler asserted that this "plague" of female sodomy was practiced to "an alarming extent" in girls' boarding schools and great efforts were required to "squench this form of licentiousness", claiming that even solitary female masturbation could cause "consumption", and women practicing it faced early decline and death (Fowler 1870, pp. 877-882). These views of the dire physical consequences of lesbianism may have continued to be believed by twentieth-century women in lesbian relationships, including for example, Katherine Mansfield, especially after she herself did contract tuberculosis (Chapter 12).

Essentialist theories of hereditary homosexuality were further developed by Dr Magnus Hirschfeld who, having attended the 1894 International Medical Congress in Rome, became influenced by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso's biological theories of criminality. Hirschfeld pseudonymously published a pamphlet^{xv}, arguing that homosexuality was biologically determined, giving six psychosexual "orientations" to explain "intermediary sexual types". Founding the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee^{xvi} in 1897, Hirschfeld produced the *Jahrbucher fur sexuelle Zwischenstufen* (1899-1923)^{xvii} and in 1919 set up the Institute for Sexual Science. His 1899 "Die objektive Diagnose der Homosexualitat"^{xviii} explicitly linked lesbianism with the Women's Movement, calling lesbians "courageous 'manly' women of high intelligence", and giving Queen Christina of Sweden as an example (Wolff 1986, pp.30-37). Hirschfeld's views were disseminated to English speakers through the British Society for Sexual Psychology, founded in 1914 (Wolff 1986, p.137), where Stella Browne presented sympathetic views of lesbianism. Hirschfeld's ideas were further promoted through the World League for Sexual Reform, founded in 1928, and which included many well-known women as supporters, for example Margaret Sanger, Helene Stocker and Alexandra Kollontai. Women speakers at the 1929

Congress included Dora Russell, Vera Brittain, and Stella Browne (ibid. pp.451-454), and members included Rebecca West and Vita Sackville-West (ibid. p.269). Hirschfeld's work was suppressed by Hitler's regime after 1933 (Lauritsen and Thorstad 1974, Steakley 1975, Wolff 1986). It is difficult to assess the influence of Hirschfeld and others on New Zealanders, but it is likely that some New Zealand medical doctors as well as women living lesbian lives were influenced by these organisations, conferences and publications.

The publication in 1895 of "Sexual Inversion in Women" by Havelock Ellis, and of *Sexual Inversion* in 1897 by Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds included case studies of lesbians. Havelock Ellis was married to Edith Ellis, who was lesbian, and he became interested in lesbianism (Lesbian History Group 1989, p.10). He theorised a developing scale of "abnormal" women, from women in "passionate friendships", where no "congenital inversion" was involved, to "actively inverted" women, condescendingly described as "attracted [to]...the pick of the women whom the average man would pass by" (Newton 1985, p.17). Ellis' views became widely known through his preface to *TWOL* (see above), and were read by the women in this study familiar with the book. At least Katherine Mansfield was familiar with the work of Symonds (Chapter 12).

Edward Carpenter described homosexuals as a useful "intermediate sex", suggesting "urnings" were not "so very rare" (Carpenter 1984, p.191) and that "the loves of such women are often very intense, and...life-long" (ibid.p.195). Carpenter's work was more widely available than that of other sexologists, especially for English readers (Oram and Turnbull 2001, p.94). He argued for a "Free Society" where the "inner laws of the sex-passion, of love, and of all human relationship" would supersede "the outer laws", because the "subjection of sex-relations to legal conventions is an intolerable bondage" (Carpenter 1913, pp.145-148). Women wrote to Carpenter; for example, Frances Wilder asked how she might contact others "of the same temperament" (Wilder 1915 in Oram and Turnbull 2001, pp.246-248). Katherine Mansfield (Chapter 12) read Carpenter's work at the General Assembly Library; other New Zealand readers likely to have been familiar with Carpenter's work were Jerome Spencer and others from the Havelock Work (Chapter 9) involved in the arts and crafts movement.

Some lesbians welcomed the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who rejected congenital

inversion and trapped-soul theories, stating, “psychoanalytical research was ...opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of special character” (Freud in Wolff 1986, p.25). Freud proposed heterosexuality as “the normal sexual development for men and women”, arguing that girls give up their mothers as primary love objects, “transferring their attentions to men”, because they sought “the penis that has been denied them” (Lesbian History Group 1989, p.11). A girl “might remain arrested in [her] original attachment to [her] mother and never achieve a true change-over to men”, or she might “refuse to accept the fear of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she *does* possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man” (Freud 1931 in Lesbian History Group 1989, p.11, original emphasis). Freudians therefore explained lesbianism as a form of “arrested development”, a “passing phase” traversed on the path to heterosexuality (Lesbian History Group 1989, pp.11-12).

Various lesbian scholars believe that sexology had negative effects on women’s romantic friendships, which became suspect as actively or potentially sexual (Faderman 1981, Jeffreys 1985). Probably this was unavoidable. The “scientific classifications” of the early sexologists were “nearly identical with theologic classifications and moral pronouncements of the English common law of the fifteenth century” (Kinsey 1948 in Weeks 1989, p.66). Weeks suggests that sexology “moved with, not against, the grain of nineteenth century preoccupations” (Weeks 1989, p.76). Rather than creating ideas, he suggests it was constructed from “pre-existing writings”, emerging from social practice. Nineteenth-century changes in social conditions produced “major shifts” in gender relations, and sexuality became “a surrogate” through which other battles were fought (ibid.p74). Further, it is doubtful whether women’s friendships have ever really been acceptable within patriarchal societies, or not have been sexually suspect (refer Chapter 2).

Increased venereal disease following WW1 had created a “moral panic”, making “good marital relations” seem desirable and the publication of Marie Stopes’ *Married Love* in 1918 “timely” (Rose 1993, pp.111-112). Stopes was a proponent of the “companionate marriage” (see below), arguing that sexual union was not “solely for the purpose of creating children” (Rose 1993, pp.136). This seemingly supported same-sex love, but Stopes attacked lesbian teachers in *Sex and the Young*, calling them “perverts” for encouraging “a love-sick following” among the girls (Stopes 1926 in Oram and Turnbull 2001, pp.138-139), described

“Lesbian love” as homosexual vice” in *Enduring Passion* (ibid. p.112), and wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas on “the horrid homosexual problem” (Stopes 1939 in Hall 1981, p.217). Despite this negativity, women in lesbian relationships could have used the ideas of the influential Stopes about loving sexual unions where the purpose was not reproduction, as permission to sexualise their own romances.

Ideals of heterosexual love which fitted sexological prescriptions were the focus of numerous sex advice books and manuals available in New Zealand. For example, John McDermott (1931) *The Sex Problem in Modern Society* included chapters by Dora Russell supporting “free unions”, divorce law reform and birth control, arguing for women’s rights to sexual pleasure. She considered “sex love the most instinctive pleasure known...starvation or thwarting of this instinct causes...acute unhappiness” (Russell 1931, p.122). A chapter by Lindsey and Evans promoted the “companionate marriage”, suggesting legal reforms to expedite more equal heterosexual unions (Lindsey and Evans 1931, pp.170-192). They encouraged “female sexual energies” to be directed toward men and marriage by promoting the “intense psychological companionship” between husband and wife with an emphasis on intimate sexual expression. As Freudian ideas of lesbianism became popular, it became seen as a “threatening, oppositional alternative to the heterosexual pattern” (Simmons 1979, pp.55-56). Freudian analyst Wilhelm Stekel thought the “inclination toward the same sex was more pronounced” in girls than boys but must give way to heterosexuality (Stekel 1953, p.58). Jeffreys sees a main focus of twentieth century sexology as overcoming “women’s resistance to sexual intercourse” (Jeffreys 1985, pp.4-5), in part a result of the “general weakening” of the restraints keeping women “dependent on men and trapped within marriage” (ibid. p.192).

Some women psychologists and sexologists argued that lesbianism was natural and quite ordinary. Katherine B. Davis surveyed 2200 women in 1929, finding lesbianism common, with over half the women acknowledging intense emotional attractions to other women, and half again describing these as “sexual in character” (Faderman 1981, pp.326-327). M. Esther Harding, a Jungian argued, “it must be recognized that the emotion involved in such friendship is instinctual or .sexual in character” and that men were “for the most part, quite unable to give women the kind of emotional satisfaction and security which they can find with their women friends” (Harding 1933 in Johnson 1989, p.152). Laura Hutton, a Freudian, thought “sexuality will play some part of any intense emotional relationship”,

suggesting that “friendships between responsible women...involving (perhaps only very occasionally, or during a transitory phase of the friendship) some sexual expression may indeed play quite a useful part in society” (Hutton 1935 in Johnson 1989, p. 152). Harding believed women in lesbian relationships “cannot be considered perverted if their actions are motivated by love”, and Hutton advised that in seeking the causes of homosexuality “it would seem wiser to refrain from adopting either the congenital or the psychogenic theory to the exclusion of the other”, suggesting lesbians should be described as “sexually abnormal (or anomalous) rather than perverted”, and pointing out that “the abnormal is not necessarily the diseased” (ibid. pp.152-153). Ideas on lesbianism as maternal fantasy were developed by Freudians including Jeanne Lampl-de Groot in 1928, and Helene Deutsch in 1932 (see de Lauretis 1994, pp.58-65; these ideas are surveyed in Chapter 11, in relation to Ursula Bethell and Effie Pollen). Margaret Mead, who had a lesbian relationship herself with Ruth Benedict (see Lapsley 2000) popularised anthropological ideas of gender and sexuality in her *Coming of Age in Samoa*, with a positive view of homosexuality, significantly also published in 1928, the same year as Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* and Woolf’s *Orlando*. However, in her later *Male and Female*, published in 1949, Mead was far less positive. These books were freely available in New Zealand, as was the most influential medical publication of the twentieth century, Alfred Kinsey’s landmark report on female sexuality, showing a high incidence of lesbian experience in America (Kinsey et al.1953, p.474). The Kinsey 0-6 scale from heterosexuality to homosexuality affirmed that large numbers of women and men had experienced or desired homosexual contacts, suggesting ten percent of the population were predominantly homosexual. Kinsey argued that homosexuality was “a significant part of human sexual activity since the dawn of history, primarily because it is an expression of capacities that are basic in the human animal”.

Other popular post-WW2 books on lesbianism were extremely negative. Frank Caprio warned lesbianism could influence “the stability of our social structure” (Caprio 1955, p.viii). Arguing that “homosexual experiences may result in the precipitation of a psychosis” requiring “psychiatric treatment”, Caprio described “alibi marriages” used to “cover-up” lesbianism. He thought it was increasing, due to “the masculinity complex found in many women as a result of defeminization trends in modern society”, and that it must be “dealt with” through psychoanalysis (Caprio 1955, pp.168-169). Winifred

Richmond also attributed lesbianism to “the growing independence of wage-earning women” and their “defective emotional development” (Richmond in Caprio 1955, pp. 9-10). Wolfe described the “predatory lesbian who seduces innocent young girls causing them to give up the thought of marriage and family life for a life of homosexual enslavement” (Wolfe in Caprio 1955, pp.7-8) (see the Petley and Davis case, Chapter 6).

Jeffreys regards this period as a “time of crisis for male supremacy”. One solution was the attitude towards sex outside marriage, including the eroticising of the single woman, now expected to “join in the sexual servicing of men previously reserved for her married sister”. The 1960s sexual revolution made it difficult if not impossible for women to reject heterosexual activity without being labelled deviant, as compulsory heterosexuality now required active sexual participation by all women (Jeffreys 1993, p.93, pp.105-106). However, Weeks (1977, 1981, 1989) and Altman (1971, 1982), writing from a gay point of view, consider sexology and the sexual revolution helped liberate homosexuals from earlier models of moral blame or criminality. Unfortunately sexology also encouraged the belief that “treatment” for lesbianism was possible and desirable. Reuben, for example, argued that women must seek to become heterosexual because “lesbians are handicapped by having only half the pieces...one vagina plus another vagina still equals zero” (Reuben 1969 in Jeffreys 1993, p.111).

Medical ideas and treatments in New Zealand

Though women leading lesbian lives may not have read medical articles themselves, they felt the full effect of them if they or their families consulted doctors about lesbianism. Like their overseas counterparts, pre-1970 New Zealand medical writers regarded lesbianism as pathological. Dr Reginald Medlicott^{xix} came to fame through his association with the Parker and Hume case (see Chapter 6), and wrote several articles on lesbianism. He defined “sexual deviation” as “any pattern of sexual behaviour which differs from normal coitus or foreplay to coitus” (Medlicott 1963, p.373), asserting

Repressed homosexuality has a special role in persecutory paranoia, but there is some reason to believe that homosexuality might be prominent in other types of paranoia (Medlicott 1979, p.123).

Comparing Chicago murderers Leopold and Loeb to Parker and Hulme, he argued that

because both pairs were homosexual, they were “immature emotionally” (Medlicott 1961) and that few murderers, “achieved anything approaching mature heterosexuality”, as all displayed elements of “either overt or covert” homosexuality. Christchurch psychiatrist M. Bevan-Brown claimed homosexuality in “late adolescence” was “always a sign of emotional immaturity” (Bevan-Brown 1961, p.212). No pre-1970 medical articles suggested lesbian relationships were other than pathological and abnormal, though Freudian influences and ideas of arrested development, had by the 1960s, provided an approach free from the earlier views of moral culpability as indicated in earlier government reports and inquiries.

The first documented case of treatment in New Zealand may be Annemarie Anon., born in Invercargill about 1869 and committed to Ashburn Hall and then Seacliff Mental Asylum at the age of 21 in 1890, under the care of Dr Frederick Truby King, the founder of Plunket (Chapter 6). Regarded as a “lively and clever girl...sympathetic to her schoolfellows”, Annemarie won prizes, including one for the “most popular girl.” She was committed for “raving” and “profound melancholy”, which her mother claimed occurred during her menstrual periods, and she was “given to masturbation” (Brookes 1991, p.15). This suggests that she was thought to suffer from “masturbational mania”, a term used to describe lesbianism at this time. For example, Westphal reported that Miss N., committed to the insane asylum in Berlin, suffered from “a rage to love women and, besides kissing and joking to engage in masturbation with them” (Westphal 1869 in Kokula 2000, p.102).

The doctors suggested Annemarie be “completely unsexed by the removal of her ovaries and clitoris”, recommending this operation as “there could never be any normal outlet for sexuality nor abandonment of the abnormal one” (Brookes 1991, p.15). The operation was performed on 20 July 1890 by Dr Ferdinand Batchelor, Dunedin, assisted by three other doctors, including Truby King, in a Seacliff cottage, and Annemarie's fallopian tubes, ovaries and clitoris were removed. Truby King noted that after the operation Annemarie no longer had “any indecent sexual habits”, apart from occasionally “expos[ing] herself”, and she was discharged from Seacliff Asylum in December, the operation being regarded as a success and reported in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* (Brookes 1991, p.16).

Brookes suggests that Annemarie's case may have been an isolated one in New Zealand

(Brookes 1992, p.141), but as numbers of US and British women were subjected to surgical treatment for unacceptable sexual behaviour at this time, including clitoridectomy and hysterectomy as “asexualisation” (Katz 1983, Katz 1992, Weeks 1977), it is likely that there were other cases of surgical treatment for lesbianism in New Zealand. It is significant that males at Seacliff guilty of “masturbation” or “misdirected sexuality” did not receive surgical treatment (Brookes 1992, p.141). Water treatments involving various baths, or cold and hot water being poured over the body, may also have been used in New Zealand, probably at the Rotorua Bathhouse, as these were regarded as useful for the treatment of “nervous” and mental problems (Kneip 1896, pp. 325-331); this included lesbianism (Katz 1976, p.134). Katherine Mansfield underwent water treatment at Bad Warishofen with Dr Kneip in 1909 (Chapter 12).

Belich reports that in 1890, 41% of a sample of women patients at Auckland Lunatic Asylum were committed for “threats to social norms”; by 1910 the figure was 54%. He suggests that this indicates New Zealand women rejecting “their roles as wives, housekeepers and mothers were at risk of being judged insane” (Belich 2001, p.176). I think that some of these women may well have been committed because they were in lesbian relationships.

Freudians saw lesbianism as a form of “arrested development”, a “passing phase” traversed on the path to heterosexuality and they and other pre-1970 psychoanalysts and psychiatrists sometimes attempted to treat it (see for example Wolff 1973, pp.23-39, Roof 2000, pp.613-615), including Dr L. K. Gluckman. Gluckman believed, “lesbianism was unknown in the pre-European Maori” and the “current emergence of lesbianism” among modern Maori women was “determined by social, environmental and cultural pressures.” Claiming that in early Maori society “a single girl could...bestow her favours on whom she wished”, Gluckman warned “artificial isolation of girls may lead to...faute de mieux lesbianism”. He argued that “uninhibited Maori attitudes to biological sexual expression” made it likely that lesbianism was “more common in prostitutes of European origin” than Maori prostitutes, and that as “Maori girls...become better educated and acquire the moral codes of Europeans”, lesbianism would increase, giving the example of a Maori girls’ school, where the “custom of fagging...known as Moms and Bebs” led to “overt lesbian expression”, which he thought “potentially pathological” (Gluckman 1967, pp.98-103, refer also Chapter

11 on “the maternal constituent”). Despite believing lesbianism might be caused by a lack of sexual access to men, Gluckman (1966) suggested that some lesbians married for “social and economic reasons” and “security and status”, basing this on one hundred lesbian clients over his fourteen years in psychiatric practice. Obviously, access to heterosexual intercourse had not prevented lesbianism in these married lesbian clients. E. Philipp (1968) also described a case of two married lesbians with children, in a relationship accepted by their husbands, and where everyone kept up a conventional family front.

In his treatment and classification of lesbian patients Gluckman diagnosed what he called their “disordered sexuality”, as “Psychotic and Prepsychotic Disorders; Psychopathic Personalities; Neurotic Disorders; Essential Lesbians; High Grade Congenital Mental Defective; High Grade Defective and Epileptic, with nearly a third of the cases noted as “Too Little Data for Classification”. He commented that they “would have fitted into one of the more defined groups had adequate data been available”. He recommended treatments including medication, education and explanation, environmental and occupational manipulation, psychotherapy, aversion treatment, or a combination of these (Gluckman 1966, pp.448-449).

He reported some of his successful treatments, including Case 5 where the patient “made a reasonable recovery” and now lived a “useful but solitary life avoiding the company of both males and females” (ibid. p.444), apparently a desirable outcome. Gluckman’s article was published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, intended to assist the general practitioner from the perspective of New Zealand’s resident “expert” on lesbians, and with the stated aim of presenting “a simple and easily comprehended clinical approach to the presenting lesbian patient”. He explained that the “physician’s role” should not be as a “moralist”, but to “minimize or remove these symptoms” (i.e.lesbianism), “prevent their recurrence...and to pay attention to the wider community implications of the illness” (ibid. p.449). New Zealand doctors informed by this widely available article, would have exposed the lesbians who were brought in by their families, or who consulted them independently, to Gluckman’s ideology. There are many stories about lesbians’ experiences with doctors (see Part 4). Gluckman urged the doctors to treat lesbians in the wider social interest, reassuring them that though the American Psychiatric Association’s list of disorders did not specifically list “lesbianism”, it was included by the Australian Committee on Medical Statistics, the German Psychiatric

Society and the Soviet draft classification on mental disorders. He advised them that it should be understood as “homosexuality restricted to the human female”, and treated as “an antisocial or dissocial reaction”, “a sexual deviation”, “a psychopathic reaction”, or a “sexual psychopathy” depending on the “total personality” of the individual lesbian (ibid. p.443). In this climate of opinion it is not surprising that there are reports of New Zealand lesbians receiving electroconvulsive shock and other “treatments”.

Prudence Gregory (1925-1986), for example, received this treatment several times in attempts to “cure” her lesbianism. The first NZBC women’s radio programme supervisor from 1962, Prudence struggled with lesbian feelings. As a catholic, she thought lesbianism was morally wrong, becoming engaged in an attempt at heterosexuality, though was unable to “go through with it”. She sought treatment at Porirua Hospital, and at Ashburn Hall, where she felt like “a tiny figure in a big white bed, all curled up”, when the psychiatrist made her admit she was lesbian, and prescribed Librium. Neither psycho-pharmaceuticals nor electroconvulsive shock therapy cured her lesbianism. She thought that what did help her at Ashburn Hall, was

falling in love with another (woman) patient...I began to see what had been wrong then: that I had got STUCK. I wasn’t out as a lesbian...I was in fact, still split in half, trying to be both hetero and homosexual and it was literally driving me insane.^{xx}

Unfortunately, in the pre-1970 period her religious guilt would not allow her to establish lesbian relationships, or even have lesbian friends. Despite later lesbian friendships, Prudence was plagued by depression, and committed suicide in 1986.^{xxi}

Lynette^{xxii} (b.1942) received aversion therapy as “treatment”. She said that she was interested in girls from an early age, and had “affairs” with school friends. She left school at sixteen to work at the Christchurch Post Office, and reported wondering why she “couldn’t seem to get interested in men”. A male co-worker “made a pass”, and Lynette said that though she rejected his advances, she worried why she felt repelled by the thought of physical relations with men. In 1958 she consulted a doctor who referred her to the Outpatients Department of Sunnyside Mental Hospital. Here she reported receiving a form of aversion therapy, consisting of naked male figures being shown on a screen, followed by naked female figures. She received electric shocks when the female figures were shown. This “treatment” did not change her sexual feelings for women, she explained, though it gave her a continuing fear of the pictures. She left treatment, and transferred to the General Post Office in Wellington, where she began a relationship with a woman co-worker, and

met “the kamp crowd”. Her Post Office manager “found out” about their relationship, and Lynette said that she was subsequently fired using Section 42 of the Mental Health Act, as homosexuality was listed as a mental disease.^{xxiii} (See Katz 1976 pp.199-200 for a 1970 US case of aversion therapy used as a treatment for lesbianism).

Ginny (b.1937) and Leta (b.1938)^{xxiv} fled from Auckland in 1958 because of family opposition to their relationship. Leta was under 21, and her mother tried to have her committed as a “voluntary patient” and a minor under her legal control, to be “treated” for lesbianism. She contacted a doctor and the Auckland police, complaining that her mentally ill under-age daughter was in an abnormal sexual relationship. A policewoman contacted Ginny and asked questions about the relationship and, though it was unclear how or if the police could act, the couple thought it best to escape to Australia, the only country where a passport was not needed at that time. (Leta’s mother would have been required to sign the documentation permitting the under-age Leta to obtain a passport.) It is unclear in this situation what powers the police and doctors had, or thought they had, but the threat of forced hospitalisation was very frightening for lesbians.^{xxv}

Charleen^{xxvi} (b.1940) was committed by her mother to Oakley Mental Hospital, Auckland, as a child patient. Charleen’s mother entertained American soldiers and other men during and after WW2, and Charleen began to “act out” at school. She was expelled several times and placed in the care of the authorities as “out of control”, eventually being committed for psychiatric treatment. She was released from hospital, but then spent time in girls’ homes and Arohata Borstal before being committed to Porirua Mental Hospital, Wellington, where she was treated by Dr Stallworthy.^{xxvii} On her release aged 21, Charleen married a homosexual man and they supported themselves through prostitution. She had several lesbian relationships, and was involved with Hank, a cross-dressing Australian lesbian (Chapter 16). Her psychiatrists regarded this relationship as a symptom of her psychiatric problems when she was again referred for treatment.^{xxviii}

Jill Julius Matthews examined case histories of earlier women patients of Glenside Mental Hospital, Adelaide, finding “lesbianism” was used by psychiatrists “not as a major category of diagnosis but as a behavioural symptom of broader mental disorder” (Matthews 1984, p.115). It was applied to patients who had “negative relationships with men”, because

psychiatrists applied “moral standards of the gender order rather than medical standards of madness” (ibid. p.122). Phyllis Chesler found that her small group of American lesbians hospitalized between 1945 and 1971 were not only committed at an earlier age than her other groups (their average age was twenty-one), but they remained in asylums for more than three times longer in some cases (Chesler 1972, pp.127-130). Katz reports a number of cases where psychosurgery including lobotomy was used as a treatment for American homosexual men during the 1950s (Katz 1976). There are reports of it being used as a treatment for lesbianism in Australia^{xxix}, and perhaps it was also used here. Katz also reports a 1940 case of treatment using pharmacological shock as a treatment for lesbianism (ibid. pp.165-166). Dr Reginald Medlicott, who thought lesbianism was a symptom of communicated insanity or folie a deux (Chapter 6), became superintendent at Ashburn Hall, where numbers of lesbians including Gregory were “treated” for lesbianism. Though there are many stories of psychiatric treatment among pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians, both from those who were patients and those who worked in the health system, as well as from others who feared forced hospitalisation and treatment, there is not yet a body of research to draw upon.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the effects of the law on lesbianism and on male homosexuality. Unlike male homosexual behaviour, lesbian sex between consenting adults was never a criminal offence in New Zealand, probably due both to the British view that legal silence about these possibilities would prevent women discovering them, and because it was difficult to define or prove lesbian sex acts. Laws against male homosexuality and regulations intended to control gender and sexual transgressions by women, could function to alert them to the possibility of lesbianism.

Lesbianism was effectively contained by a web of laws and regulations, preventing women from transgressing the boundaries of acceptable sexual and gender behaviours. These included cross-dressing as well as other unacceptable public or private conduct suggesting uncontrolled sexuality. Where the law could not contain the transgression, medical treatments were used to regulate women into submission.

Classical ideas of lesbianism as a disorder appear to have been re-introduced during the

renaissance, and all earlier ideas re-presented in sexology theories from the nineteenth century onwards. It appears that there were always labels for transgressive women, and while it is not clear what terms women used among themselves, when male homosexuals began to name themselves using medical terminology some women also took up these labels.

Pre-1970 medical treatments for lesbianism in New Zealand included surgical treatment, electroconvulsive shock, aversion therapy and psychoanalysis. Whether regarded as pathology, inadequacy or social threat, before 1970 lesbianism was classified as symptomatic of mental illness in most countries. Medical theories and descriptions of lesbianism remained the most common and influential source of information on lesbian possibilities throughout the period of this study, popularised through the media and by gossip, as discussed in the following chapter, making it unlikely any New Zealand women were unaffected by the anti-lesbianism of these discourses.

ⁱPersonal knowledge.

ⁱⁱDorian Society Papers, LAGANZ, MS Papers 359.

ⁱⁱⁱPersonal knowledge.

^{iv}The Chairman was Hon. W. H. Triggs, and members the prominent Sir F. Truby King, with Sir Donald McGavin, Dr J. Sands Elliott, C. E. Matthews, Controller-General of Prisons, J. Beck, Officer-in-Charge of Special Schools, and Dr Ada Paterson as the only woman.

^vThe Committee met in Wellington, Auckland, Hamilton, Waikeria, New Plymouth, Christchurch, Otekaieke, Dunedin, and Invercargill between 23 May and 22 August 1924, and heard evidence from, among many others, Miss Howlett from the NCW and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Professor Shelley from Canterbury University College, Professor Kirk from Victoria University College, the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church.

^{vi}It is thought that German lesbians were sent to concentration camps as "anti-social women", wearing a black triangle to denote this status, together with prostitutes and female criminals. See, for example, Friele (1980,1995), Kokula (1983, 1984). Schoppmann points out that "eugenicists subsumed homosexuality under the concept of 'anti-social behaviour' and that "the Nazis drew a special connection between lesbians and prostitutes", though considers it impossible to estimate how often lesbians were arrested (Schoppmann 1993, p.14).

^{vii}*The Dominion*, 6 July 1954.

^{viii}*NZ Truth*, 14 July 1954.

^{ix}Hearings of the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents, 1954; 4 August 1954, Folder One, ATL.

^xThe Mazengarb Committee sat for two months in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland, hearing evidence from 145 witnesses and 120 written submissions from government officials, education, welfare and church representatives, milk bar owners, and the Communist Party. Members of the Committee were Rev. Jack Somerville, Nigel Stace, of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Jim Leggat, principal of Christchurch Boys' High School, Dr G. L. McLeod of the Health Department, and two women, Mrs Lucy O'Brien of the Catholic Women's League and Mrs Rhoda Bloodworth, a Justice of the Peace.

^{xi}Personal communication to AJL from confidential informants.

^{xii}*National Education* 3 September 1951, p.289

^{xiii}New Zealand Police, Black Book (The Police Force Act 1947 and Regulations made hereunder and General Instructions for the Guidance of the Police Force of New Zealand), c.1950.

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- ^{xiv} Tommy/tommie: “a masculine woman of the town” “a woman who does not care for the society of others than those of her own sex” (*A Dictionary of Slang*: Partridge; “a mannish sort of prostitute” (*A Dictionary of the Underworld*: Partridge).
- ^{xv} With Max Spohr 1896: *Sappho und Sokrates, Wie erklärt sich die Liebe der Männer und Frauen zu Personen des eigenen Geschlechts*. Tr, “How can one explain the love of men and women for people of their own sex?”
- ^{xvi} Tr. The Scientific-humanitarian Committee.
- ^{xvii} Tr. Yearbooks for Sexual Intermediaries.
- ^{xviii} Tr. The objective diagnosis of homosexuality.
- ^{xix} Dr Medicott’s career included practice at Porirua Mental Hospital, where he helped “treat” patients using malaria, insulin or electric shock (Williams 1987, pp.160-167), and at Ashburn Hall where he attempted to “cure” lesbians (personal informants).
- ^{xx} Diary Prudence Gregory 1985, in author’s possession.
- ^{xxi} Interview Prudence Gregory 1985-1986, by Alison Laurie, in author’s possession.
- ^{xxii} Pseudonym.
- ^{xxiii} Notes from an unrecorded interview with Alison Laurie, 1987.
- ^{xxiv} Pseudonyms.
- ^{xxv} Personal communication from Ginny and Leta to author.
- ^{xxvi} Pseudonym.
- ^{xxvii} Dr Stallworthy was the prosecution psychiatrist for Juliet Hulme and Pauline Parker, and had argued that their lesbianism did not mean that the girls were insane (Chapter 6).
- ^{xxviii} Personal communication, also Charleen’s patient files from Oakley and Porirua Hospitals (in her possession).
- ^{xxix} In the 1980 Australian documentary film *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers*, a lesbian describes receiving a partial lobotomy as treatment for lesbianism.

Chapter 5

The Overseas Stories

Introduction

This chapter surveys pre-1970 European information on lesbianism influencing the cultural heritage brought into New Zealand. These stories affected everyone, creating the context for women's relationships and how they were understood. Even women who did not read the stories themselves would have been constrained by these cautionary tales, warning them away from lesbian possibilities, and forcing those who persisted in following forbidden desires, to live lives of discretion, concealment and deception. At the same time, these stories confirmed the existence of lesbian possibilities and pleasure.

Faderman (1994) suggests lesbian literature has a rich history, with several genres and categories, and Donaghue concludes that novels, ballads and other accounts of sex between women were widely available in England from the seventeenth century, pointing out that "where there is a taboo, there must be enough knowledge for that taboo to arise" (Donaghue 1993, p.22). Mark Mitchell and David Leavitt suggest that for earlier readers wanting to read something "about...two women, who form a possibly erotic bond", though there was no actual catalogue to guide them, "the books were there" (Mitchell and Leavitt 1998, pp.xvi-xvii), including classical, ecclesiastical and fictional stories of women's gender and sexual transgressions. Surveys of lesbian stories are available in the work of Jeanette Foster (1975), former librarian at Alfred Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, still the most comprehensive survey of early material; in Donaghue (1993) describing stories available in England from 1668 to 1801, and in Faderman's (1994) anthology of lesbian literature from the seventeenth century to the present.

How widely available were these stories in New Zealand? The previous chapter discussed early ecclesiastical regulations informing later civil law as well as consequent societal attitudes towards lesbianism and male homosexuality. Though not secular authorities in New Zealand, various churchmen and religious groups exercised considerable and continuing influence on law-makers, censorship regulations and conceptions of public

morality.

Availability of overseas material in New Zealand

Early New Zealand was not “a tightly regulated society”, as censorship legislation was at first limited (Christoffel 1989 in Watson and Shuker 1998, p.116). The “real censors” in colonial New Zealand were “the consciences of the respectable” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.5). Searching New Zealand library catalogues for what overseas titles were available is inconclusive. There were private lending libraries, and people imported books and magazines directly. For example, Maud England (Chapter 9) received “left-wing newspapers and periodicals” from her sister's bookshop in England, and “imported books not easily obtainable in New Zealand” (Hughes 1998, p.161). Ena Ryan (born 1908) recalled her middle-class family receiving the *Ladies Home Journal* and other American magazines before WW1, as well as buying overseas paperbacks (Ryan in Owen 1998, pp.15-16).

Most New Zealand reading came from Britain, each boat bringing “high” and “popular” culture, including verse, fiction, non-fiction, and magazines like the *Illustrated London News* (Gibbons 1981, p.310). Communist Party member Alex Galbraith reported a “surprising amount of literature from other parts of the world...in circulation with all sorts of intermingled philosophies” (Nunes 1994, p.15, p.24). A bookshop in Christchurch imported Scandinavian books ordered by Manawatu settlers, some sexually explicit.ⁱ By 1890 pamphlets were available arguing “the present rigorous sexual code” caused “mental and physical illness and that the cure for the malaise was ‘sexual exercise’” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.124). Newspapers carried advertisements for “books by post”, a 1890 advertisement for Dr L.A. Mert’s *The Physiology of Marriage*, to assist “matrimonial unhappiness”ⁱⁱ, announced that it could be obtained by writing to Melbourne, while another, headed “Secrets of Life and Health”, offered a “Medical Treatise” by post to help “Lost Manhood”.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1921 Norman E. Aitken’s Book Arcade, Wellington, advertised a range of books on sexuality available by post, including Marie Stopes’ *Married Love*, claimed as “a new contribution to the solution of sex difficulties”^{iv}. Such advertising must have encouraged people to order further books on sexuality, including homosexuality. People could also have learned about the existence of books on homosexuality through newspaper articles and tried to obtain them from these advertisers. One 1907 article referred to

“revelations with regard to the psychology of sex...made as the result of the researches of Kraft-Ebing [sic] and other writers on the subject”, and mentioned Havelock Ellis and his “Studies in the Psychology of Sex”^v. In 1911 a legislative councillor quoted Ellis as “an authority which cannot be disputed”, and the Attorney General had advised Members of Parliament “to read *The Evolution of Sex*” in 1908 (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.124). Some people obtained extensive private libraries, for example, Wellington photographer Henry Wright owned works by Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and other sexologists, later bequeathed to the Alexander Turnbull Library^{vi}, while others collected explicitly sexual postcards and erotic illustrations^{vii}. The General Assembly Library in Wellington held a range of books including work by Edward Carpenter, which Katherine Mansfield borrowed (Chapter 12). Comparably, in Australia International Workers of the World member Fred Hancock listed texts read by socialists there, including works by Krafft-Ebing, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis among other writers on “sexual science” (Damousi 1994, pp.71-74).

Early libraries may have held books later banned. As literacy increased after the Education Act of 1877 there was increasing concern about what publications were now available to a larger reading public. Writing of England in 1880, Matthew Arnold bemoaned “the tawdry novels which flare in the bookshelves of our railway stations” (Arnold in Williams 1975, p.190). The first prosecution in New Zealand for indecent publications occurred in 1890, when five booksellers were arrested for selling novels by Emile Zola. The 1892 Offensive Publications Act was soon enacted, prohibiting “any picture or printed or written matter which is of an indecent, immoral, or obscene nature”, including advertisements (Watson and Shuker 1998, p.117). Controls on the import or publication of books were extended by the 1908 Police Offences Act, the 1910 Indecent Publications Act and the 1913 Customs Act. Olssen suggests that the government responded to the disruptions of WW1 by instituting greater censorship of books and films, responses to the 1918 influenza epidemic also reflecting the feeling that “disease” and “disorder” were both foreign imports (Olssen 1992, p.278).

The Customs Department maintained confidential lists of books considered indecent or seditious under the 1910 Indecent Publications Act. These lists were circulated to the New Zealand Booksellers Association and the New Zealand Library Association to guide the

ordering and importing of books^{viii}. By 1935, 138 books were banned and others restricted under the 1910 Act (Barrowman 1991, p.130). Import licensing restrictions were introduced in 1936, to assist the informal censorship developed between the Minister of Customs, and importers, librarians and booksellers. By 1952 there were over 400 books on these lists of “indecent literature” containing several categories; one of books by authors such as Sigmund Freud and Krafft-Ebing which could be imported for “experts”; another allowing specialist groups such as nudists to import nudist magazines; a third category of books banned to everyone, with no exceptions, like Margaret Graham’s *Common Treatise on Birth Control*, and Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* which was banned from 1936 though by 1950 it was available again from some public libraries. Two final categories were for books that had been assessed and could be imported, and books not yet assessed, which might be imported but with no guarantee of not being seized by police^{ix} (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, pp.52-53). Despite these restrictions, left-wing co-operative bookshops played a “significant role”, for example Eileen Coyne was introduced by Progressive Books to “literature on sexuality...as well as to radical political ideas” (Coyne in Barrowman 1991, p.129).

The 1963 Indecent Publications Act and the establishment of the Indecent Publications Tribunal were in part responses to the moral panics of the 1950s relating to “juvenile delinquency”, following the revelations of the 1954 Mazengarb Report^x. It was suggested that juvenile delinquency and sexual immorality were a result of exposure to imported US comics, gangster novels and films (Wertham 1955, Glamuzina and Laurie 1991). Following this Act, the decisions of the Indecent Publications Tribunal 1964-1972 reveal that Krafft-Ebing *Psychopathia Sexualis* retained a restricted classification, with a 1967 decision ruling that it could still be sold only to “persons concerned either professionally or as students with sexual abnormalities”. Havelock Ellis *Female Auto-erotic Practices* was ruled “indecent” (i.e., it could not be imported) in 1967 (Perry 1973, p.7), though Hirschfeld’s *Sexual Anomalies and Perversions*, edited by Norman Haire was found “not indecent” in 1969 (ibid. p.10).

Films also became subject to censorship. The first film screening was in Auckland in 1896, and by 1906 “moving pictures” were “one of the commonplaces of the day” (Watson and Shuker 1998, p.28). The first “picture palaces” opened in 1915 (Olssen 1981a, p.273), and

by the 1920s Auckland had over 20 picture theatres, with 350 picture theatres throughout New Zealand by 1934, the highest number per capita in the world (Harrison 1974 in Watson and Shuker 1998, p.33). With this public interest, requests for film censorship were made from 1909, resulting in the 1916 Cinematograph Film Censorship Act, providing for the appointment of a Film Censor. Films were banned if regarded as “undesirable in the public interest.” A system of classifications was introduced in 1920 and these and other amendments were included in the 1928 Cinematographic Film Censorship Act (Watson and Shuker 1998, pp. 28-32). In 1930 a record 102 films were banned^{xi}, including the film *Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930, Germany) (Watson 2000, p.8). However, Film Society members could see films not available to the general public and it was screened by the Wellington Film Society after WW2. Watson believes “New Zealand’s censors have made decisions in line with their own philosophies”, arguing that Gordon Mirams (film censor from 1949 to 1958) was a founder member of the Wellington Film Society, and “responsible for the ‘restrictions to film societies’” classification (Watson 2000, p.3). Though passing some explicit art films banned elsewhere, Mirams banned films regarded as encouraging teenage rebellion, including *The Wild One* (Benedek, 1954, US)^{xii}, and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955, US) though on appeal gave *Rebel* an R-16 restricted certificate, while passing *Rock around the Clock* (Sears, 1956, US) (ibid. pp.10-11, Watson and Schuker 1998, pp.37-48). *Rebel* in particular was important for New Zealand lesbians of the 1950s as it provided images of teenage rebellion and dress (see Chapter 16). Amendments to the 1928 Act made in 1957, were incorporated in the 1961 Cinematographic Films Act, allowing for restrictive certificates, but the new censor Doug McIntosh (1960 to 1976) banned as “contrary to public order or decency”, films with any sexual content including *I am Curious Yellow* (Sjoeman 1967, Sweden). In 1967 he allowed *Ulysses* to be screened only to segregated male and female audiences, as it contained the word “fuck” (ibid.pp.11-12).^{xiii}

American movie magazines informed New Zealanders about films not shown here and provided gossip about film stars like Marlene Dietrich (see below). In 1958 radio personality Aunt Daisy recommended *Screen Magazine*, urging her listeners to read about the pictures “that we haven’t seen yet and...the private life of many people whom we’ve known very well for years on the screen” (Barnett and Sullivan 1988, pp.15-16). The grapevine and gossip provided further information.

Despite censorship, it is likely that most overseas material on lesbianism was available, regarded as particularly desirable because of its forbidden nature (Foucault 1990a, pp.7–10). Regulation was one thing, but enforcement another, and there are many reports of books and other publications being privately brought in, indicating this practice was commonplace. For example, British seamen from the “Home boats”^{xiv} brought records, books, and the latest fashions in clothing into New Zealand, as did American servicemen during WW2 and, after the war, Americans at the Operation Deep Freeze base in Christchurch. British and American homosexual men brought in a variety of homosexual publications – probably everything available at the time^{xv}. Some New Zealand lesbians subscribed to overseas publications (see Chapter 9), and there are reports of lesbians and of homosexual men receiving books and magazines from overseas friends and circulating these among their own networks^{xvi}.

Gossip

If oral history is the history of those denied control of the printed record, then gossip is the history of those who cannot even speak in their own first-person voice (Becker et al. 1981 in Weiss 1993, p.30).

A significant unofficial discourse on lesbianism, and one which could not be legislated against, was gossip, also known in homosexual circles as “the grapevine”^{xvii}. Donaghue suggests that “the gist of scandalous stories, for example tales of female husbands, would have been passed on through gossip” (Donaghue 1993, p.13). Gossip provides “an alternative discourse to that of public life” (Spacks 1985 in Weiss 1993, p.30), and Weiss suggests it is one process by which lesbian subcultures formed, through histories located in “rumor, innuendo, fleeting gestures and coded language” particularly suggested in films (Weiss 1993, p.32). Deborah Cameron sees gossip as “one of the *private* uses of language” that are “associated with women” as distinct from the “public domain” (Cameron 1998, p.3 original italics), where men control what Cora Kaplan (1998) calls high culture.

In *Gossip: a journal of lesbian feminist ethics*, Anna Livia argues that lesbian histories are “encapsulated in gossip”, passing on “a body of opinion and tried experience which would go otherwise unrecorded”. She suggests that lesbian stories, even when told “different every time”, are “the emotional truth” (Livia 1986, pp.62-63), and that “these stories, and

how they are told...set a moral climate, pass on values and evaluations, tell other women who have things to say...how safe it is to speak” (ibid. p.67). Among women generally, gossip is important. Deborah Jones defines gossip as “talk between women in our common role *as* women”, suggesting it arises from women’s perception of themselves as a group with experience in common (Jones 1980, p.195, original emphasis). Women’s story-telling often takes place in “the privacy of the domestic sphere” (Jordan and Kalcik 1985 in Coates 1996, p.303, n.9), and their stories are typically “full of detail” and “peoples’ voices” (Coates 1996, p.98). These characteristics make gossip and story-telling ideal vectors for the transmission of lesbian histories and information, between countries and across years. Judy Grahn (1984) argues that the presence of hundreds of lesbian and gay stories demonstrate the existence of hidden cultures through the centuries.

Narrators in the present study reported gossip and the grapevine as main sources of information, especially from lovers, and in Part 3 Frances Hodgkins, for example, passed on gossip in her letters. Gossipy hints and innuendo might also involve mentioning lesbian books, for example *The Well of Loneliness* (see Chapter 17).

Classical accounts

Reference to certain classical works was one coded way to mention lesbianism. Not much material survived, as “after the collapse of Roman power” the classical literature salvaged in Christian monasteries was “winnowed and expurgated” resulting in the “obliteration of anything sympathetic” to lesbianism (Foster 1975, p.29). Some works were rediscovered and reissued in Europe after the renaissance (also see Chapter 4) and educated people became familiar with certain lesbian references, with some stories re-appearing and influencing themes in English literature. Surviving fragments of sixth century BC poet Sappho from Lesbos became known through English translations from the eighteenth century (Reynolds 2000, p.149), re-introducing the popular use of the terms “sapphic” and “lesbian”. Texts by other Greek and by Roman writers became available both in translation and the original, including Ovid’s story of Iphis who magically changed into a man the day before her/his wedding to Ianthe (Donaghue 1993, pp.28-29) and Lucian’s *Dialogues of Hetaerae* where Cleonarium asked Leana how Megilla, “that Rich Lady of Lesbos, caresses thee as a Man would do”, with Leana responding that Megilla was a “strange Female” (ibid. pp.31-32). Martial’s work asserted that lesbianism was caused by insatiable lust:

*You, strange mixture of the female gender,
Whom driving lust makes a male,
Who love to fuck with your crazed cunt,
Why has a pointless desire seized you?*
(Martial in Boswell 1980, p.185).

Another poem suggested

*To make the mounts collide emerg'd thy plan
And monstrous Venus would bely the man.
Thou a new Theban torture couldst't explore
And bid adultery need a male no more*
(Martial in Donaghue 1993, p.31).

The most significant of the rediscovered material on lesbianism was Juvenal's Sixth Satire, used as code between Anne Lister and her early nineteenth century friends. This work explicitly describes drunken Roman women enjoying wild lesbian revelry.

*Here, at night, they stagger out of their litters
And relieve themselves, pissing in long hard bursts
All over the Goddess's statue. Then, while the Moon
Looks down on their motions, they take turns to ride each other,
And finally go home*
(Juvenal in Castle 1993, p.256,n.9).

While these explicit works by Juvenal and Martial remained locked in "the decent obscurity of a learned language" (Gibbon in Hennegan 2000, p.123), Alison Hennegan suggests there was "no cause for alarm". However "advances in women's education" improved access to both originals and translations. One translator believed Juvenal made "depravity loathsome", thus aiding virtue but, despite the "vitriolic anti-lesbian sentiments" of Juvenal and Martial, Hennegan suggests earlier lesbians simply "took their information where they could find it" (Hennegan 2000, pp. 122-124). The glimpses they provide are rather as if people of the future could only read of twentieth-century lesbians in the fragments surviving from right-wing attacks and sensational depictions of debauched lesbian conduct. Despite their negative imagery, some women found classical works useful. Anne Lister (see Chapter 2), who received a classical education, referred to Juvenal when she noted that her new friend Miss Pickford "has read the Sixth Satyr [sic] of Juvenal. She understands these matters well enough" (Lister 1823 in Whitbread 1988, p.268). This illustrates how educated women could use even anti-lesbian references as codes, which, though confirming lesbian

existence, also warned women that they must act discreetly and cautiously.

As well as in the medical texts (Chapter 4), classical literature used terms for lesbianism that suggest the idea of a special identity, Martial for example using “tribade” for a Roman courtesan:

*Famous amongst all tribads, Philaenis,
With reason do you call “your friend”, she whom you plow*
(Martial in Bonnet 1997, p.150).

After its re-introduction into European literature, “tribade” continued to be used as a label for a particular type of woman. In French, it was defined in a seventeenth century dictionary as a woman “who couples with a person of her own sex”, and referenced to Martial (Bonnet 1997, pp.149-150). Brooten lists other terms from classical literature suggesting types of women, for example from Greek “hetairistria”, “dihetaristria”, “Lesbia” and “tribas” and from Latin “tribade”, “fricatix” and “virago” (Brooten 1996, pp.4-6). English terms derived from these and in popular use from the seventeenth century included lesbian, tribadist and sapphist (Donaghue 1993, pp.3-5).

Only a minority of pre-1970 New Zealand women received tertiary education (see Chapter 7) and could study advanced Greek or Latin, and even for the few who did there were (unsuccessful) attempts to censor explicit material. At Canterbury College in 1879, for example, the Classics professor protested against the inclusion of certain Latin plays for women students, and the University of New Zealand Convocation decided they were “immoral and unfit to be read by students in a mixed class”, though no further action was taken (Sutch 1974, p.80). Latin was taught in some girls’ secondary schools, though the syllabus is unlikely to have included the above extracts. However, even if people did not read them directly, these classical stories influenced English-speaking culture generally, and ideas of sex-changes and lustful women were disseminated through Shakespearean and other stories brought to New Zealand that played with the boundaries of sexuality and gender (see below). Some women in Part 3 of this study could have read the classics, for example the Richmonds, as they were educated overseas, and may have read or heard about this material. Bethell (Chapter 11) for example refers to Sappho, though claims not to have read her work. No narrators studied the classics, but one (Tighe in Chapter 23) heard stories about girls changing into boys, demonstrating the persistence of the Iphis theme.

However, for women to have read the classical stories themselves was less significant than to have heard about them, and to be able to drop a reference indicating to a potential friend that, like Miss Pickford, one understood “these matters”.

Biblical stories, influences and interpretations

The church through its various denominations exercised considerable influence on how all homosexuality was conceptualised by New Zealanders. For women, however, what is of more importance is the way Christianity has regarded women and female sexuality generally, as discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the law. Following her research on a group of New Zealand women who identified as lesbian, Kirkman (2001) concluded they were affected more by the sexism of church structures and attitudes to women than by negative views of lesbianism. Though this research took place after the period of the present study, it may be assumed that lesbians in the church have consistently experienced this as a problem.

In the present study, it may be the case that some women, for example Ursula Bethell who was involved in the Anglican church, questioned religious proscriptions against lesbianism precisely because they were already aware of the injustice of church attitudes towards women, particularly in relation to their exclusion from the ministry. This avenue of inquiry is beyond the scope of my study, but it is useful to note that though women leading lesbian lives were profoundly affected by the anti-lesbian religious discourses informing societal attitudes toward lesbianism, they may have made distinctions between divine and human interpretations of biblical teaching on homosexuality. This may have been facilitated by their more general awareness of the discriminatory and patriarchal culture of New Zealand churches.

Accordingly, on reading the Bible for themselves rather than relying on the interpretations of church authorities, New Zealand lesbians could enjoy the story of Ruth and Naomi. This begins with Ruth's appeal to her mother-in-law Naomi not to leave her, and may be read as an approving tale of devotion between women. Though some Old Testament writers as well as St Paul appear to condemn sex between women as well as men^{xviii}, whether women applied this to their own lovemaking and understood that it was forbidden “sex” is unclear

(Faderman 1981, Jeffreys 1985, Frye 1990). Anne Lister noted to Miss Pickford that “you remember an early chapter of Genesis & it is infinitely better than the thing alluded to there, meaning onanism. This is surely comparatively unpardonable. There is no mutual affection to excuse it” (Lister 1823 in Whitbread 1988, p.273) commenting also “We were sent on this world to be happy. I do not see why we should not make ourselves as much so as we can in our own way” (Lister 1823 in Whitbread 1988, p.269). A hundred years later, in New Zealand, Effie Pollen (Chapter 11) took a similar view. As the Richmond and Shaen families (Chapter 10) were Unitarians, it is likely that they followed in the tradition of religious thinkers including the influential Mary Wollstonecraft, a follower of Richard Price, an early Rational Dissenter, or Unitarian, who had argued liberty and reason constituted “the capacity of virtue” (Price 1758 in Taylor 1997, p.24). She interpreted this to mean that liberty itself was “the mother of virtue” (Wollstonecraft 1982, p.122), and referring to Milton’s assertion that “earthly love is the scale by which to heaven we may ascend”, portrayed her heroine Mary, in *Mary – a fiction*, as living happily with Ann while her husband was absent. Mary then asks “have I desires implanted in me only to make me miserable? Will they never be gratified? Shall I never be happy?” She concludes, “My conscience does not smite me, and that Being who is greater than the internal monitor, may approve of what the world condemns” (Wollstonecraft 1980, pp.40-41). Given Wollstonecraft’s own relationship with Fanny Blood, this may be read as a plea for the acceptance of divinely inspired female love relationships.

Wollstonecraft’s work was a strong influence on New Zealand feminist thought; her books were available, extracts were reprinted in *The White Ribbon*, and it is likely many educated women in Part 3 knew her work. Nancy Sahli suggests that the “romantic evangelicalism” popular among women presented the “highest form of love” as that of “friend for friend”, basing this on the Gospel of St. John, and believing “restrictions on love, in whatever form, were contrary to the spirit of Christ’s example” (Sahli 1979, p.26).

Various women in Part 3 were influenced by Unitarian or other alternative ideas. For example, influenced by Annie Besant’s ideas Jerome Spencer and Amy Hutchinson founded theosophy in New Zealand and later became involved in the Havelock Work (see Chapter 9). Though most narrators in Part 4 attended churches, only the catholic narrators (Emily, Chapter 19, Katie, Chapter 20) reported conflict between their religious belief and

sexual behaviours, though some mentioned moral concerns about their need to live a lie. However, the people around them quoted biblical objections to lesbianism, for example Frankie's non-religious mother (see Chapter 21), and the attitudes of New Zealand society generally were strongly influenced by the mainstream Christian condemnation of all homosexuality.

Fiction

Foster found no English texts in the ten centuries after Rome's collapse before Berner's sixteenth century translation of *Huon*, based on the story of Iphis, which was followed by many other stories on this theme (Foster 1975, pp.34–38). However Donaghue argues that from the seventeenth century onwards, far from silence on lesbianism, there were many tales that even illiterate English people knew, as novels were customarily read aloud and ballads sung in the streets, suggesting widespread knowledge of lesbianism (Donaghue 1993, p.13), and the publishing "boom" spread this even further. However "information about lesbian existence...might quickly become a secret to be kept from others", and a woman admitting knowledge could "risk being thought immodest or having her own friendships suspected" (ibid. p.16).

Aphra Behn wrote love poems to other women, and Faderman uses her example to suggest this was "socially approved behaviour" (Faderman 1994, p.24). However, the eighteenth-century writer Anthony Hamilton described a Miss Temple screaming when a Miss Hobart attempted to embrace her, "sufficient to disgrace Miss Hobart at court and totally ruin her reputation in London" (Foster 1975, p.44), and Henry Fielding warned, "once our carnal appetites are let loose...there is no excess of disorder which they are not liable to commit" (Fielding 1746 in Faderman 1994, p.135). Castle regards Fielding's work as "vehemently antilesbian" (Castle 1993, p.62), and Donaghue reports a cluster of texts from the 1720s from men who "had noticed a frightening increase in lesbian practice". She suggests the theme of the "overgrown clitoris" encouraged Europeans to locate lesbianism in "primitive cultures", but that others saw it as "a secret skill or a decadent vice" and regarded it as a product of "the over-civilised nations of Europe" (Donaghue 1993, p.257). Gulliver remarks upon an absence among the Yahoos of "unnatural Appetites in both Sexes", and suggests "these politer Pleasures are entirely the Productions of Art and Reason" (Swift in Donaghue 1993, p.257). This theme ran alongside the theme of the tribade, and women

involved in these practices may not have been seen entirely negatively. Fanny Hill and Phoebe Ayres in Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, were quite positively portrayed. However, Trumbach points out that this was because they had only non-penetrative sex with other women (Trumbach 1994, p.127).

Though men wrote these texts, for many women any lesbian stories were "better than none" and could be given "subversive readings" (Donaghue 1993, p.17); perhaps Lister did this when she explained that reading novels gave her "a fearful rousing", making her "get into what I have been led with...Anne" (Lister 1821 in Whitbread 1988, p.146).

Wollstonecraft's *Mary, a Fiction* (see above) was probably the first novel about a lesbian relationship by a woman. Foster found that only four of the "thirty-odd nineteenth-century authors" writing on lesbian themes were women and that most writers condemned it (Foster 1975, pp.114-115). One significant work was Henry James *The Bostonians* published in 1886, and popularising the term "Boston marriage" denoting a supposedly sexless female union. Books about male homosexuality were read by some women; Katherine Mansfield (Chapter 12), for example, read Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Grey* and was greatly influenced by his work and life.

Foster found over one hundred pre-1954 twentieth-century English titles with explicit lesbian references, including 1928 as a significant year with the publication of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (*TWOL*), Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. Of these, the sympathetic *TWOL* was banned. It is noteworthy that it contained references to Marie Antoinette and her relationship with Madame de Lamballe (Hall 1956, p.241), Castle pointing out that Hall expected her 1920s readers to be familiar with the queen's lesbianism (Castle 1993, p.144), who was used "as a kind of lesbian Oscar Wilde" from the late eighteenth-century (ibid.149).

Hall wrote *TWOL* from "a deep sense of duty" to defend those "set apart from some hidden scheme of nature" (Hall 1928 in Brittain 1968, p.85), with a preface on inversion by Havelock Ellis. There were immediate attacks, with James Douglas, editor of the *Sunday Express*, calling it "an intolerable outrage" (Douglas 1928 in Brittain 1968, p.53). He regarded arguments of in-born rather than chosen sexuality to avoid moral blame as contrary to the Christian doctrine of free will, claiming he would "rather give a healthy

[child] a phial of prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul” (ibid. p.57).^{xix} Hall’s publishers withdrew the book, secretly reprinting it in Paris, but imported copies were seized and it was tried under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act. The test of obscenity was whether a book might “deprave or corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences” (Brittain 1968, pp.88-89). Presiding magistrate Sir Charles Biron declared *TWOL* obscene, basing his decision not upon “gross or filthy” words, or that the book discussed “unnatural offences between women”, but because it dangerously described inverts as attractive personalities, freeing them from moral blame by attributing their behaviour to “congenital inversion”. An appeal found the book “condoned unnatural practices” and because it suggested women “guilty of them should not receive the consequences they deserve”, concluded “this is a disgusting book, when properly read” (Biron 1928 in Brittain 1968, pp.99-100). US courts ruled *TWOL* acceptable, and copies were published there and distributed to many countries (Klitch 1974, pp.189-190) but the ban was not successfully challenged in Britain before the 1959 Obscene Publications Act (Brittain 1968, p.156). The obscenity case and surrounding publicity “inadvertently publicised” lesbianism, subverting the intention of the legislators (Weeks 1977, p.110); “millions of shop, office and mill girls have been led to ask the furtive question; What is Lesbianism?...[making the book] a certain seller for years to come” (Stephenson 1928 in Brittain 1968, pp.97-98). In its report of the trial, *Time and Tide* correctly predicted that “the first results of the suppression...will be that surreptitiously obtained copies...will circulate immediately” (Brittain 1968, p.108). When the 1968 paperback edition was published in Britain, 551,910 copies of the book had been sold in fourteen languages (ibid. p.154), making it unquestionably the most influential pre-1970 book on lesbianism. The book was officially banned from import in New Zealand for a time (see above), though seems to have been consistently available and the main pre-1970 written source of information on lesbianism, read by all the narrators, and by at least Peter Dawson in Part 3 (Chapter 14).

Schoolgirl stories hinting at same-sex love were also a source of information for twentieth-century readers. Rosemary Auchmuty (1989a) discusses the popularity of earlier girls’ school stories by writers including Angela Brazil describing same-sex love. She attributes the decline of this theme to the sexology discourses that made girls’ friendships suspect and girls sleeping together suggestive of abnormality. A mid-century offering was *Olivia* (1949)

by “Olivia”^{xx} describing lesbian relationships between teachers at the thinly disguised girls' boarding school Les Ruches in Fontainebleau France, run by Marie Souvestre^{xxi} (Holroyd 1995, p.17). Despite the toning-down of these stories at least one narrator (Katie, Chapter 20) recalled them as significant.

Altogether Foster found a total 324 fictional works using lesbianism as a theme prior to 1954. By 1967 Grier and Stuart, “disregarding the trash category”, had identified “a further 675 titles with real value”, indicating an explosion of interest in lesbian themes during that period, including popular 1960s lesbian paperback classics (Grier 1975 in Foster 1975, p.356). Many depicted lesbians tragically, with endings where women returned to men; one positive novel was Maureen Duffy’s *The Microcosm* published in 1966, based on her tape-recorded interviews with London lesbians (Duffy 1988). Frankie (Chapter 21) and Tighe and her friends (Chapter 23) reported reading lesbian paperbacks during the nineteen-sixties

However, it did not matter whether pre-1970 fiction “depicted love between women in a positive or a negative light” (Castle 1993, p.64). What mattered was that books were available, confirming that love between women existed. It is likely that all the educated women in Part 3 read widely (for example Elsie Andrews, Chapter 13, admired Virginia Woolf), and were as influenced by these stories as was the society around them. For those who read other languages (including Mary Taylor and the Richmonds, (Chapters 9 and 10), and Ursula Bethell, (Chapter 11), more novels were available in French and German.

Theatre, film and television

One source of positive and popular lesbian representation was stage culture, providing a legacy of masquerade and cross-dressing, theatricality and pretence, through pantomime, opera and theatre. In this culture women could blamelessly appear as men. From Shakespeare’s themes of masquerade, including Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, to the principal boys of traditional pantomime, and operas like the *Rosenkavalier*, women enjoyed staged intimacies between women, who were sometimes women pretending to be men pretending to be women. “Breeches actresses” were also popular, performing male roles in Shakespearean and other plays. Nineteenth century actor Charlotte Cushman who played male leads in Europe and North America received

thousands of letters from women admirers (Merrill 2000, p.16). Within the traditions of theatre and pantomime, women who loved women could find images and frameworks of female desire in masquerade. Narrators enjoyed watching principal boys in pantomime and Shakespearean cross-dressing. As well as adoring cross-dressed or breeches actresses, female audiences also worshiped conventionally dressed heroines from the “Swedish Nightingale” singer Jenny Lind, adored by many women in the 1850s including Queen Victoria (Castle 1993, p.205), to pop-star Dusty Springfield in the 1960s, widely known to be lesbian by her fans (Valentine and Wickham 2000).

Cross-dressing traditions moved into film, significantly including tuxedoed Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* and Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina*. Film works through a number of languages and on various levels, and women can view “against the grain”, selectively enjoying parts of films where heroines are depicted as having careers or embarking on adventures. Viewers may appropriate images for their own use, some lesbians confirming that they identified with male romantic heroes, or anti-heroes like Marlon Brando and James Dean (Chapter 16). Weiss argues the “new twentieth-century theatrical sense of self” in films helped form lesbian identity, and though lesbians may have gone to the movies “to find romance and adventure...they came home with much more” as the Hollywood star system and the idea that roles could be changed signaled “changeable personalities, multiple identities” (Weiss 1992, pp.28-29). Dietrich and Garbo were important as lesbian subcultures knew their “real lives” could not be separated from their “star images”, and the 1955 revelation that Dietrich was lesbian in *Confidential* magazine was connected by lesbian spectators to cross-dressing scenes in *Morocco* (ibid. pp.32-33). However, films could not explicitly depict lesbian themes. Weiss suggests the 1932 *Madchen in Uniform* set the tone for what might be tolerated, with lesbianism permitted only as “subtext”(ibid. p.11), and the 1934 US Motion Picture Production Code prohibited all open references to homosexuality in film until 1968 (ibid. p.40). The nineteenth-century case of Scottish teachers Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods (Faderman 1983) was the theme of the play *The Children's Hour* (Hellman 1934), adapted for film as *The Children's Hour* (Wyler, 1961, US) with a negative and unpleasant lesbian theme (Weiss 1992, p.52). The most positive pre-1970 film depicting lesbians was *The Killing of Sister George* (Aldrich, 1968, UK) with the lesbian relationship between Sister George (Beryl Reid) and Childie (Susannah York) set against a backdrop including *The Gateways* lesbian club.

The romantic stories portrayed by Hollywood from the early twentieth century were a major and influential form of entertainment, Hollywood constructing the message over and over again that “sex is worth dying for” (Foucault 1990a, p.156). Romantic films conveyed “falling in love” as the most significant event in life, with “the inevitability of the deepening of true love” the main theme (Radway 1987, p.162). Though characters and plots were heterosexual, messages of imported Hollywood romantic love were absorbed and played out by New Zealand lesbians. Films were one way women could access images from outside their own circumstances, and even negative portrayals allowed viewers to transform stories into informative or even inspirational texts.

Television brought documentary films as well as feature films into the home. The most significant documentary on lesbians was the 1964 BBC television documentary *One in Twenty* made by Bryan Magee, which discussed lesbians sympathetically, but which was not shown in New Zealand). In the book based on his documentary Magee concludes with a plea for “toleration”, as lesbians had to live “lives in which concealment, guilt and fear play important roles” (Magee 1966, p.192).

Feminist writing on lesbianism

In the nineteenth century the private sphere, where women had some control, lost its autonomy in the area of sexuality once “doctors and educators became the authorities” and experts from “the public world of the professions influenced home life” (Freedman and Hellerstein 1981, p.119). The ideas of sexology promoted active and compulsory heterosexual participation as part of the definition of what it meant to be a man or woman (see Chapter 4). A “normal woman” was now expected to be a “welcoming recipient of male wooing” (Weeks 1989, p.86). Alison Oram points out that the sex reform movement emphasised “the necessity of heterosexual intercourse for women and the dangers of sexual repression”, attacking lesbians and spinsters who “remained outside heterosexuality”. In this setting, some feminists may have used “celibacy” as a label “to indicate that they prioritized women in their lives” (Oram 1989, p.111).

Writing in 1909, Cicely Hamilton (1981) argued for improvements in the status of single women, strongly promoting celibacy, by which she may have meant refraining only

heterosexual sex.^{xxii} Hamilton was probably lesbian, Hamer pointing out that she “certainly knew a great many lesbians” (Hamer 1996, p.55), and Auchmuty suggesting that the fact she destroyed her personal papers, like many of her 1930s associates, “suggests that the lesbian witch-hunt which followed the trial of [TWOL]...forced them underground” (Auchmuty 1989b, p.92).

Though New Zealanders resident in Britain or their friends may have sent material to New Zealand, it is difficult to know who actually subscribed to early feminist publications that supported lesbianism. Macdonald thinks it “extremely likely” that there were New Zealand subscribers to the London *Victoria Magazine*, which published chapters from Mary Taylor’s (see Chapter 9) *The First Duty of Women* (Macdonald 1993, p.15). No mailing list has survived for the London magazine *Urania* (1915-1940) which circulated privately, aiming to “work against the belief that men and women were innately different”, and explaining there were “no ‘men’ or ‘women’ in Urania”. Founders Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper were lesbians, and there were articles and reviews of books on same-sex love (Hamer 1996, pp.67-69). Some New Zealand women may have subscribed to the British *Freewoman* (1911-1913), which published “the frankest material on sexuality” and was “harassed by the censors, attacked by the press, banned by W.H.Smith’s news-stands”, for including articles on “free love” (Marcus 1983, pp.6-8). In an article written for *Time and Tide*, Rebecca West admired the *Freewoman* for its “unblushingness” in mentioning “sex loudly and clearly and repeatedly and in the worst possible taste...even mention[ing] the existence of abnormalities of instinct” (West 1926 in Spender 1984, pp.65-66). There were certainly New Zealand subscribers to *Time and Tide*, including Andrews and Kirton (Chapter 13) and Bethell and Pollen (Chapter 11), and it may be assumed they read West’s articles, as well as those of Winifred Holtby, Brittain’s friend and probable lover,^{xxiii} who argued in *Time and Tide* that

On all sides the unmarried woman today is surrounded by doubts cast not only upon her attractiveness or her common sense, but upon her decency, her normality, even her sanity (Holtby 1936 in Johnson 1989, p.155).

Pam Johnson believes that unlike Brittain, Holtby realized “the new emphasis on the psychology of sex would put relationships such as the one she enjoyed with Brittain under critical scrutiny” (Johnson 1989, p.155). Holtby was prepared to write quite openly on

lesbianism, and in 1935 argued that “we are still greatly ignorant of our own natures”, as

We do not know how much of what we usually describe as ‘feminine characteristics’ are really ‘masculine’ and how much ‘masculinity’ is common to both sexes... We do not even know – though we theorise and penalise with ferocious confidence – whether the ‘normal’ sexual relationship is homo- or bi- or heterosexual (Holtby 1978, p.192)

Brittain too wrote relatively positively on lesbianism in a 1928 *Time and Tide* article reviewing *TWOL*, which she called an

important, sincere and very moving study [which]...is a plea...for the extension of social toleration, compassion and recognition to the biologically abnormal woman, who because she possesses the tastes and instincts of a man, is too often undeservedly treated as a moral pariah (Brittain 1968, p.48).

However, Brittain rejected Hall’s sex-role stereotypes and over-emphasis of sex characteristics, noting that Hall

makes her “normal” woman clinging and “feminine” to exasperation and even describes the attitudes towards love as “an end in itself” as being a necessary attribute to true womanhood...This confusion between what is “male” or “female” and what is merely human...persists throughout the book...in describing the supposedly sinister predilections of the child Stephen Gordon...so many of them appear to be the quite usual preferences of any vigorous young female who happens to possess more vitality and intelligence than her fellows (ibid.p.50).

Andrews particularly admired the work of Brittain, Holtby and West, and it may be assumed that their ideas influenced the opinions of many women in her circle, indicating a rejection of biological theories of lesbianism in favour of a feminist approach. Brittain’s phrase “quite usual preferences” may be read as a more radical sentiment than *TWOL* itself.

Post-WW2 feminist writing provided new approaches, laying the foundations for 1970s lesbian-feminism. The most significant and influential was Simone de Beauvoir’s section on “The lesbian” in *The Second Sex*, arguing lesbianism was “always a matter of choice”, and that “no sexual fate governs the life of the individual woman: her type of eroticism...expresses her general outlook on life”, because lesbianism was “an attitude *chosen in a certain situation...one way...in which woman solves the problems posed by her condition in general, by her erotic situation in particular*” (de Beauvoir 1979, pp.437-444, italics in the original). Though early second-wave feminist writer Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* thought “female homosexuality is currently so dead an issue that...[it] is observed in scorn or in silence” (Millett 1972, p.337, n.1), Germaine Greer in *The Female*

Eunuch described lesbianism in political terms as “rebellion” and a “revolt against the limitations of the female role...an invention of an alternative way of life”. However, Greer depicted unmarried teachers unpleasantly, and her overall message was ambivalent (Greer 1971, pp.293-295).

Post-WW2 popular magazine articles

Popular overseas magazines were freely imported and widely available in pre-1970 New Zealand, through bookshops and public libraries. Lisa Bennett found only two articles on homosexuality in *Time* and *Newsweek* during the nineteen-forties, twenty-one in the nineteen-fifties, and twenty-five during the nineteen-sixties, all of which were “critical of homosexuals”. Some saw homosexuals as a security risk, speculating what caused this “mental disorder”, others wondering whether to “Punish or to Pity?” as *Newsweek* put it, with a 1966 *Time* article asserting “homosexuality is a pathetic little second-rate substitute for reality”. In 1969 the first *Time* cover story on homosexuality called homosexuals “abnormal”, “abomination”, “deviant”, “depraved”, “queer” and “unnatural”. Most articles focused on male homosexuality, with the word “lesbian” first used in the 1960s (Bennett 2000, pp.30-32), when *Life International* ran a 1964 article, on “Homosexuality in America”, claiming “women homosexuals are not nearly so numerous, promiscuous or conspicuous as their male counterparts”.^{xxiv} The *British Woman* ran a positive 1969 feature by Marjorie Proops asserting, “it is not only possible, it is also very commonplace for a woman who enjoys sex fully with men to love another woman”, and that “Love, if its real, tender, selfless and enduring...can be nothing but good. Whatever the sexes of the lovers, true love can surely never be bad.”^{xxv} Though these articles reflected changing social attitudes, most pre-1970 information was anti-lesbian, reinforcing women’s views that they needed to conceal and protect their relationships.

Summary

Pre-1970 information and ideas on lesbianism included stories of transvestism, gender inversion and “lewd women” from various sources, from classical times onward. Though there was some positive information, the discourses predominantly manufactured and reproduced anti-lesbianism. However, even negative stories confirmed the existence of lesbian possibilities, allowing women to use their forbidden knowledge as code, and to transmit it through their private gossip. A range of terms describing female homosexuality

existed, most of which were probably known and used in New Zealand, with some appearing in pre-1970 New Zealand newspapers and others introduced by overseas visitors or through imported books and magazines.

Despite censorship, it is likely that almost all the overseas stories and material were brought to New Zealand. Together with locally produced information, described in the following chapter, these discourses created the context and culture within which the women in this study developed their lesbian relationships and led lesbian lives.

ⁱ Danish collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

ⁱⁱ *The New Zealand Mail*, January 24, 1890.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Evening Post*, January 3, 1890.

^{iv} *New Zealand Truth*, Saturday September 3, 1921. Other books advertised included *Wedded but No Wife*, *Facts for the Married*, *Sex Problems Solved*, *Plain facts on Sex Hygiene*, *Confidential Chats with Girls*, *Confidential Chats with Boys*, *The Key to Health, Wealth and Love*, *Sex and Marriage* and *Advice to a Wife*.

^v *NZ Truth*, 4 May 1907, p.5.

^{vi} Henry Wright Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

^{vii} Nineteenth-century illustrations depicting semi-naked women were republished by Lloyd and Thompson (1998).

^{viii} Customs Department, C1 Registered Files, Series 36/959 and 24/43/107.

^{ix} Customs Department, C1 Registered Files, Series 36/959 and 24/43/107; NZ Libraries, December 1950, p.275.

^x *The Dominion*, 12 September 1960.

^{xi} However, this was only about 4 percent of the 2626 films submitted to the Censor (Watson and Shuker 1998, p.34).

^{xii} *The Wild One* was not screened in New Zealand until 1977 (Yska 1993, p.114).

^{xiii} Public reaction to film cuts and restrictions eventually led to the 1976 Cinematograph Films Act.

^{xiv} “Home boats” were ships sailing to and from the “Home” country of England (Gibbons 1981, p.308). This expression was in common use.

^{xv} Communication from several informants. I personally brought lesbian publications into New Zealand in 1973 hidden in a Volkswagen van, which was not searched.

^{xvi} For example, early gay activist Barry Neels received many homosexual books and magazines from overseas penfriends with whom he exchanged recorded tapes (Interview with Paul Magill by Alison Laurie 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library).

^{xvii} Interview with Paul Magill by Alison Laurie 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library. Also note the (negative) 1964 book on lesbians by US journalist Jess Stearn called *The Grapevine*.

^{xviii} Genesis 19:5; Leviticus 18:22,23; Leviticus 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Timothy 1:10; Romans 1:26, 2:27.

^{xix} “Aldous Huxley offered to provide him with a child, a bottle of prussic acid, and a copy of *TWOL*, and if Douglas chose to give the child the acid, Huxley would erect a handsome marble statue to him, to be built immediately after the editor’s execution” (Klaitch 1974, p.187).

^{xx} The pseudonym of Dorothy Strachey Bussy, sister of Lytton Strachey; the title and pseudonym were suggested by a Strachey child Olivia, who died in infancy (Holroyd 1995, p.708, n.19)

^{xxi} Marie Souvestre left France to start Allenswood, in Wimbledon, a girls’ school, attended by Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1890s (Holroyd 1995, pp.15-16).

^{xxii} Originally, celibacy simply meant unmarried. See John Boswell (1994, p.110 n).

^{xxiii} Their friendship is described in Brittain (1981).

^{xxiv} *Life International*, 27 July 1964, Vol.37, no.2.

^{xxv} *Woman and Woman’s Mirror*, November 22, 1969, vol.65, No. 1693, p.18, p.24.

Chapter 6

The New Zealand Stories

Introduction

This chapter surveys pre-1970 stories produced within New Zealand on lesbianism. This local “production of sexuality” (Foucault 1990a, p.105) undoubtedly enabled some New Zealand women to discover lesbianism, while these stories also functioned as cautionary tales to reinforce compulsory heterosexuality and gender conformity. The overseas culture of sexuality imported here and surveyed in the previous chapter surrounded and influenced local stories, despite fears of corruption from imported literature, including American comics, and consequent censorship legislation (see Chapter 5). Local stories were influenced by overseas visitors, sex education, theatre (both local and visiting performances) and by the media and their reporting of New Zealand cases involving lesbians. The women in this study, and those around them, were affected by this material. A public context where lesbianism was demonised and mainly presented as linked to promiscuity, pathology, murder or madness, influenced their ability to lead lesbian lives and develop lesbian relationships.

More overseas influences

After the first European contact, New Zealand was never isolated. From the eighteenth century New Zealanders travelled to and from Europe despite the distance, and New Zealand history is “full of the unavoidable tension that comes with the colonial legacy of facing in two directions at the same time” (Murray 1998, p.13). In addition to New Zealanders travelling overseas and bringing back ideas and publications, visitors came here. Tourism, trade with and immigration to “the Britain of the South” were promoted from the 1830s (Belich 2001, p.83). The “Brittonic network” enabled the transmission of feminist ideas through the interchange of speakers between Britain, Australia, the US and New Zealand (Dalziel 1994 in Belich 2001, pp.166-167; see Chapter 7). Oscar Wilde was rumoured to be planning a lecture tour in 1882.ⁱ Annie Besant visited in 1894 and in 1908, probably promoting Charles Knowlton’s work on contraception, which suggested masturbation as an alternative to heterosexual intercourse.ⁱⁱ Sidney and Beatrice Webb toured in 1898, were interviewed by newspapers, and met with the local Fabian Society (Webb 1959). The feminist and socialist *Daybreak*, established in

Wellington in 1895, and *The White Ribbon*, founded in 1896 by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), reproduced or recommended overseas writing, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Noel Coward visited in 1941 (Barnett and Sullivan 1988, pp.113-118) and it may be assumed that he linked up with local homosexual networks. Immigrants fleeing Europe during the 1930s and again in the post-war period brought liberal and progressive ideas.ⁱⁱⁱ The thousands of American servicemen stationed here during WW2 influenced New Zealand culture socially and sexually (Ebbett 1984, Bioletti 1989, Coney 1993, pp.316-318). The pleasure-seeking environment provided new opportunities for lesbians, as there were fewer restrictions on women, who were encouraged to provide hospitality for the visiting troops. Freda Stark (Chapter 17), for example, danced at the Civic Theatre in Auckland for American audiences, while she had a relationship with an American married woman. Sylvia Carrigan, born in 1926, recalled the marines introducing American music and comics (Carrigan in Owen 1998, p.116). There were certainly homosexuals in the American forces in New Zealand (Parkinson 1986, see section on news media below). The many thousands of New Zealanders who served in wars overseas also brought back new knowledge of sexual practices and networks.

Though official attitudes to all expressions of sexuality tightened after the war, the Mazengarb Report (see Chapter 4) indicates that young people's behaviour in particular did not match the prescriptions (Manning 1958, Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, Yska 1993).

Improved communications and increased access to international travel assisted cultural transmission, including British influences of fashion and music and ideas from the US counter-culture and the anti-Vietnam war movement. Young people in particular were receptive to the social changes of the 1960s, including attitudes to sexuality, with the emphasis on "greater personal freedom" and "doing your own thing" (Dunstall 1981, p.428). For New Zealand kamp communities, ships and ship-queens were a constant source of information. Regular callers were the *Dominion Monarch*, from the UK, the *Wilhelm Ruys* from Holland, and the *Monowai* and *Wanganella* from Australia. Ship-queens held kamp parties on board, and brought books, magazines, fashions, Old Spice after-shave lotion (used by both New Zealand kamp men and women) and information about overseas homosexual communities. New Zealand kamp women and men

travelled to the UK, Europe and Australia and brought back books and information, and homosexual and lesbian immigrants and tourists supplied further gossip for the New Zealand grapevine^{iv}.

Sexuality and sex education

Changing views of sexuality in New Zealand were both of benefit to lesbians, through more liberal attitudes separating sexual pleasure from reproductive imperatives, and made life more difficult, by making it harder to avoid unwanted male sexual attention. In the early twentieth-century the Women's Christian Temperance Union linked temperance and sex education, promoting "abstinence and self-restraint" for men and women, but their "social purity model did not view women as sexual beings with desires of their own" (Coney 1993, p.24). The "double standard" for male and female sexual behaviours produced two strands of thought, one strand wanting a single standard of chastity, and the other a right to pleasure for both men and women.

Early New Zealand medical literature prescriptively linked women's sexuality to the "reproductive faculty" (Levesque 1986, p.3), one doctor decreeing, "The desire for motherhood and the perpetuation of the race...purifies and ennobles the sexual act" (Barraclough 1905 in Levesque 1986, p.4). This was expected to occur within marriage. However, rates for births outside marriage remain consistent for the eighty years from the mid-1870s to the mid-1950s, at about forty-five per thousand births (Glass 1959), indicating that ordinary people ignored the prescriptions. The Society for the Protection of Women and Children urged the state to intervene and "make illegitimacy a criminal offence with such drastic punishment as might act as warning and prevent a repetition" (Curzon-Siggers 1909 in Levesque 1986, p.6). In 1912 the Society recommended "detention homes" for unmarried mothers as "a girl who has lost her virtue is a menace to the community" (ibid. p.6; see also Chapter 4).

The Plunket Society was founded in 1907 by Dr. Frederick Truby King, medical superintendent of Seacliff Asylum (Giddings 1993), and addressed the welfare of infants and their mothers. What the Society had to say about sexuality reflected King's prescriptive ideology, including the prevention of constipation and masturbation which he thought lead to moral decline (Olssen 1981b, pp.3-23). King regarded "female masturbation as a 'sexual inversion' together with sadism and sodomy" (Barraclough 1905 in Levesque 1986, p.4).

Women's rights activists initially saw women as victims in need of protection from male sexuality. The age of sexual consent for females in New Zealand during most of the nineteenth century was twelve years (based on the 1828 English law), raised to fourteen in 1893, fifteen in 1894, and to sixteen in 1896 (Coney 1993, p.127; Sutch 1974, pp.84-93). In 1897 feminist campaigner Annie Schnackenberg argued for an age of consent of twenty years called "the age of protection" as it should not be possible for a girl or woman "to consent to her own ruin"^v. However, by 1921 the focus of the National Council of Women shifted from predatory men to girls who were "potentially seductive" and a raised age of consent became seen as "a way of controlling sexually wayward girls" (Coney 1993, p.127). Though this was not achieved, the intentions of containing female sexuality under state control continued through the girls' reformatories (see Chapter 4).

Meanwhile, the increasing use of contraception and (illegal) abortion indicated in New Zealand as it did elsewhere that married couples hoped "the act would have no reproductive consequences", as sex was becoming "more closely associated with the goals of romantic or spiritual union, and even of a physically pleasurable, or erotic experience" (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, p.72).

Direct references to sex education included an 1895 review by Ada Wells, suggesting that much could be learned by observing nature, and warning "we are beginning to understand that laws govern the universe, and that disobedience to these laws is visited by a penalty that is inevitable"^{vi}. Wells may have had a lesbian relationship herself, with Kate Sheppard^{vii}, and her review supports scientific teaching about sex and may imply that anything found in nature is natural and acceptable. The nursing magazine *Kai Tiaki* published a 1910 speech on venereal disease by Dr Agnes Bennett, who asserted

however revolting it may be to us, we ought to remember that this sex impulse is implanted in every normal individual, and in some it is very much harder to control than others...The ultimate state of the race will be one we hope, where education and discipline have brought about control of all the bodily impulses.^{viii}

Bennett was a strong supporter of sex education, and may have had lesbian relationships. This speech seems to suggest the naturalness of sexual feelings, though both here and in later speeches she encourages women to avoid extra-marital sex with men; for example in a 1944 lecture to servicewomen she told them that it was not their

duty to have sex with soldiers, and that abstaining from sex would not make these men less effective in battle.^{ix}

Ettie Rout took a different position. After founding the *Maoriland Worker* in 1911 in “the interests of Industrial Unionism, Socialism and Progressive Politics” (Tolerton 1992, p.72), she reported that people were “beginning to limit their families” because they had learned “marriage and procreation” were not “necessarily inseparable” (Rout in Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.151). The spread of birth control had many “subtle effects on sexuality” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.151), and it seems likely a greater acceptance of lesbian feelings for some women was one such effect. Rout’s *Safe Marriage* published in 1922 was banned outright (Tolerton 1992, p.216). Rout argued for “free love”, describing marital sex as part of the “profit system” and regarding marriages of “convenience” and other forms of “mercenary intercourse” as “wrong”, because “unchastity is sexual intercourse between those who do not love one another” (Rout 1923 in Sutch 1974, p.99). Rout was influenced by Professor Alexander Bickerton of Canterbury College^x, who promoted contraceptive instruction, condemning “mercenary marriage” for making woman the “uncleanest creature” and arguing that “selective passionate love” made her pure (Tolerton 1992, p.31). Some liberal Christians also believed that people who loved one another were “truly” wedded “before high Heaven” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.137). Rout’s views could be used to justify lesbian relationships, and reflected the influence of Carpenter (refer Chapter 5) who regarded sexual union as a sacred bond rather than a reproductive act.

Woman Today (1937-1939), a progressive magazine promoting “peace, freedom and progress”, published material on politics, social issues, work, parenting, equality for women, fiction and poetry, and included articles on sexuality, a 1938 editorial asserting “distorted ideas on [sex] are so widespread that wholesome teaching for the new generation is often a very difficult matter”^{xi} and an article suggesting “a child’s whole life may be coloured by the unpleasant recitation or distortion” of the facts of life.^{xii} A 1937 letter pointed out “The sexual urge is experienced by children from about the age of 12 or 13 or even earlier”^{xiii}. A review of Frances Strain’s *Being Born* reported the book was available from “the Reference Department of the Wellington Public Library”, indicating that sex education books were not on open shelves^{xiv}. Despite its progressive views, this magazine did not ever directly mention lesbianism.

The Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society founded in 1936 became the New Zealand Family Planning Association in 1939. Their original aims were to “educate and enlighten the people of New Zealand on the need for birth control and sex education” and in 1939 “assistance with the sex education of youth” was added to their aims, but these ideas were slow to gain acceptance (Fenwick 1993, p.265). Their entire presumption was that sex education was education for heterosexuality. They did not “question the primacy of the family or the woman’s role within it”, instead arguing that birth control might even be used to increase the population (Coney 1993, p.72). Marriage Guidance Councils were set up in New Zealand during 1948-1949^{xv}, also with a strong and conservative focus on marriage and the heterosexual family (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, pp.56-57).

There was great resistance to the idea of sex education in schools. The Thomas Report on the Post Primary School Curriculum (1944, 1959,p.54) stated that “the facts of reproduction” should be taught along with “character development” and “the quality of self-discipline”. This did not include any reference to the emotional or pleasurable aspects of sex, but was a mechanical and biological account, which scarcely informed pupils of heterosexuality, let alone homosexuality. The Primary School Curriculum, Revised Syllabus, asserted that there should not be any “place in primary school curriculum for group or class instruction on this topic” (1955, p.8).

Even nursing education reflected these attitudes. As noted by Bea Arthur (Chapter 17) the principal nursing text-book used until the 1970s provided diagrams of female genitalia without depicting the clitoris, and did not refer to the sexual act as pleasurable, giving only a technical account of the reproductive process (Gowland and Cairney, 1941).

Not until the publication of *The Little Red Schoolbook* in 1972^{xvi} was there any positive information on homosexuality available for young people. This publication met with an immediate response from The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC), who responded with *The Little White Book*, and claimed homosexuals “attempt to seduce into this inhuman way of life many people who were not born homosexuals”, adding

About female homosexuals we have little to say. The recent statements from young women in Auckland are vile and filthy. The fact that several of the outspoken young

perverts are Maoris has nothing to do with it.^{xvii} *The crime is spreading and it must be eradicated* (SPUC 1972, pp.44-45).

Theatre, performance and fiction

More pleasantly, the worlds of performance meant that the traditions of English theatre, with crossdressing, innuendo, circus, music hall and pantomime, as well as the homosexual theatrical networks within these worlds, became part of New Zealand culture, as many shows eventually came here. English theatre was introduced in Wellington and Auckland in 1843 and overseas performers visited frequently (Downes 1979, p.5). The opening production for the Theatre Royal in Auckland in 1856, for example, brought English breeches actress Mrs W.H. Foley to New Zealand, to play male parts. In 1861 she gave probably the first local female-to-male cross-dressed theatre performance with the role of Jack Sheppard in *Jack Sheppard or the House Breaker*, at Wellington's Royal Olympic Theatre. Downes notes that "her husband apparently did not support her", as he lived overseas and returned here "from time to time with circuses and other entertainments" (Downes 1979 pp.24-27). She may well have been part of early homosexual theatre networks.

From the 1880s J.C. Williamson of Australia and other overseas companies toured variety shows and vaudeville, for example the Pollard Opera Companies brought Gilbert and Sullivan and pantomime (ibid. pp.28-29, Gibbons 1992, p.316). Freda Stark danced and toured with various visiting American and Australian companies during the 1930s (Chapter 17). Plays on local themes and amateur theatre developed from the nineteenth century, with Ngaio Marsh producing her first play in 1913, and repertory societies and the British Drama League promoting one-act plays, mainly by women, with themes reflecting women's issues, including sexuality (Gibbons 1992, p.329). Left-wing theatre groups staging progressive plays were popular from the 1930s, for example, the Fielding Community Players performed Lillian Hellman's plays (Gibbons 1992, p.329). University theatre became popular in the 1960s and locally written and overseas plays were produced, including a 1962 Victoria University Drama Club production of Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, in which one of the main characters is lesbian (McNaughton 1991, pp.274–302). Ngaio Marsh brought English actors here for her Shakespearian productions, including the openly homosexual actor Peter Varley (1923-1997) around whom visible kamp circles formed in Wellington coffee bars Man Friday and the Tete a Tete during the late 1950s (see Chapter 8).^{xviii}

It is likely most women in Part 3 were familiar with theatrical shows, Katherine Mansfield (Chapter 12) herself performing in London, and Ursula Bethell (Chapter 11) socialising with Ngaio Marsh and attending theatre performances. Drama was a feature of the Havelock Work (Chapter 9), and Peter Dawson wrote plays (Chapter 14). Participation in amateur theatre groups was a way for lesbians to meet, for example at the Little Theatre in New Plymouth, where only “single people could be members” (Saphira 1997, p.123). Theatre cultures provided a range of alternative images and transformational possibilities for both lesbian participants and viewers.

Pre-1970s offerings in fiction on any kind of homosexuality were subdued and meagre. Katherine Mansfield’s stories (Chapter 12) contain some lesbian themes. In “Bliss” the protagonist is attracted to another woman, who prefers the protagonist’s husband; “At the Bay”, “Juliet”, “Je ne Parle pas Francais” have lesbian characters or themes. James Courage’s *The Fifth Child* (1948) and *A Way of Love* (1959) have homosexual themes, as do several of Frank Sargeson’s pre-1970s stories – “The hole that Jack dug”, “I for one”, “I saw in my dream”, “I’ve lost my pal” and “That summer”. Ursula Bethell (Chapter 11) wrote lesbian love poetry, in her memorial poems to Effie Pollen. I have not been able to locate any other published work that is overtly lesbian.

Some novelists treated sexual themes and argued for “free love”; Jean Devanny *The Butcher’s Shop* in 1926 described a loveless marriage, and her heroine’s extramarital relationship as “clean”, because it was motivated by love; this book was banned. Robin Hyde *The Godwits Fly* in 1938 juxtaposed “the glory hole”, or sex, with “the glory box”, or marriage^{xix}; neither was satisfactory for women, but love, if it existed, might be worth it. McLeod (2001) discusses lesbian readings of Jane Mander’s 1920 novel *The Story of a New Zealand River* and Margaret Escott’s 1936 novel *Showdown*. *The New Zealand Women’s Weekly* and other magazines included romance stories reinforcing the ideals of Hollywood and the belief that women should marry for love having met “Mr Right”. These representations reinforced ideas of the “companionate marriage”, added to by love-songs played on radio. Through these stories, New Zealand women were encouraged to seek fulfillment through love as the most important and valuable experience in life.

The news media

The New Zealand print news media consistently reported incidents of gender and sexual transgression, with items of women “masquerading” as men. The death of Australian cross-dresser Mrs De lacy Evans was reported in 1901 under the heading “The Man-Woman”^{xx} (Chapter 2), and there were reports of Amy Bock’s attempt to marry her landlady’s daughter Agnes Ottaway, the 1906 and 1907 arrests of cross-dressing Bert Rotciv, the 1923 case of Eugenia Falleni convicted in Sydney of murder, the death of cross-dressing Deresley Morton (Peter Stratford) in 1929 and the 1945 case of “Mr X”, charged with fraud for marrying another woman (See Chapter 9 for a discussion of these cases).

Media reports of male homosexual scandals would also have affected lesbians, for example, a newspaper comment on Oscar Wilde’s case that “the two years imprisonment to which Oscar Wilde has been sentenced ought to serve as a salutary warning to the British aristocracy.”^{xxi} Significant local cases included the arrest of Wanganui’s mayor, Charles Evan Mackay, in May 1920 for the attempted murder of homosexual poet Walter D’Arcy Cresswell. It was alleged Mackay shot Cresswell for threatening to expose Mackay’s homosexuality. The defence argued he suffered from “homosexual monomania” having made “efforts” to “cure himself”, and “consulted doctors and metaphysicians”. Mackay was found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment (Parkinson 1985, p.11). The case resulted in widespread anti-homosexual feeling in Wanganui and prejudice against the Sarjeant Art Gallery, which Mackay helped found, and influenced how Edith Collier’s work (see Chapter 9) was received (Drayton 1999, p.64). Cresswell was “taken up by the Bloomsbury set” in 1930, following the publication of his autobiography *A Poet’s Progress* which omitted “reference to the Wanganui affair” (Parkinson 1985, p.11). (See Chapter 11 for Bethell’s friendship with Cresswell).

The 1935 Mareo case (described in Chapter 17) began the connection of lesbianism with murder in New Zealand. Eric Mareo was convicted of killing his wife Thelma, because of her lesbian relationship with Freda Stark. Lesbianism was depicted as part of a loose-living theatrical world, likely to result in jealousy and murder. These themes re-emerged twenty years later, in 1954, when Juliet Hulme, aged fifteen and Pauline Parker, aged sixteen, killed Honora Parker, Pauline’s mother, in Victoria Park, Christchurch. Described as “the world’s worst murderers”, Parker and Hume were

depicted as lesbians by both the prosecution and the defence, with the prosecution calling them “dirty-minded girls”. Defence psychiatrist Dr Reginald Medlicott (see section on medical articles below) presented lesbianism as a pathological condition symptomatic of communicated insanity, or “folie a deux”, meaning the girls were sane when on their own, but became mad when together in a lesbian relationship. The case strongly impacted on New Zealand lesbians. For example, one mother feared being alone with her daughter after breaking up her lesbian relationship, and a woman ended a lesbian relationship to avoid becoming like Parker and Hulme (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, pp.165-181).

In 1955, the year after this case, the *New Zealand Pictorial* reported “gangs of homosexuals” in Auckland, living together

for the sake of perversion. You can see these warped-brain men - and women too - wandering about the streets or sitting idly in night cafes. Auckland has too many of them...Homosexuals have a strict code of ethics all of their own...they fight amongst themselves like Kilkenny cats. For this reason a group of homosexuals is always controlled by the "queen bee" whose word is absolutely final. Others in the sect are "marthas" who dress as women; "arthurs" who adopt the normal male role, and "butchs" who stand in either way...homosexuals, ambisexuals, lesbians and the like...are largely only a degrading menace, however undesirable, to themselves^{xxii}.

This article may have encouraged the urban drift of homosexuals (Chapter 7). Articles of this kind reflect the negative association of homosexuality in the media with crime, murder and abnormality. In some cases involving male homosexuals, the media apparently supported the acquittal of killers who claimed their victims had made homosexual advances. In 1944 a nineteen-year-old New Zealand soldier was acquitted of the murder of a twenty-five-year old American soldier, by claiming the American made homosexual advances (Parkinson 1986). In 1960, Roy Jackson, a waiter at the Ca d’Oro (Chapter 8) was killed when he fell from the deck of the *Whangaroa*, docked at Napier, after being assaulted by two seamen who were acquitted of manslaughter. The judge commented, “it was stretching things a bit to say that it was unlawful for the accused to remove Jackson from the ship as, after all, it was their home”.^{xxiii} Jackson had travelled to Napier to visit his lover who worked on the ship, and the Auckland kamp community took up a collection for his burial. The acquittal sent a signal that killing homosexuals might not result in a conviction^{xxiv}. These cases foreshadowed the 1964 Hagley Park case, where six youths aged between 15 and 17 years were acquitted on a charge of manslaughter, the prosecution alleging they had gone to Hagley Park in Christchurch with the purpose of finding a “queer” and “bashing” him. Their

homosexual victim, Charles Aberhart from Blenheim, died from his injuries, the youths claiming he had made a homosexual approach to them and, horrified by this they accidentally beat him to death (Holcroft 1964, p.8, Breward 1965, p.155). These cases demonstrated the possible consequences of any form of homosexuality, and the verdicts were consistent with Doreen Davis' 1967 acquittal for the murder of Raewyn Petley.

In November 1966 Nursing Sister Raewyn Joy Petley, aged 40, of the Royal New Zealand Nursing Corps, was "found dead in her bed...with a deep wound in her neck" at the Royal New Zealand Air Force base at Whenuapai.^{xxv} Another "critically ill nurse" was in Auckland Hospital, being treated for "an overdose of drugs".^{xxvi} This nurse, Sister Doreen Ellen Davis, aged 30, was tried for Petley's murder at Auckland in March 1967. The prosecution alleged Davis cut Petley's throat with a scalpel, left the room via the window and drove back to her quarters where she took an overdose of barbiturates, her motive for the murder being conflict in their lesbian relationship. Davis was defended by Kevin Ryan, and denied all charges, insisting Petley cut her own throat. There are suggestions the military may have tidied the women's rooms, before calling the police and arranging Davis' defence, as she would be charged in a civilian court, and they hoped for a verdict of suicide as it would be less damaging than murder^{xxvii}.

Petley served with the Royal New Zealand Nursing Corps from 1954, moving to Whenuapai air force base in February 1964; Davis joined the nursing corps in 1962, and met Petley in 1966 at the Hobsonville base. Their relationship developed, another nurse testifying that because Davis visited Petley's flat at night, she had felt "disgusted" and reported them^{xxviii}, consequently, Davis was to be transferred to Wigram.^{xxix} The prosecution produced two unsigned letters, alleging Davis wrote to Petley "I do love that smile darling more and more each time we meet", and "Please don't ever deceive, darling...You mean too much to me and I do to you."^{xxx} The defence argued Davis was "befriended by a woman outwardly kind and sympathetic but inwardly a hunting lesbian."^{xxxi} Davis testified Petley was "generous and kind at first"^{xxxii}. However, she said, on a later occasion,

Before I knew it, Raewyn was in bed with me. I got a fright at first. She looked different. She said she wanted me. She tried to kiss me and did. She...looked like a man, not a woman...I finally gave in to Raewyn.^{xxxiii}

On the night of Petley's death, Davis claimed Petley tried to prevent her from leaving her room

the look I had seen on Raewyn's face was more domineering than I had ever seen before...I told her to just leave me alone and I went to the door... Sister Petley was looking at me directly - she was semi-sitting up in bed...The next thing I saw was this knife...I saw a lot of blood and that cut on her neck.^{xxxiv}

Ryan called medical witnesses to testify that a person could cut their own throat, and defence psychiatrist Dr Henry Bethune who described Petley as “a congenital or essential lesbian”^{xxxv}. Ryan argued that even if Davis had killed Petley, she did so in a state of “automatism” brought on by the shock of Petley's lesbian advances. However, he argued it was more likely Petley had killed herself, as she had made previous suicide attempts.

The media portrayed Petley as “a smiling depressive” and as an “essential” or “hunting” lesbian, and Davis as an innocent seduced by Petley. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty. Glamuzina has suggested that the image of the “predatory lesbian”, allowed the court to become “a showcase for heterosexuality by demonising and pathologising lesbianism” (Glamuzina 2001, p.81). Duggan points out the need to “retell” stories of this kind from lesbian points of view (Duggan 1993, p.809, see Chapter 2).

The *New Zealand Truth*, a popular weekly with a circulation of 100,000 by 1928 extensively reported cases of sex/gender transgression, the former chief reporter suggesting that many people received their sex education from *Truth's* coverage of divorce, rape, carnal knowledge, sexual offences and sex scandals.^{xxxvi} Soon after the Petley case, in June 1967 under a heading “Now It's Camp Coffee Houses”, the paper reported that the “capital's other sex” met at the “Powder Poof and the Lets-B-Inn” coffee houses where “women danced intimately”.

Now, at their mid-city meeting places, they openly display their tendencies by their dress – just as effectively as if they carried placards...Lesbians...seemed to keep to themselves, though their actions...were more openly suggestive...This could well be because adult lesbian practices are not banned by law...But in spite of their unashamed display of their tendencies, none of the ‘camp’ crowd...looked happy. Altogether the scene was pathetic^{xxxvii}.

This report may have been helpful to women wanting to know where to meet others. Another item on the same page referred to a “community ball” at the Brooklyn Community Centre, Wellington, where “350 dancers in their bizarre costumes were the capital's homosexuals and deviates...a ‘gay’ throng.”^{xxxviii} This seems to be the first use of “gay” in a New Zealand newspaper, indicating that the word was introduced before 1967. *Truth* photographed attendees without their consent, wondering at their anger,

reproducing a photograph of unidentified people. This created fears among many homosexuals of media attendance at homosexual events and consequent public exposure^{xxxix}. The journalist was recognized as working for *Truth*, because he “took the photos at the Dominion Monarch Ball”. An item about this Ball, held in 1962 at St Francis Hall, Hill Street, Wellington, included photographs and descriptions of men in frocks, possibly also taken without permission, and portrayed as attended by “those who are not normal, who live in the shadowy life of a sexual co-existence.”^{xl}

In 1965, under the heading “Woman In The Shadows”, *Truth* informed readers that “Miss Esme Langley” had founded the Minorities Research Group in London, warning that “There is about one chance in 20 that...your daughter will become a lesbian”^{xli}. Though newspaper articles like these confirmed lesbian existence, and in this instance provided information about an English group that women could join (though they gave no address), pre-1970 coverage was usually negative, warning of the consequences of lesbianism and reinforcing messages of compulsory heterosexuality.

Other print news media, including the Communist, trade union, student^{xlii} and literary press, included articles by progressive writers including Jean Devanny, or reviews of their work, but a search of some selected examples has produced few significant references to lesbianism. For example, the Victoria University College magazine *Salient* ran an item in 1940 on the continued ban of *TWOL*, but the focus was predominantly on censorship^{xliii}.

Radio and later television brought powerful messages into New Zealand homes about romantic heterosexual love, through radio serials and television dramas. Radio broadcasting began in Dunedin in 1921, and a set of Regulations for Broadcasting was issued in 1923, by which time there were eleven privately operated licensed stations, all subject to the regulations and told what they could and could not broadcast. An Act of Parliament enabled the implementation of a Dominion-wide service, and by 1936 there was full state control (Downes and Harcourt 1976, pp.10-16). Officials and programme controllers within the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, a government department, were restrictive and cautious. Broadcast from 1931, American radio serials were soon regarded by broadcasting executives as an undesirable influence, and were gradually replaced by British and Australian serials, with no American serials broadcast in the immediate post-WW2 years 1946-1956. A major concern was that radio “was heard by

larger audiences than had been reached by any previous method of entertainment”, making the home “the listening point” (Day 1994, pp.305- 308). Even mildly sexually suggestive songs were banned^{xliv}, though censorship regulations did not actually require this. The Mazengarb Report (see below) recommended that “a married woman” be appointed to the selection panel for programmes to ensure moral standards were upheld (ibid, p.308). Given these anxieties, it is unlikely that any New Zealand radio station would have risked broadcasting any mention of lesbianism in the pre-1970 period. Despite these limitations, radio played an important role in “shifting attention...from an overwhelming focus on the local community” (ibid, p.314). This included the international youth culture (Dunstall 1981, p.428), promoted by the new popular music sessions and disc-jockeys, and assisted from the 1950s by portable radios and the new 45-rpm records (Day 1994, pp.316- 319).

Television commenced in New Zealand in 1960, comprising four state-owned channels by 1970, one in each main centre, with programming determined by the censor’s classification for films, and by TV officials for other programming. Again, caution was observed and “good taste” the guide rather than censorship regulations.

There appear to have been no significant pre-1970 references to lesbianism on television. Early references to male homosexuality included a documentary programme in the *Compass* series and news coverage of the Homosexual Law Reform Society’s petition to Parliament supporting decriminalization of male homosexuality^{xlv} (see Chapter 4).

Pre-1970 women’s magazines contained few references to lesbianism. In 1954 the *New Zealand Women's Weekly* described in the “Psychologist's Casebook” the relationship between Kay and Sue. The story is imported from the US, referring to “dates” while Kay and Sue were away at “college”. Kay had an unhappy childhood, and her parents were always “bickering”. She “sided with her mother in these quarrels” and the two women who “had no source of affection but each other” grew close. At college Kay found “friendship and understanding” with Sue, and became “as dependent upon Sue as she had been upon her mother”, preferring to stay home with Sue than go on dates with boyfriends. Kay “tolerated” Sue going on dates, but when she returned and “wanted to tell her all about her evening's fun”, Kay “belittled the boy and hastily changed the subject.” Then, Sue told Kay she was getting married. Kay couldn't sleep and next day “she wept bitterly and begged Sue not to leave her, saying that “she could not get along

without her.”

The diagnosis was

Individuals who have problems like Kay's are sick and unhappy people. They should be encouraged to seek professional help in the understanding and control of their emotional drives, so that they can achieve their measure of happiness and social effectiveness^{xlvi}

This article in a popular magazine brought the views of sexology and psychiatry into New Zealand homes. In 1969 a more enlightened article “One in Every Twenty” appeared in *Thursday*, a progressive women’s magazine, arguing for homosexual law reform and describing the Homosexual Law Reform Society as “a group of intelligent, well-intentioned normal people who see flaws in the law as it stands regarding homosexuality among males”.^{xlvi} The article did not mention lesbians, but it did signal that homosexuality was now an acceptable topic for women to read about.

Summary

From early European contact, British and other European religious, medical and cultural representations of lesbianism influenced New Zealand- produced discourses. New Zealand produced stories were mainly constructed through sex education, media reports of women “masquerading” as men and sensational murder cases involving lesbians. Editorial policies manufactured silences about lesbianism on television and radio. While the available stories did provide information about lesbianism, negativity and silence meant they functioned as cautionary warnings for women to be discreet, whether or not they consciously registered these messages. Anti-lesbianism functioned through these stories, as well as through the material level of access to economic independence considered in the next chapter.

ⁱ *The New Zealand Mail*, 27 May 1882, p.18 cols. a and b.

ⁱⁱ Charles Bradlaugh, publisher of the atheist *Freethought*, and Annie Besant were prosecuted for re-publishing in 1877 Charles Knowlton’s 1832 *Fruits of Philosophy, or the Private Companion of Young Married People*. (E. O. Hellerstein et al 1981 eds, p.189). Besant later embraced celibacy and “self-restraint” (Jeffreys 1985, p.44).

ⁱⁱⁱ See, for example, Ann Beaglehole (1988) on the influence of Jewish immigrants during this period.

^{iv} Interview with Paul Magill by Alison Laurie 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library; personal communications from Johnny Croskery, Cees Kooge; personal knowledge.

^v *The White Ribbon*, February 1897, p.4.

^{vi} Ada Wells “Review”, in *The White Ribbon*, November 1895, p.3.

^{vii} Rachel McAlpine (1990), gives a fictionalised account of Wells’ life, including this relationship.

^{viii} Text of a speech by Dr Bennett, in *Kai Tiaki*, October 1910, p.155.

^{ix} Dr Agnes Bennett manuscripts for Lecture II, given to WAAC and WAAF, 1944. MS papers 1346, Folder 246A.

^x Professor Bickerton was sacked from Canterbury College in 1902 for setting up the Federative Home at Wainoni, an experiment in communal living (Tolerton 1992, p.28). Mabel Howard worked at Wainoni for a time, and both she and her father Ted Howard were influenced by him (see Chapter 9).

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- ^{xi} Editorial, in *Woman Today*, January 1938, Vol. 2, No.10, p.1.
- ^{xii} Jean Dawson, Sex Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society, "How Shall I Tell My Children?" in *Woman Today*, September 1 1938, Vol. 2, No.6, p.17.
- ^{xiii} Letter from Jean Boswell of Kawakawa, in *Woman Today*, July 1 1937, p.12.
- ^{xiv} Review of *Being Born*, in *Woman Today*, August 1937, pp.136-137.
- ^{xv} In 1948 Hilda Hulme, Juliet Hulme's mother, became a Vice-President and counsellor of the first Christchurch Marriage Guidance Council (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991).
- ^{xvi} Translated and republished from the Danish edition.
- ^{xvii} This was a reference to Ngahuia Te Awakotuku (then Volkerling) and her speeches and activism for Auckland Gay Liberation.
- ^{xviii} "Peter Varley" obituary in *Sunday Star/Times*, August 1997.
- ^{xix} I am indebted to Jackie Matthews for this interpretation.
- ^{xx} *The New Zealand Mail*, 18 September 1901, p.15
- ^{xxi} *New Zealand Observer and Freelance*, Saturday June 1, 1895, p.3, col.4.
- ^{xxii} *NZ Pictorial*, 12 December 1955.
- ^{xxiii} *The NZ Truth*, May 3 and June 14, 1960.
- ^{xxiv} Personal information from Anna Hoffman 2000.
- ^{xxv} *Sunday News*, 20 November 1966.
- ^{xxvi} *NZ Herald*, Monday 21 November 1966
- ^{xxvii} Confidential communication from service personnel.
- ^{xxviii} *The Auckland Star*, 23 January 1967.
- ^{xxix} *NZ Herald*, 24 January 1967.
- ^{xxx} *NZ Truth*, 21 March 1967.
- ^{xxxi} *NZ Herald*, 18 March 1967.
- ^{xxxii} *The Auckland Star*, 14 March 1967.
- ^{xxxiii} *NZ Truth*, 21 March 1967.
- ^{xxxiv} *The Auckland Star*, 14 March 1967.
- ^{xxxv} *NZ Truth*, 21 March 1967.
- ^{xxxvi} Communication from Les Cleveland, a former chief reporter of *NZ Truth*.
- ^{xxxvii} "Now It's Camp Coffee Houses", *NZ Truth*, 13 June 1967.
- ^{xxxviii} "Bawl or Brawl- Let Me Out", *NZ Truth*, 13 June 1967.
- ^{xxxix} Personal knowledge.
- ^{xl} "This Fantastic Ball", *NZ Truth*, 16 January 1962.
- ^{xli} "Women In The Shadows", *NZ Truth*, 15 August 1965.
- ^{xlii} Student magazines included, for example, Auckland University College Literary Society publication *Phoenix* (1932-1933); Canterbury University College *Oriflamme* and Victoria College Free Discussion Club *Student*. The latter two were eventually suppressed by College authorities (Hamilton 1998, pp 5-11); Auckland's *Craccum* and Victoria's *Salient*, among others, still exist.
- ^{xliii} *Salient* 1940, Wellington p.
- ^{xliv} *The NZ Listener*, 10 April 1952.
- ^{xlvi} Ref. P86826 NZBC News, 8 November 1968, Television Archives, Avalon, Lower Hutt.
- ^{xlvi} "Psychologist's Casebook", in *The New Zealand Women's Weekly* 18 February 1954.
- ^{xlvi} *Thursday* magazine, 4 September 1969, pp.18-20.

Chapter 7

Pre-1970 conditions of existence affecting lesbians

Introduction

Progress for women meant progress for lesbians, as reforms in New Zealand society provided more choices for women. This chapter is not a social history of all New Zealand women, but examines selected pre-1970 material conditions of life relevant to lesbian existence including the position of Maori women, legal frameworks, and women's access to education, employment, housing and communications. Women might have lesbian relationships, but they could not make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives without a legal identity, money and housing. Changing material conditions enabled or constrained women's ability to lead lesbian lives and live in lesbian relationships.

Maori women

Colonisation and the imposition of British law affected all Maori women's choices. When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 the position of British women was at a low point. Maori women at this time participated in the decision-making processes of whanau, hapu and iwiⁱ equally with men of similar status. They owned property, retaining it if marriages ended, and were fully participating members of their whanau, rather than subservient to an individual husband as were British women (Makereti 1986, pp.76-77, Pere 1987 pp.56-57, Coney 1993, p.189, Mikaere 1994 p.2). After 1858, British laws governed Maori women, and their legal identity and property were transferred to their husbands on marriage.ⁱⁱ The traditional Maori taumauⁱⁱⁱ continued to be recognized for some legal purposes, but the 1951 Maori Purposes Act and the 1955 Marriage Act eventually forced all Maori to conform to Pakeha marriage (Coney 1993, p.176, p.186, Mikaere 1994, p.2). The colonial nuclear family was promoted as "the model" of civilization, and colonial structures and ideologies were imposed, missionary schooling contributing to "the redefining of the roles and status of Maori women" (Pihama 1998, p.183). The imposition of British ideologies of the family has contributed to the development of negative attitudes about homosexuality among some Maori people. Lesbianism may have been commonly accepted in earlier Maori societies. The 1988 Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy states

Of specific concern to Maori lesbians however is the claim sometimes made that homosexuality was introduced by Pakeha and that it had no place in traditional Maori society. There is no evidence to support this claim. Kuia and Kaumatua^{iv} have suggested to the Commission that . . . homosexuality - female and male - was not uncommon in pre-European times and that it was in fact more readily accepted than today (Royal Commission 1988, 2.2.38).

Arrangements in pre-European times may have allowed certain people to live as the other sex, similar to other native American and Pacific societies^v. It has been suggested to me that when the men were away at war during earlier times, the wahine toa^{vi} protected the village and took on men's roles, including sexual relations with other women^{vii}. This custom did not survive colonisation in this form, though a continued acceptance of cross-dressing among some Maori, for example of the song-writer Tuini Ngawai, and of transgendered people such as entertainer Carmen Rupe (Carmen 1988) and Member of Parliament Georgina Beyer (Beyer 1999), may link to older traditions.

As colonised people, Maori experienced a systematic alienation of land and resources by means of compulsory purchase, confiscation or fraud. The subsequently low socio-economic position of Maori women (see Mikaere 1994), and of Maori lesbians, reflects these processes; the death of Bubs Hetet aged only 52 years from lung cancer (Chapter 22) is an example of the poorer health of Maori women and their high levels of smoking. The increasing development of negative attitudes among Maori towards homosexuality is reflected in Hetet's recounting that she could not disclose her lesbianism to her mother. Joan Metge (1964) found from her research in Auckland during the 1950s, that the decision to migrate to the city was often sparked off by family conflict. From my own observation during the 1960s, numbers of Maori lesbians moved to the city because they either feared or had experienced family conflict because of their lesbianism. This was also the case for many non-Maori lesbians living in small towns or rural areas who migrated to the city.

One consequence of Maori migration to the cities was that Maori and Pakeha were brought into closer contact, resulting in greater discrimination against Maori in employment, housing and education, including advertisements stating "No Maoris" (Awatere 1984, Ballara 1986).^{viii}

Urbanisation

The move to the cities following the development of capitalism and industrialisation was essential for the development of modern homosexual identities and communities.

D'Emilio argued that these processes allowed individuals to urbanise and live anonymously outside the constraints and traditions of village and family life. The "transition away from the household family-based economy" enabled individuals to make a living through wage-labour, allowing "homosexual desire" to become a "personal identity" based on living "outside the heterosexual family", and constructing a life around "attraction to one's own sex" (d'Emilio 1993, pp.469-470).

Nineteenth-century Christchurch and Dunedin were cities of "wealth and culture, the epitome of civilised living in the colony" (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.35). Wellington became the capital, and Auckland the largest population centre. The non-Maori population in 1891 was 626,658, of whom a little over 28% lived in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch or Dunedin. By 1936 this figure had increased to 1,491,484 with nearly 40% living in these centers, and a further nearly 15% living in towns with populations larger than 8000 (Olssen 1992, pp.255-256). Further geographic shifts in New Zealand between 1936 and 1976 saw urban areas increase to contain two-thirds of the population, with the rural sector reduced to one-sixth (Labrum 2000, p.190).

The rapid urbanisation of Maori in the post-WW2 period was a consequence of land alienation coupled with government policy (Coney 1993, pp.84-85, Metge 1964). In 1945 three-quarters of the Maori population lived in rural areas, but by the mid-1970s, three-quarters lived in urban areas, with over a fifth living in Auckland (Dunstall 1981, p.403). This was one of the highest rates of urban migration in the world at that time (Coney 1993, p.84).

Urbanisation provided benefits for Maori lesbians such as access to government employment and training, for example, in the Post Office or the armed services, like Hetet. Though it meant Maori women could acceptably leave the close scrutiny of family life in rural areas to live lesbian lives in the cities, (see Te Awekotuku et al. 1993, Carmen 1988), it created cultural disruptions and alienation of some urban Maori lesbians from their traditional rural communities.

For women wanting lesbian relationships, cities provided meeting-places and better access to information on lesbianism, as well as employment opportunities and rental accommodation. As increasing numbers of homosexual women and men, particularly

Maori, lived in cities, the early post-WW2 publicly visible kamp communities formed (see Chapter 8).^{ix}

Nineteenth-century women

Without a legal existence, the vote or economic independence, the possibilities for any women to live apart from men were limited. British laws on marriage, divorce and property (like homosexual laws, see Chapter 4) became effective here through the 1858 English Laws Act (Sutch 1974, p.90). These laws were at their “most oppressive”, as nineteenth-century British legislation eroded women's rights (ibid. pp.12-13), Virginia Woolf commenting, “From the first day of the nineteenth century the sexes grew further and further apart”. The Dower Act of 1833 enabled husbands to will property away from their widows, husbands and wives becoming “one person in law” with the legal existence of women “suspended during the marriage” (Blackstone in Sutch 1974, p.13) and women's property and wages passing to their husbands on marriage.

Women's rights activists campaigned for reform and the passage of the 1884 Married Women's Property Acts, strongly influenced by overseas ideas as they “read, watch and reflect” on events (Muller 1869 in Macdonald 1993a, p.18). Overseas visitors included Maria Susan Rye in 1863, British activist for married women's property law reform (Macdonald 1993a, p.17), and American temperance campaigner Mary Clement Leavett in 1885, inspiring the founding of Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) branches throughout the country (Lovell-Smith 1993, pp.12-13). The WCTU campaigned for women's rights, including the franchise, and in 1893 New Zealand became the first country where women gained the vote. For the remainder of the nineteenth-century, and into the twentieth, New Zealand women's rights activists continued to campaign for economic self-determination, including access to education, employment, and the elimination of the double standard (see Macdonald 1993a, Lovell-Smith 1993, Coney 1993). However, the early attainment of the vote appears to have meant that there was not the broad political involvement of women in New Zealand during the early twentieth-century, as was the case for example, in the UK, where Hamer (1996) has identified numbers of women leading lesbian lives who were involved in the suffragette movement, or in the US, where Faderman (1999) has done the same in respect of American women's suffrage campaigns.

Education

Access to equal education and training were essential if women were to obtain paid employment and become economically self-supporting, and this was an area where New Zealand women's rights activists fought long and continuing campaigns. Primary education had been made free, secular and compulsory for boys and girls aged 7-13 years in 1877, and of 118,000 pupils in 1891, nearly 49% were girls. Belich suggests this early provision for girls' education for girls was partly due to the strong Scottish influence in New Zealand society, as the Scots regarded education as "suitable even for girls" (Belich 2001, p.167). Otago Girls' High School was founded by Scottish settlers in 1871^x, followed by girls' colleges in Auckland, Napier (where Bessie Jerome Spencer became headmistress, see Chapter 9), Wellington (attended by Katherine Mansfield, see Chapter 12), Nelson (where Dorothy Kate Richmond taught, see Chapter 10), Christchurch, New Plymouth (attended by Elsie Andrews, see Chapter 13) and Invercargill. The 1869 University of Otago Ordinance in the Scots founded city of Dunedin did not exclude women, and classes were open and certificates granted to women, who were able to take full degrees in New Zealand from 1877 (Sutch 1974, pp.78-79).^{xi} In 1886, 40 percent of secondary school pupils were girls, rising to 45% by 1900, and by 1893, women were half the number of university students (Belich 2001, p.167). There was strong opposition to this, with Sir Truby King asserting in 1909 that equal education for women was "one of the most preposterous farces ever perpetuated" (Sutch 1974, p.81). Given his role in Annemarie Anon's genital mutilation (Chapter 8) and his Plunket Society's philosophy of woman's primary role as mother (Chapter 6), this comment is consistent, as he correctly identified the denial of higher education as a key mechanism for containing women under male control. Though Sinclair called him "arguably the most influential man in Pakeha society" (Sinclair in Belich 2001, p.163), his views did not prevail, and pre-1970 New Zealand women benefited from a state-supported education system, including access to tertiary qualifications. There was, however, educational deprivation due to dominant social attitudes, with woman's main role continuing to be seen as wife and mother and many believing that advanced education was unnecessary for daughters. The Society for Research on Women (SROW) found in a 1967 study of 5400 women, that the 1930s Depression had caused more girls than boys "to cut short their education and seek employment" without gaining school qualifications. Mathematics, in second place as a subject choice for boys, was in seventh place for girls, limiting their employment options (SROW 1972, p.33),

as it was required for all scientific study, including home science, and technical courses, such as medical technology (O'Connor 1968, p.3).

Of the total 70% of women in the 1967 study who received secondary education, 48% took professional or general courses, 32% commercial, and 18% homecraft, with most women born between 1928 and 1942 taking commercial or homecraft. There were generational differences: only 38% of women born between 1908 and 1912 received secondary education, compared with 98% of those born between 1943 and 1951, indicating a rapid rise over three decades. Despite receiving some secondary schooling, an overall 62% left secondary school without any qualifications^{xii} (SROW 1972, pp.33-36). Typical of her age-group, narrator Katie Hogg (b.1926) was made to leave straight from primary school, but Freda Stark (b.1910), Bea Armstrong (b.1915) and Betty Armstrong (b.1909) were among the minority of their generation who attended secondary school, though all left without formal qualifications.

Forty percent of SROW's respondents received further training immediately after leaving school. Of these 20% trained at private business colleges; women in this study undertaking this training were Betty Armstrong (b.1909), Freda Stark (b.1910) and Emily (b.1921); 13.5% took nursing, Beatrice Arthur (b.1915) and Tighe Instone (b.1940) trained as nurses. Nine percent took teacher training, including Elsie Andrews (b.1888), Muriel Kirton (b.1893) and Morrigan Severs (b.1942); and 9% attended university, including Bessie Jerome Spencer (b.1872). Only 21% of women born between 1907 and 1912 had any post-secondary school qualifications, compared with 35% of women born between 1943 and 1946 (SROW 1972, pp.38-42). The figures indicate that most pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives who worked in skilled occupations were likely to be in teaching, nursing and secretarial work, and that women born before 1912 who obtained qualifications, including several in the present study, were in a minority.

A 1975 Department of Education report on women's education identified problem areas affecting girls' choices, making specific recommendations for improvement. Nolan argues that the state was not "an unambiguous promoter of women's domesticity", instead wanting to train "a nation of women, not to be equal to men, but...nonetheless to enter paid employment" (Nolan 2000, pp.35-36). This benefited women leading

lesbian lives, but pre-1970 outcomes for many were still limited by their lack of education and qualifications.

Work

Where employment choices are limited, some women cannot become economically self-supporting. Hyman argues that “the increasing possibility of education and economic independence...enabled those who did not wish to marry...to have other options, single and/or lesbian”, and was “a major reason for the emergence of a separate lesbian culture and identity” (Hyman 1994, p.180). The Commission of Inquiry into Equal Pay, reporting on conditions for women’s employment before 1971, found that opportunities were restricted by “family and social obligations, lower education qualifications, lack of specialized training...limited participation in union activity...and regional employment patterns” (Sutch 1974, p.208). This hindered women from leading lesbian lives, especially as family obligations included the expectation that unmarried daughters remained at home caring for elderly or ailing family members (the fate of Collier, see Chapter 9). The lack of acceptable, traditional female employment in some regions, coupled with a lack of qualifications, and little apparent interest from unions in improving opportunities for women, meant some women were forced to accept marriage as their only option (including Thelma Mareo, Chapter 17, and Katie Hogg, Chapter 20).

Though most women worked in traditional areas of female employment, Sutch considers the nature of nineteenth century New Zealand life gave women more equality in rural areas, and the “absence of a strong middle-class weakened the impact of the view that women should not be in paid occupations” (Sutch 1974, p.71). In the 1870s many single women had worked as poorly paid servants^{xiii}, and in every occupation women earned far less than men; for example, a skilled woman tailoress earned half the wage of a male tailor (Coney 1986, p.20). In 1891, 39% of women aged 15 to 24 years were in paid employment, rising to over 50% by 1921, and to 60% by WW2, making paid employment “the majority experience” for young women (Nolan 2000, p.33). Education contributed to “the collapse of domestic service as a woman’s occupation”, as office work became “feminised”, with the percentage of female office workers rising from 2% to 40% between 1890-1939 (ibid. p.36). This new field of work attracted women wanting to lead lesbian lives (for example, Betty Armstrong and Emily).

WW1 provided new opportunities for women. In *TWOL*, Hall depicts British lesbians benefiting from the new employment options available to women. Some New Zealand women volunteered for service overseas, while others took up positions left vacant by men who had been called up. In 1915 the Women's National Reserve was formed and women registered to replace men in the work force, and by 1917, 4153 women were employed in the Public Service, where they received equal pay from 1919-1921. Women also worked in voluntary organisations supporting the troops in Europe (Barber 1989, p.114). As elsewhere, it is likely these new work situations bringing women together provided opportunities to meet, form lesbian relationships and establish lesbian networks (see D'Emilio 1983, Faderman 1991).

When unemployment rose in the 1920s, women were "rooted out of all but low-level public service work" and "disproportionately downgraded" (Hyman 1994, p.83). In 1921 the Post Office placed a limit on women's salaries "regardless of their seniority, skills and position" (Cook and Matthews 1990 in Hyman 1994, p.83). From slightly more than 16% of Post Office employees in 1921, women dropped below 10% by 1929, doing "low-paid, repetitive work...compared to the higher-skilled postmistress positions filled earlier" (Hyman 1994, pp. 82- 83). It may be assumed that numbers of New Zealand women hoping to lead lesbian lives during this period, were instead forced to marry, as they became increasingly unable to support themselves, especially as the full impact of the depression years took effect.

During the 1930s depression men's unemployment relief schemes were under the supervision of the Unemployment Board, but women could only receive relief through the Women's Unemployment Committees, which were dominated by conservative women (Coney 1993, pp.230-231, Nolan 2000, p.176). Many thought neither women nor Maori should receive assistance, as women could find men to support them or take domestic employment, and Maori could return to the land. Though ineligible for relief themselves, employed women still had to contribute to the relief fund (Simpson 1990, p.64) despite activists arguing "the position of the unemployed girl is both serious and urgent" (Foskett 1935b, pp.10-11). Many did marry, Thelma Mareo, for example, when the show closed and she could find no other work (Chapter 17). Following the election of the first Labour Government in 1935, the Arbitration Court set the minimum wage in 1936 at three pounds three shillings weekly for men, a "family" wage intended to support a wife and three children in fair and reasonable comfort, and one pound eight

shillings weekly for women (Simpson 1990, p.86). This was just 47% of the male wage (Hyman 1994, p.83), and was probably not sufficient for a single lesbian to manage, though a couple might. This legislation sent clear signals that the heterosexual family was to be the ideal household with the man as husband and breadwinner and the woman as wife and mother.

A programme of public works helped the economy to recover, and the 1938 Social Security Act provided general support. Sutch suggests the Labour Government “brought much gain to women in jobs, social security benefits, the five-day forty-hour week and full employment” (Sutch 1974, p.124), though Nolan points out that Labour’s unemployment provisions included only single working women (Nolan 2000, pp.190-191). Labour may have unintentionally assisted women to lead lesbian lives through these provisions.

WW2 provided more opportunities for women, as land girls, in the munitions and clothing factories, and replacing men in positions in industry and the public service. Small numbers of women joined the armed forces. In practice only young single women or married women without children were “manpowered” (Montgomerie 1992, p.185), and most New Zealand women were conscripted only into traditional female employment (ibid. p.204). Nonetheless, this employment provided a wage and more opportunities for women to meet others at workplaces. Freda Stark became lovers with a married American woman when they met after being manpowered to the Hamilton munitions factory (Chapter 17).

In 1936 women were 21% of the paid labour force, rising to over 25% in 1945 and declining again to about 23% in 1951. By 1961 this increased again to 25%, in 1966 to 27% and by 1971 nearly 30% of women were in some paid work, most of them single (Horsfield 1988, p.257, Hyman 1984). Though women’s labour force participation was low in comparison with Sweden, the UK and the USA (ILO Yearbook 1970 in SROW 1973, p.10), increasing numbers of New Zealand women in paid employment indicates growing employment opportunities, enabling more women to lead lesbian lives. However, sex segregation across industries did not decline, many women’s jobs remaining in traditional, low-paid areas of employment (Horsfield and Evans 1988, p.12, Horsfield 1988, p.19, Hyman 1984). In 1966 most women workers were employed in the service industry, shops, general office work, shorthand-typing, light

manufacturing, production process and labouring. In that year figures show how educated women clustered into a few professions, as of 34,658 New Zealand teachers, 19,237 were women; of 19,075 nurses, 17,889 were women; and there were 81,663 women clerical workers as against 59,443 men (Lloyd-Pritchard 1968, p.8-9). There were few other possibilities, for example before the passage of the 1972 Apprenticeship Amendment Act most females were restricted from training opportunities (SROW 1973, p.104), and while in 1971 there were 26,000 apprenticeships in New Zealand, there were only 580 for girls, almost all of which were in hairdressing (Bullock 1973, p.18).

By 1973 the Minister of Labour was able to claim that labour shortages and changing attitudes to the employment of women over the preceding twenty years had improved women's work opportunities (Foreword in SROW 1973). In the decade 1956-1966 some women had moved into traditionally male fields of work, for example, electronic, electrical work, draughting and light industrial (SROW 1973, p.21), though they did not receive equal pay. The 1960 Government Service Equal Pay Act applied to public service workers only,^{xiv} and by the late 1960s women factory workers still earned only half the male wage (Hyman 1994, pp.83-84); most of these women would have found it difficult to live independently of their families except in a rooming house or boarding situation.

In 1967 the first National Advisory Council on Women and Employment (NACEW) was set up to enable women to contribute "to the national economy consistent with their individual freedom, and their responsibility as wives and mothers" (Hansen 1987, p.5). This aim did not recognize single women, or women leading lesbian lives, of whom most needed to work. In 1967 SROW found that 77% of never-married women and 74% of divorced women worked full-time, Wellington having the highest proportion of never-married women workers, which they attributed to the greater availability of "white collar" work in the capital (SROW 1972, pp.52-53). The availability of work opportunities in government service or company head offices undoubtedly attracted lesbians to Wellington. SROW concluded, however, that in Auckland, with rapid population growth and industrial development in the period 1966-1971, women workers were most likely to be paid "above-award wages" (SROW 1973, p.137). This seems to have attracted lesbians, as by the end of the period there were sufficient numbers of lesbians living in Auckland to establish a lesbian club (see Chapter 8).

A 1971 SROW survey of 1055 employers in the six main centres concluded that sex allocation of jobs remained related to societal sex roles, and that only employers in the public service sector paid equal pay for equal work, despite nearly two-thirds of the employers having difficulty getting sufficient staff, many reporting they had to take on staff of “lower quality” than desired (SROW 1973, pp.2-3). Probably “lower quality” for some employers meant that they were forced to hire women for traditionally male jobs, and lesbians must have benefited from these labour shortages. However, SROW concluded that employers preferred “young married women as they are more stable than young single women”, and that they wanted women “old enough to be sensible, young enough to be decorative” (ibid. pp.96-97). These attitudes affected lesbian employment opportunities, with the “decorative” requirement necessitating stereotypically feminine dress and behavioural codes (see Chapter 8, also Chapter 9 for an example of armed services’ attitudes even to women’s off-duty dress).

Few pre-1970 employers would have hired or retained known lesbian employees, despite the post-WW2 labour shortage. Though there is no pre-1970 New Zealand research on this question, research in the US from the late 1970s indicates that few lesbians could safely disclose their sexuality to employers or co-workers; one survey found that 88% of lesbians they interviewed concealed their lesbianism at work (Hall 1986, p.61). A survey of US employers in the 1980s found that “18 percent would fire, 27 percent would not hire, and 26 percent would not promote homosexuals”, suggesting that lesbians would avoid occupations where it was “difficult to pass as heterosexual”, limiting their employment choices (Badgett and King 1997, p.75). Though this overseas research relates to the post-1970s, narrators’ stories and other reports confirm that most pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians needed to exercise great discretion at work^{xv}. For example, Betty Armstrong (Chapter 18) experienced difficulties when co-workers suspected she was lesbian, and others were actually asked to resign (see Chapters 8, 21 and 22).

For some women seeking economic independence, prostitution and crime may have become their only options. From the nineteenth-century New Zealand provided opportunities for prostitution, Macdonald noting that an association was made between female immigration schemes and prostitution, leading to the passage of the 1869 Contagious Diseases Act (Macdonald 1990, p.173, see Chapter 4). Campaigner Maria Rye claimed the immigration barracks were “occupied by a body of women known only to night and evil deeds” (Rye

1863 in Macdonald 1990, p.175). By the 1870s, there was “a ready trade for prostitutes” with brothels throughout the country (Coney 1993, pp.122-123), which continued to flourish, especially during WW2 with the influx of American servicemen (see below; Coney 1993, p.316). Jordan found some prostitutes were lesbian (Jordan 1987, p.187), and narrators in this study knew lesbians working as prostitutes during the pre-1970 period (Chapters 21, 22, 23; also Chapter 9). It is likely that girls detained for moral offences (see Chapter 4) were subsequently forced into prostitution, as a result of the effect of criminal convictions on their employment choices.

Social class

The impact of class on all pre-1970 women’s choices was significant, and the main reason why some women were forced into prostitution. Class stratification within New Zealand society was “well-established” by the 1890s (Olssen 1992, p.272), with education as the “key to social mobility” (ibid. p. 276). New Zealand has been mythologised by some as a classless society, with the “ruling idea” after WW2 that “everybody acts the same, receives the same amount of the world’s goods...moves in the same direction” (Pearson 1952 in Dunstall 1981, p.399). However, a commitment to class equality and social mobility is not equivalent to an absence of class. For women, class affected access to education, employment, and opportunities for independence. The socio-economic position of Maori women due to the processes of colonisation meant that they became over-represented in the lower classes, affecting their access to opportunities through the dual mechanisms of racism and classism.

The Pakeha daughters of the rich colonial city capitalists often “stood on much the same footing as sons... when it came to sharing of wealth” and were treated as “full heirs” (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.122). For women leading lesbian lives, upper-class status and wealth might operate as a protection, though insecurity about their class position could motivate upper-class families to abandon their daughters for fear of social disgrace. Eldred-Grigg suggests that style and outward appearances were very important for the rich of New Zealand. Families like the Beauchamps, who descended from “common tradesmen”, blurred their past (ibid.p.51), and Katherine Mansfield herself thought her father “commonplace and commercial” (ibid. p.122). In turn, when he discovered his daughter’s lesbianism, Sir Harold Beauchamp paid her an allowance to live abroad, and Lady Beauchamp removed Katherine from her will (see Chapter 12). Though wealthy

and successful, they must have seen their class position as contingent on outward respectability.

Social class protected those who lived discreet lesbian lives, like Ursula Bethell and Effie Pollen, or Dorothy Richmond. Working-class women were vulnerable to the demands and expectations of employers, and a lack of education and marketable skills meant some could not earn a living wage. Eugenia Falleni from a poor immigrant working-class background in Wellington, and Mr X in Auckland, cross-dressed as men to earn male wages (see Chapter 9).

Some upper-class women had access to information about lesbianism and overseas lesbian communities. Eldred-Grigg comments that for upper-class New Zealanders, Europe was the place “for pleasure, for shopping, for the cultivation of contacts and manners” as the “the rich steamed constantly back and forth” (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.147). The Richmond and Bethell women (Chapters 9, 10, 11) travelled to Europe for education and pleasure. Australia was more accessible for working-class women^{xvi}, with Bert Rotciv and Amy Bock moving between the two countries (Chapter 9), and Hank coming to New Zealand while Sylvia went (briefly) to Sydney (Chapter 16). Some working-class lesbians from England and Europe came to New Zealand as assisted immigrants, seeking new lives and employment opportunities.

Social class affected how or whether women could live as lesbians, though it is not necessarily the case that upper-class women were more able to lead lesbian lives, as they may have been more controlled by their families. However, as Chaney (1994) points out, class affects aspirations, and is an important element in the choices women in this study were able to make.

Marriage

For most pre-1970 women, the institution of marriage was difficult to avoid. Many formerly married lesbians have recounted their stories^{xvii}, most leaving marriages during the 1970s, after the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in 1973, and after the Women’s Movement and lesbian-feminism provided a context and support.

Much early feminist activism focused on improving the more oppressive features of marriage: The Married Women's Property Acts of 1860 and 1870 provided protection

for deserted wives (foreshadowing the 1898 Divorce Act) and the Act of 1884 extended these provisions to all married women, enabling them to acquire, hold and dispose of property and earnings (Coney 1993, p.188). It was difficult for women to leave marriages. The divorce laws were enacted in 1867, enabling wives to divorce husbands for adultery accompanied by cruelty or desertion without “cause”, though husbands could divorce for adultery alone. The 1898 Divorce Act enabled divorce for either husband or wife for adultery alone, as well as for habitual drunkenness, and husbands could apply on the grounds of “habitual neglect of domestic duties”, but not until the 1963 Matrimonial Proceedings Act could wives apply for divorce for “failure to provide means of support” (Sutch 1973, p.86)^{xviii}.

During the nineteenth century New Zealand marriages were mainly economic arrangements and “virtually nobody” would have considered “sexual compatibility or personal fulfillment as reasons for marriage, nor their absence a reason for divorce” (Olssen and Levesque 1977, p.13). Marriage for “the gentry” was a system “to secure estates, to protect property and to close ranks against outsiders”, and “Tomboyish young ladies were also numerous among those who later married” (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.99), suggesting that some of these could have been women forced to abandon lesbian lives.

Earlier feminists understood the relationship between economic dependence and the ability to remain single. Mary Taylor (Chapter 9) argued the “first duty” of every woman was to earn her own living, and Jessie Mackay suggested

marriage will be somewhat hindered by economic equality...The old stigma on an unmarried woman has passed away...It cannot be too often reiterated that at this stage of our development marriage is not the ordained destiny of every man, and certainly not of every woman. The minority whose duty and happiness lie elsewhere have a perfect right to live and thrive in their own way. (Mackay 1902 in Lovell-Smith 1992, p.142).

However, by the 1920s the “companionate marriage”, based on friendship and sexual satisfaction rather than economic necessity, had appeared. Lindsey considered psychological companionship and sexual intimacy as particularly important to marriage (Lindsey 1927, refer Chapter 5). Olssen suggests that in late nineteenth-century New Zealand “the conjugal family constituted a new ideal” (Olssen 1992, p.258), and “companionship had largely replaced reproduction as the main goal of marriage” (ibid.p.280). Simmons suggests lesbianism became a symbol of opposition within this “cultural context of increased expectation...of sexual activity” in the new type of marriage, and that it became difficult for women to remain single, or to maintain

emotional and sexual distance within marriage (Simmons 1979, p.58). Phillips suggests that by 1920 the “sentimental domestic family” was well established, and though over half the men in the nineteenth century never married, this figure dropped to 20% by 1956 (Phillips 1996, p.225, p.265). By 1971, 65% of all New Zealand women were married; this figure excludes previously married and not yet married women (Department of Statistics 1993, p.39). The strong pressure to marry is reflected in the experiences of Katie Hogg (Chapter 20) and Morrigan Severs (Chapter 24).

Marriage inevitably meant motherhood, and women who married in 1880 averaged 6.5 live births, falling to 2.4 births in 1923 (Olssen 1992, p.263). However, by 1956 there were 124.1 births per 1000 women of childbearing age, the highest pre-1970 New Zealand figure (Phillips 1996, p.265). The pressure to have children, and the continuing surveillance of women’s compliance meant that even in “white”, or marriages of convenience, couples would have had to account for childlessness, with complex pressures either pitying them, or suggesting they were selfish. Having children affected the ability of women to leave marriages, earn money and achieve economic independence. Katie had to foster her three children when her marriage ended (Chapter 20), and Tighe Instone fostered her son while she worked to support them both (Chapter 23).

Heterosexual marriage and motherhood were promoted through post-WW2 social policies and domestic ideologies intended as strategies to restore “normality” after the disruptions of war. One woman explained “I got married not so much because I wanted to but because it was the thing to do...I wanted to do all the things that were right and acceptable and create my own family” (cited in Smith 1991, p.92). Phillips suggests veterans returning from the war wanted to “settle down in comfortable domestic life” (Phillips 1996, p.265), but “antagonism between the sexes” was a post-WW2 characteristic of New Zealand society, and married women were often forced to play “the deferential little-woman role” in unhappy marriages (Hall 1958, pp.47-49).

There were reforms. The 1933 Marriage Amendment Act raised the marriage age to sixteen years (Coney 1993, p.127), the 1955 Family Protection Act empowered courts to override wills where husbands excluded widows or children, and the 1963 Matrimonial Property Act provided for a division of family assets taking women’s contributions into account. This enabled women to leave marriages with some financial

resources, though not until the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1973 could women with children leave with the surety of a regular income, despite the maintenance provisions of the 1968 Domestic Proceedings Act.

Single women

A significant difference between pre-1970 Britain and New Zealand is that unlike Britain, New Zealand did not have a population of “surplus women”. During the 1870s the pakeha population was young and males outnumbered females, creating a distinctive male culture in what seemed “a man’s country”^{xix} (Olssen 1992, p.257, Phillips 1996). After WW1 the large number of casualties suffered by the New Zealand forces and the declining immigration of single men reduced the “surplus men”, to 1000 males to 953 women (Phillips 1996, p.225). Most of these men lived in rural areas and though a small “surplus” of unmarried women over the age of 45 years lived in the cities (were they women leading lesbian lives?), by 1936 the overall ratio was 97 women to 100 men (Olssen 1992, pp.257-258). Despite the availability of so many potential husbands, Eldred-Grigg suggests some daughters of landowners chose “the life of a classic ‘old maid’” devoting themselves to their families, with their status “low but secure”. Unmarried daughters were, of course, expected to remain at home, so perhaps these rural “old maids” from the upper classes did not themselves choose this lifestyle. Eldred-Grigg interestingly asserts, however, that some of these women led “the racier life of a...mannish lady [who] smoked cigars, swore at stockmen, slugged whisky from her silver hip flask” (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.99).

In nineteenth-century Britain the position differed, as with so many “surplus” women, almost one in three adult women were single and one in four never married (Auchmuty 1975 in Jeffreys 1985, p.86). Emigration to other countries, including New Zealand, was suggested as a solution (Gregg 1862 in Jeffreys 1985, p.87). Private emigration societies like Maria Rye's Female Middle Class Emigration Society encouraged women to move to New Zealand, (Macdonald 1990, p.7), and the prospect of marriage was “presented as an attraction” for single immigrant women (Levesque 1986, p.1). Though British feminists campaigned to address the problem through improvements in women’s access to education and employment (Jeffreys 1985, p.87), nonetheless many single British women emigrated to New Zealand, with about 12,000 single women landing as assisted immigrants during the 1850s-1860s, and a larger number during the 1870s-

1880s with single women comprising around one-fifth of the 100,000 assisted immigrants (Macdonald 1990, p.4).

In her study of some of these single women immigrants Macdonald found that over half (2,293) of the 4028 female Canterbury migrants married at least once in New Zealand. She was unable to locate marriages for the remaining 1,707 women, suggesting reasons for this as some dying, others leaving again, and some marriages not having been found (ibid. p.135), but does not consider whether some women may have chosen not to marry because they wanted to lead lesbian lives. She noted that wages for all workers were higher in New Zealand than in Britain, encouraging women to emigrate, though men were paid twice as much as women (ibid. pp.114 -117), and points out that while “full economic independence was beyond the reach of most young women, marriage was certainly not the only route toward...economic security” because of the availability of work for single young adults who were “independent and mobile”, concluding that “it cannot be said that women came to New Zealand in order to marry” (ibid. p.139). Though Macdonald wonders how these single women who made the choice to emigrate and face unknown dangers “differed from their sisters who stayed behind” (ibid. p.190), she does not extend this to wonder whether women attracted to other women may have particularly seen emigration as an opportunity to escape family expectations and surveillance, and that women leading lesbian lives may have been well-represented in the group she studied.

Government assisted immigration schemes continued into the twentieth-century. For example, the government assisted 5424 female domestic servants to New Zealand between 1909-1914, responding to the demand for servants (Nolan 2000, p.335, n.16) and between 1921 and 1931 a further 4503 free passages were taken up (ibid. p.168). In the post-WW2 period, assisted immigration schemes specifically promoted New Zealand’s excess bachelors as an attraction for prospective female immigrants.

Despite the promotion of marriage as an ideology and preferred way of life, it is interesting to note that it was actively discouraged in the main female professions. Women teachers were expected to devote themselves to their pupils and could live together, ostensibly to share expenses, without appearing to attract negative comment. Several narrators in this study were aware of love relationships between their teachers at their girls’ schools, but did not see these as unusual at the time (see Chapter 25).

Women who married during teacher training lost their studentships, and during the 1930s depression, married women who were not the sole earner were dismissed in many districts (Nolan 2000, p.169), with the Women Teachers' Association, of which Elsie Andrews (Chapter 11) was President, campaigning against this marriage bar (ibid. pp, 182-183). Nurses who married were not permitted to complete hospital training, nor did most public hospitals employ married nurses before the 1960s.^{xx} Restrictions on marriage made teaching and nursing ideal occupations for lesbians (Chapters 17 and 23).

However, single women became a rarity in New Zealand. For the pre-WW1 period never more than 6% of women over 45 remained single (Levesque 1986, p.1), suggesting that eventually most women found single life too difficult. By the 1950s, Hall (Phoebe Meikle) could claim

A woman who does not marry is made in a hundred ways to feel a failure...marriage is the most generally accepted criterion of feminine success...it [is] an unshakeable New Zealand assumption that a woman who has not married is a woman who has not been asked in marriage (Hall 1958, pp.47-57).

Meikle herself did manage to avoid marriage, as did the majority of women in the present study. Staying single was only one aspect of being able to lead a lesbian life (and many women lead successful lesbian lives within their marriages). Obtaining independent housing was crucial, for an unmarried daughter living at home and caring for her family would be likely to encounter many restrictions preventing the development of a lesbian relationship.

Housing

How did women who wanted to lead lesbian lives obtain independent housing? It was thought improper for New Zealand women to leave home and live in the same town as their family unless they married, until as late as the 1960s. Women could, however, acceptably move to another area to seek work or training, as did several women in this study, for example Freda Stark taking work in a Hamilton show (Chapter 17), Bea Arthur moving from Napier for nursing training in Wellington (Chapter 18), or Tighe Instone moving from Wellington for nursing training in Palmerston North (Chapter 23). The single women described by Macdonald (1990) and later single immigrants would have been women alone, without family ties in New Zealand, and more able to move freely and live independently. Though the processes of urbanisation permitted rural women to leave home, there was anxiety about this trend. In 1886 the *New Zealand*

Farmer “warned young women against leaving the farm for the city” (cited in McClure 2000, p.112), indicating that significant numbers were doing this. A 1922 YWCA survey found that a quarter of 1,325 young working women in the city were living independently (Nolan 2000, n.93).

However, for women able to leave the family home, opportunities to establish independent households in flats or houses without men were mainly limited to wealthy or professional women. Most nurses lived in nurses’ homes; for example Bea Arthur (Chapter 18) was first allowed to “live out” after she qualified as a nurse in 1942. Her partner Betty Armstrong lived at home with her mother, and Bea was invited to live with them; only detailed research beyond the scope of the present study would show how many households had unrelated females living with them, and probably this would be blurred through a presumption that these women were live-in servants or “companions”, as has been claimed for the presence of Effie Pollen in the Bethell household (see Chapter 11). Though wealthy women may have been able to afford to rent or buy flats and houses, many were probably more constrained than were working-class women to acceptably leave their family homes unless for marriage, making Katherine Mansfield’s solo departure for London in 1908 exceptional.

Nineteenth and early-twentieth-century working-class women able to leave home, and who wanted to live in lesbian relationships, though unable to afford to purchase or rent housing, could have found accommodation in domestic service or other live-in jobs, for example fruit-picking or as cooks in hotels, shearing gangs or on ships.^{xxi} Women working in factory jobs, tailoring or other occupations could have shared rooms in boarding or rooming houses or in hostels, as could women employed in travelling shows, like Freda Stark and Thelma Trott (Chapter 17). These circumstances would have required great discretion, as there is unlikely to have been much privacy in such shared accommodation. Some working-class lesbians disguised themselves as heterosexual couples, with one partner earning male wages, and were able to afford to rent houses or flats, for example Eugenia Falleni (Chapter 9) or Mr X (Chapter 6).

Dwellings allowing for family privacy developed in the twentieth century. Eldred-Grigg suggests better housing “altered marital possibilities”, as much as improved sexual knowledge (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.144). Bad and overcrowded housing was identified by Prime Minister Seddon in 1897 as “the root of the sore” of sexual problems, and the

eugenics movement argued for spacious new homes as a “fitting environment for sexual intercourse among the ‘racially fit’ ” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.151). The 1905 Workers’ Dwelling Act and 1906 Advances to Workers Act assisted the state to build 648 houses for working-class families and provide cheap loans for 9675 more by 1919 (Olssen 1981, p.276). This may have meant “more sexual privacy for husband and wife” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.151), but Olssen points out the poor could not afford these houses, with fast-rising rents during WW1 worsening the problem. The influenza epidemic focused attention on over-crowding, and more state houses were built following the 1919 Housing Act, with State Advances providing loans to workers and returned servicemen, and some local bodies and government departments building houses, but the situation did not improve before the 1935 Labour Government built 3,445 houses in three years (Olssen 1981, pp. 276-277), with 29,000 state houses completed by 1949 (Dunstall 1981, p.404). However, of these only 100 had been allocated to Maori, though eventually Maori Affairs and State Advances provided a housing scheme for Maori, that peaked in 1962 (Coney 1993, p.85). State Advances mortgages financed 16% of all private dwellings, so that with the state house scheme for renting and the state advances scheme for buying, housing assistance was provided by the state for two in every five houses (Chapman 1981, p.342).

However, the state housing system catered mainly for families, though single women were provided for in blocks of flats from the 1930s, the largest being the Dixon Street flats in Wellington (completed in 1943) and the Symonds Street flats in Auckland (Dalley 2000, p.166). Flats were also created through the subdivision of large urban houses no longer suitable for the smaller twentieth-century family (Burnett 1986, pp. 66-67). For example, “Mr X” and her “wife” rented a flat during the 1940s in a subdivided house in Parnell, then a cheap inner-city area (Chapter 9). Accommodating families through the state system must have reduced pressure on the private rental market, releasing city accommodation for single people as families moved to the more desirable and spacious suburbs. Pre-1970 suburbanisation was especially noteworthy in Auckland (Dunstall 1981, p.402).

The post-war marriage boom created new demands for housing and a waiting list for state houses by 1950 (Ferguson 1994, p.177). The population increased from 1.7 million to 2.9 million between 1945 and 1972, creating pressure on housing, and shortages in Auckland in particular during the 1950s (Labrum 2000, p.190).

The 1949 National government allowed sales to state tenants, more house construction and 90% loans for purchase (Chapman 1981, p.353), and the proportion of owner-occupied houses rose in the 1950s to 69%, mostly in suburban areas (Dunstall 1981, p.405). This was in addition to the high number of state tenants, and despite the waiting lists for state housing, access to decent, affordable housing for more people appears to have been better during the 1930s to 1950s than at any time previously (see National Housing Commission 1988).

Good housing involves many factors other than the house itself, as surveys by SROW (1976, 1983) indicate. “Neighbourhood friendliness” was regarded as important by many women (SROW 1983, p.16), but it seems likely that pre-1970 lesbians living in suburban areas would have needed to exercise great discretion. Elsie Andrews and Muriel Kirton lived in the New Plymouth suburb of Fitzroy, and Ursula Bethell and Effie Pollen in the Christchurch suburb of Cashmere, apparently without difficulty from neighbours, though Bethell and Pollen did not encourage friendly neighbourhood visits without invitation (see Chapter 11). Tighe Instone reported difficulty with neighbours (see Chapter 23), and most of the younger lesbians I knew during the early 1960s chose to rent flats in the anonymity of inner-city living rather than risk the scrutiny of suburban life, where they feared that nosy neighbours might discover their lesbianism and report them to the landlord, or make other trouble for them. Lesbians able to purchase housing often chose cheaper inner-city areas too, rather than the cheap suburbs. In this study, for example, Katie Hogg and Julie Evans (Chapter 20) as well as Bubs Hetet (Chapter 22), purchased houses during the 1960s in Ponsonby, at that time a cheaper part of the Auckland inner-city area.

For most pre-1970 women not wanting to rent, purchasing a home of course required access to finance. Additionally, as Labrum points out, post-WW2 housing needs extended beyond the basics, creating a need for hire purchase to buy consumer goods including refrigerators and washing machines (Labrum 2000, pp.200-201). What access did pre-1970 New Zealand women have to mortgages and credit?

Access to credit

Access to any credit was difficult for pre-1970 women, despite women’s increasing economic independence. Women campaigned for loans to single women, with Terry Peckston achieving their inclusion in National Party policy if not actually in practice.^{xxii}

Writing on access to credit for women during the 1970s, Ann Hercus^{xxiii} described “a single career woman on a good salary” who still needed to provide a male guarantor in order to obtain store credit in Wellington. SROW surveyed 137 banks, insurance companies and other institutions, concluding they all penalised single women and it was “rare for any to be granted a mortgage”, with some insurance companies having specific policy provisions excluding single women, while other companies wanted male guarantors for both single and married women (Hercus in SROW 1981, p.15).

Broadlands Financing Company insisted that women were refused money for mortgages or other credit only “on completely ‘reasonable’ grounds and rarely because of sex discrimination”, but Hercus noted many women could not provide “established” credit histories to satisfy these institutions. She attributed discrimination in obtaining credit to “outmoded and stereotyped attitudes [and] confused thinking and misconceptions about a woman’s legal liability for her debts” (ibid. p.16). A later SROW report concluded that firms often took a “paternalistic attitude” to women and finance, assuming they “know better what women can and cannot do as far as money is concerned” (SROW 1982, p.27).

This indicates that most pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives would have encountered discrimination when seeking mortgages, or credit to purchase furniture, household appliances and motor vehicles. The women in this study may have been exceptional as they were able to obtain mortgages and purchase housing, and credit for other items. For example, Elsie Andrews and Muriel Kirton obtained a private mortgage through a lawyer (Chapter 13) as did Tighe Instone (Chapter 23), while Bubs Hetet, who worked for the Post Office Savings Bank, was able to obtain a mortgage from her employer (Chapter 22). In most instances the women would have had to provide a substantial deposit, as SROW found that even by 1981, the Housing Corporation, for example, required single people to have a higher deposit than married people (SROW 1982, p.11).

Transport and communications

Transport and communications were crucially important for pre-1970 lesbians, as they enabled women to travel away from their family homes, seeking employment, moving to another part of the country, or simply visiting others within the same area. Transport improved significantly over the period of this study. From an isolated society where sail and steamships took months to reach Europe, by 1970 air travel had replaced the “Home

boats”, and Europe could be reached within days. The bicycle was important as it allowed “wheelwomen” to broaden their horizons, independently riding miles away from their homes within moments (Coney 1993, pp. 116-117, Simpson 1993, pp.418-419). From 1905 the electric tram enabled suburbanisation, and from the 1920s trams and cars became the main means of city transportation (Olssen 1981, p.253). The main trunk railway was completed by 1912 and the 1925 Coates Government implemented a public works programme, building roads and more railway lines, that eventually replaced coastal shipping as the main form of transport, with air travel developing after WW2 (Brooking 1981, pp.240-241). By the 1920s, Elsie Andrews could travel throughout New Zealand by train, bus and ferry (Chapter 13), and airmail and telecommunications enabled rapid exchanges of information both overseas and within New Zealand.

After WW2, access to car ownership became significant. Faderman suggests the automobile in the US contributed to the heterosexual revolution from the 1920s, as it took couples “miles away” from their families, enabling “dating” and “petting” (Faderman 1986, p.33). In New Zealand the motorcar also “boomed” in the 1920s, with over 200,000 private cars by 1930 (Belich 2001, p.248); this suggests a similar development of dating and petting here. Wotherspoon notes that cars were an important factor in the development of Australian homosexual culture, as they were “mobile bedrooms”, allowing for sexual experimentation, as well as enabling suburban homosexuals to access city networks and venues (Wotherspoon 1991, pp.147-149). One pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian explained, “a car was something to get away in, and somewhere to make love once you’d got away”.^{xxiv} Many narrators had access to their own or friends’ motor vehicles. Though Bubs Hetet and her friends (Chapter 22) used horses for transport during the post-WW2 period, as in many other rural Maori communities, by the late 1950s they were riding motorcycles. Narrators reported travelling in motor vehicles within cities or between cities to attend kamp parties or to meet other lesbians. With few institutions through which they might meet others, access to transport was essential for New Zealand women to enable them to make contact with other women, both in order to both form lesbian relationships and lesbian friendship networks.

Summary

This overview of relevant social circumstances affecting pre-1970 women in New Zealand society indicates that though conditions for Maori women worsened after colonisation, there were gradual improvements in women's access to a legal identity, property, education, paid employment, housing, credit and improved transport and communications. The variables of class and race affected the degree of access to these improvements.

With no "surplus women" in New Zealand, it was difficult for women to acceptably avoid marriage, however from the nineteenth century some women did manage to remain single. Changing attitudes to sexuality as pleasure rather than reproduction may have encouraged women to act on their lesbian desires, despite the increased heterosexualisation of society, and the pressure for women to become sexually active with men.

Most women were confined to a few, poorly paid, traditionally female occupations, but labour shortages during the 1960s provided new opportunities, and the introduction of equal pay gave more women access to a living wage. Urbanisation improved women's opportunities for employment, independent living and meeting others, and the increasing suburbanisation of heterosexual family life may have freed up urban rental accommodation for single women or lesbian couples. Though women's access to mortgages or credit was difficult, some women were able to purchase homes. Improved communications assisted the exchange of information and lesbian connections, enabling pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives to communicate throughout New Zealand and overseas, reducing isolation, and facilitating the development of the lesbian networks, friendship circles and early communities examined in the next chapter.

ⁱ Whanau, tr. the extended family; hapu, tr. a sub-tribe made up of several whanau; iwi, tr. a tribe, comprising several hapu.

ⁱⁱ Maori women in the Hawke's Bay area refused to marry Pakeha men for this reason (Grimshaw 1972, p.137).

ⁱⁱⁱ Traditional Maori arranged marriage.

^{iv} Tr. female and male elders.

^v See Blackwood (1984), Medicine (1983) for examples of these arrangements for women including "warrior women", and Whitehead (1981), Roscoe (1994), Besnier (1994) on arrangements for men, including berdache, mahu, fa'a'afine, fakalaiti.

^{vi} Tr. strong women.

^{vii} Personal communication from a Maori lesbian from Waikato to AJL, based on family knowledge.

^{viii} Not until the 1971 Race Relations Act and the 1977 Human Rights Commission Act was this kind of discrimination outlawed.

^{ix} See Faderman (1991) for a discussion of these developments in the US.

^x The OGHs was founded by Miss L.W.Dalrymple who was influenced by the ideas of Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale who were trained at Queens College, London (Sutch 1974, p.76) which the Beauchamp girls and Ida Baker later attended.

^{xi} Kate Edger was the first woman in the then British Empire to be awarded a university degree; she received her Bachelor of Arts in 1877, at Auckland College.

^{xii} Of those who gained qualifications, 8% attained School Certificate; 7% University Entrance; and 4% either the Chamber of Commerce or the Public Service Entrance Examinations taken in shorthand typing (these were both abolished in 1970) (SROW 1972 pp.33-36).

^{xiii} Most of the rest worked as cooks, seamstresses, nurses, housekeepers and laundresses, or in woollen mills. Others worked in clothing factories, shoe factories, printing and bookbinding, or from home as shirt makers, dressmakers, tailoresses and milliners. A Royal Commission investigated sweated labour and made recommendations that produced legislative reform in the 1890s to protect women and children in mines, factories, shops and offices, including the 1891 and 1894 Factories Acts and the Shop Acts (Sutch 1974, pp.71-74).

^{xiv} The 1972 Equal Pay Act extended the Public Service provisions to the private sector (Hyman 1994, pp.83-84).

^{xv} The 1985-1986 and 1991-1992 campaigns to include sexual orientation as a ground for prohibited discrimination in the Human Rights Act produced many examples of employment-related discrimination. Submissions are held at LAGANZ in the ATL.

^{xvi} New Zealand was part of Australia until 1901.

^{xvii} See, for example, Abbott and Farmer (1995).

^{xviii} Not until 1980 did the Family Proceedings Act make the sole ground for divorce for both men and women two years separation (Coney 1993, p.177), and the demand for a legal share of a husband's income was not enacted until the 1976 Matrimonial Property Act recognized women's unpaid contributions to the family (ibid. p.188).

^{xix} By the 1890s many of the "surplus males" had become the "destitute elderly", and the government introduced a means-tested old-age pension largely as a response to a significant number of never-married elderly males who had no families to care for them (Olssen 1992, pp.257-258).

^{xx} Nurses have various opinions on this, but have assured me that in most public hospitals married nurses were first employed at the 1960s, and that trainee nurses were first permitted to live outside nurses' homes at about the same time.

^{xxi} My paternal grandmother Alice Stott Laurie worked as a live-in cook in New Zealand and Australia in hotels, shearing gangs and on ships from at least the mid-1890s.

^{xxii} Obituary for Terry Peckston in *The Evening Post*, 8 September 1979.

^{xxiii} Ann Hercus, a Labour MP, became the first Minister of Women's Affairs 1984-1987, after the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established by the Fourth Labour Government.

^{xxiv} Personal communication to author, from a lesbian born in 1941.

Chapter 8

Lesbian existence

Introduction

This chapter describes the pre-1970 lesbian meeting-places and cultures that developed in New Zealand. As elsewhere, middle-class women had limited access to public spaces (Coney 1993, p.14), and most middle-class pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives met in private friendship circles (see Faderman 1991, Kennedy 1996). As was the case in England, working-class women had greater access to public space (Giles 1995), and in New Zealand the post-WW2 urbanisation of Maori as well as non-Maori lesbians and homosexual men produced more publicly visible kamp meeting-places (Carmen 1988, Te Awakotuku et al. 1993). Despite constraints on women's participation in public places, improved access to transport and communications assisted women to socialise more publicly, especially in the cities. Faderman suggests that where earlier women were "virtual prisoners in the home",

US lesbian life was able to develop in the twentieth century by the formation of a range of institutions including women's colleges, sports teams and bars (Faderman 1991, p.306). For reasons explained in this chapter, publicly visible lesbian meeting-places such as developed in the US, European countries and even in Australia, did not emerge in New Zealand until later.

Kennedy and Davis suggest that "the conceptual division between the public (social life and politics) and the private (intimacy and sex) which characterised nineteenth-century society", was realigned in the twentieth century through "women's move out of the home and the eroticising of social life in general." They see the emergence of lesbian communities as related to this, and suggest that "securing public space" was motivated by "the need to find a setting for the formation of intimate relationships" (Kennedy and Davis 1993, pp. 4-5). Eventually, middle-class lesbians joined working-class lesbians in public meeting-places, as all social life became eroticised. Lesbians needed lesbian social spaces as alternatives to the increasingly sexualized demands of general social life (see for example Jeffreys 1985).

Overseas communities

By the late nineteenth century, identifiable lesbian meeting-places had emerged in some European cities. Male homosexual meeting-places like the eighteenth century London molly houses had developed earlier (Weeks 1977, pp.36-37). Burford mentions eighteenth-century pubs and brothels for lesbians, though gives no examples (cited in Donaghue 1993, p.293, n.3). Choquette depicts working-class 1850s Paris lesbian meeting-places as “a by-product of prostitution” that began as the prostitutes’ “table d’hôte” in the Breda (later called Montparnesse) quarter (Choquette 2001, p.150). These establishments eventually became the lesbian “brasserie” of the 1890s; Louis Legrand and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec representing lesbians also attending dance-halls and male homosexual meeting-places (ibid. pp.157-159). Choquette reports that the masked Mardi Gras ball, held in the Latin Quarter, was appropriated from the 1870s by “lesbian and gay sub-cultures and turned into a public community celebration for both groups” (ibid. p.154).

The best-known of the upper-class lesbian networks of early twentieth-century Paris were initiated by British and American lesbian expatriates, the city becoming “a mecca” because the “relaxed moral atmosphere...included the right to be homosexual” (Jay 1988, p.8). Gertrude Stein, who noted that “it wasn’t so much what Paris gave you, it was what it didn’t take away” Stein in ibid.1988, p.8), ran an early salon, and Natalie Clifford Barney a mixed weekly salon from 1909 to 1972, attended by lesbians, writers and artistsⁱ (Jay 1988, pp.8-25). However, these circles were not open to any woman, for though Barney considered herself feminist, she was “elitist” and no-one simply walked “through her door”. Everyone came “via an invitation or with invited guests”, and one had “to prove that one *deserved* to be there” (ibid. p.34, original emphasis). Stein’s visitors, too, came “by invitation only” (Benstock 1987, p.168). It is unlikely that any contemporary New Zealand lesbians were part of these upper-class circles, though research on this question has not been undertaken. Several writers and artists leading lesbian lives (see Chapters 9 and 10) spent time in Paris, and would have had their own networks, but what links there may have been is not established.

Berlin was a centre for homosexual culture; several women in this study visited Germany, including members of the Richmond family who stayed with friends in Dresden for periods (see Chapters 9 and 10). There were also German visitors to New Zealand, Alla Atkinson reporting to her sister Dorothy Richmond that she had seen Blanche with her German “lady-husband”, and Frances Hodgkins referring to Hannah Ritchie’s “lady German doctor” (see Chapter 10). Their German connections may well have brought these New Zealand women into contact with the German lesbian cultures of the period. When Janet Flanner visited Berlin in 1910, “all around her, sex and sexual practices were openly discussed - or exhibited - in ways unimaginable at home”, the sexual theories of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis were being “widely debated” and lesbianism portrayed as a “physiological disorder” rather than a “moral one” (Wineapple 1989, p.23).

The 1920s were “a short winter’s day before the long night of fascism” (Bell 1976, p.59). In abeyance during WW1, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee was revived and the Institute for Sexual Science opened (see Chapter 4). For English homosexual Christopher Isherwood, “Berlin meant Boys” (Isherwood 1977, p.10), and Vita Sackville-West reported attending the 1929 Berlin “sodomites ball”, where men “dressed as women” (Sackville-West 1984, p.324). There were also numerous clubs and meeting places for women, notably the Ladies Club Violetta, and The Café Domino for more elegant and middle-class women, and the Taverena, with a rougher, working-class atmosphere. There were several lesbian magazines, including the well-known *Die Freunden*ⁱⁱ (Kokula 1983, 1984). When the Nazis came to power in 1933 homosexual organisations, clubs and magazines were closed immediately, though some private friendship circles continued to meet throughout the Nazi period, for example, one group of lesbian friends met at a Berlin hairdressing salon (see Fischer 1995). Generally, most homosexual and lesbian institutions throughout occupied Europe were extinguished, as Nazi philosophy sought to eliminate what it regarded as anti-social sexual deviance (see Lauritsen and Thorstad 1974, Rector 1981, Kokula 1983, 1984, Schoppmann 1991, Friele 1995).

Britain was the main influence for New Zealand lesbian and homosexual cultures. From the nineteenth century there had been publicly visible homosexual cultures in London. Alfred Taylor, for example, at Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial, described wearing women’s

clothing during “carnivals at Olympia, Covent Garden and Queen's Gate Hall” (Hyde 1948, p.282). Despite the greater discretion generally of British homosexuals following the trials (Hyde 1972, p.172), public meeting-places continued for men (see David 1997). Private pre- and post-WW1 circles included Bloomsbury, where Virginia Woolf was part of a group of “sapphists” and “buggers”, and Garsington, where Lady Ottoline Morrell’s gatherings were attended by writers and artists, a significant number of whom were homosexuals and lesbians (see for example Alpers 1980, pp.208-210).

London night-clubs attracting a lesbian clientele included The Cave of the Golden Calf, where Mansfield performed (Chapter 13), and during the 1920s, The Cave of Harmony, The Orange Tree Club and The Hambone (Dickson 1975, p.103). There were membership organisations which some lesbians joined, for example, Hall and Troubridge were members of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, (affiliated to the World League for Sexual Reform), and there must have been lesbian members of the ladies clubs that developed as the counterpart of British gentlemen’s clubs during the 1890s.

In the US, visible lesbian cultures emerged in New York, Chicago and other larger cities at least from the 1920s. Faderman suggests that American working-class women began frequenting saloons that offered food as well as drink, which middle-class women could not do, and that working-class lesbians became prominent in the establishment of the lesbian bars, with a black lesbian culture in Harlem, and a more middle-class white lesbian and bisexual culture developing in Greenwich Village (Faderman 1991, pp.79-85). There were New Zealand connections. For example Jane Mander (1877-1949) lived in Greenwich Village from 1912 near Willa Cather, affirming, “we had something of a little set of our own in Greenwich Village”. She moved on to London in 1920, describing “getting to know Radclyffe Hall and the Sackville Wests” before returning to New Zealand in 1934 (McLeod 2001, p.51).

In the post-WW2 period, mixed homophile organisations re-emerged or were newly established in formerly Nazi-occupied Europe, including the COC (Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum)ⁱⁱⁱ in the Netherlands in 1946, the Forbund af 1948 (F48) in

Denmark in 1948, Det Norske Forening av 1948 (DNF48) in Norway from 1948^{iv}, and the Riks Forening for Seksual Likberetning (RFSL) in Sweden in 1950.^v In the UK, the British Sex Education Society was established in 1947 (by Norman Haire, an Australian), the British Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1958 and the Albany Trust in 1960. The first British lesbian organisation was the Minorities Research Group (MRG), founded in 1963 and formed through the Albany Trust in London by Esme Langley (1919-1992) and Diana Chapman, producing the lesbian magazine *Arena Three* (see Hamer 1996, pp.166-190). The mixed organisations also produced magazines and though male-dominated, there were some lesbian subscribers, for example to the *Journal of Sex Education*, founded in 1948, which published in its first issue a report on Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Weeks 1977, p.152).

In the United States Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon founded the first US lesbian organization in 1952, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), in San Francisco and published the second^{vi} US lesbian magazine, *The Ladder* from 1956 (Martin and Lyon 1991). The homosexual men's organisations Mattachine Society was established in 1948, and One Inc. in 1952. Will Roscoe suggests gay pioneer Harry Hay was the first to argue that homosexuals were a "cultural minority" (Roscoe 1996, p.5). Though Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, Carpenter and Hall identified homosexuals and lesbians as special groups, Hay's idea of homosexuals as a "community of culture" may have been new. Hay, a Communist Party teacher and activist, used Josef Stalin's definition of the nation when he founded Mattachine in 1948.

A nation is a historically-evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture...subject to the law of change, has its history, its beginning and end
(Stalin 1942 in Roscoe 1996, p.41).

Stalin's definition did not rely on essentialist ideas of race to define a nation, instead asserting that what could bind members was "a history or collective memory into which individuals can project themselves and thereby derive an identity". African-Americans had been recognized by the 1928 Sixth World Congress of the Communist International as a new "national minority", based on Stalin's definition, thus Party policies and theoretical discussions during the 1930–40s enabled Hay to describe homosexual Americans "as a cultural minority amenable to political organisation". He extended the

Party's cultural minority model by arguing that homosexuals "had two of the four criteria - a language and a shared psychological makeup...sufficient to consider them a cultural minority" (Roscoe 1996, pp.40-43).

Though the idea of homosexual men and of lesbians as special groups seems to have been recognised in New Zealand by at the least the 1960s, as the establishment of the homosexual men's organisation the Dorian Society confirms (see below), there do not appear to have been any pre-1970 lesbian organisations. A branch of DOB was formed in Australia, set up as the Australian Lesbian Movement in Melbourne from January 1970 (Wotherspoon 1991, p.168), indicating significant numbers of Australian subscribers to DOB's magazine *The Ladder*.

It is difficult to discover how many New Zealanders contacted overseas lesbian organisations or subscribed to magazines. Several Dutch lesbian and homosexual immigrants informed New Zealanders of the COC and other European organisations^{vii}. As well as through the gossip networks, New Zealand lesbians could learn of MRG's existence through the 1965 report in the *New Zealand Truth* (see Chapter 6). There were New Zealand members, as well as subscribers to *Arena Three*, including Janice B. (Chapter 9) and Julie Evans (Chapter 20). MRG membership in the 1960s was highly international, including lesbians living in London who came from the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the former Rhodesia, as well as from New Zealand.^{viii}

Both lesbian and mixed pre-1970 organisations provided social events and regular meeting spaces, and carried out political activities to improve conditions, abolish laws against male homosexuality and increase understanding of lesbianism and homosexuality through visibility in the media (Friele 1975, Katz 1976, Weeks 1977, Martin and Lyon 1991). MRG newspaper advertisements announced "Homosexual women meeting at the upstairs bar at the Shakespeare's Head" (Brighton Ourstory Project, p.86), attracting among many others, Ida Baker and her companion (see Chapter 12). Not all lesbians welcomed this blatancy, one 1965 letter to *Arena Three* complaining,

too much publicity about your club's activities in the popular press is making it very difficult for two women to live together unnoticed, without being viewed with suspicion (cited in Oram and Turnbull 2001, p.257).

During the post-WW2 period lesbian bars and clubs developed in many cities, with listings for the first issue of *Gaia's Guide* in 1974^{ix} including some already in existence for decades, for example, the Gateways Club in London^x, mentioned as a favourite meeting-place by Freda Stark (Chapter 17). Narrators interviewed by Kennedy and Davis (1993) described the importance of the Buffalo lesbian bars, and Joan Nestle explained

We needed the lesbian air of the Sea Colony [a working class Lesbian bar in New York City] to breathe the life we could not anywhere else, those of us who wanted to see women dance, make love, wear shirts and pants. Here, and in other bars like this one, we found each other (Nestle 1987, p.37).

The close relationship between New Zealand and Australia from the nineteenth century (when New Zealand was governed from New South Wales) meant some women leading lesbian lives always travelled between the two countries (see Chapter 9). Kay Daniels found the Cascades factory for female convicts was said to have “swarmed with lesbians”, including the “man-woman” (Daniels 1998, p.165), and Joy Damousi reports that at the Hobart factory the “man-woman” and “pseudo-male” were isolated in separate cells because of their “depraved habits...nocturnal orgies and...licentious and unnatural practices” (Damousi 1995, p.71). Some of these lesbian convicts may well have moved on to New Zealand following their release.

For both nineteenth and pre-1970 twentieth-century New Zealand lesbians able to travel, Sydney was their closest destination. Wotherspoon calls Sydney the largest “white” city in the British Empire outside London, as it was among the fifteen largest cities in the world, with a population of 1.2 million by 1931 (Wotherspoon 1991, p.35). From the 1950s, ten o'clock closing in New South Wales enabled publicly visible lesbian or “kamp/camp” meeting-places to develop in Sydney such as the back bar of the Rex Hotel, in Kings Cross, despite harassment from the police (ibid. p.155). Though there was six o'clock closing in Victoria, lesbians in Melbourne met at various locations with Val's Café 31 in St Kilda popular from 1952 (Ford et al. 1996, p.9). Middle-class lesbians joined theatre people at the Prompt Corner Coffee Lounge, in Collins Street, owned by the actor Bunny Brooke.^{xi} There were private networks in Adelaide, including a working-class kamp party scene organised by Jan Hillier during the 1950s and 1960s, who charged party-goers an entrance fee to party at her premises and bring their own refreshments.

Hillier went on to organise kamp dances and commercial venues in Melbourne from 1964.^{xii}

Together with lesbian immigrants and visitors to New Zealand, New Zealand lesbians visiting overseas were able to bring back information about lesbian venues, and ways of organising, which in time influenced the development of pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian meeting-places and cultures, eventually including the establishment of the KG Club in Auckland.^{xiii}

New Zealand lesbian culture

Without lesbian organisations, clubs or bars, how did pre-1970 New Zealand women meet other women? Meeting places for lesbians depended on what venues were available in society generally for women at this time. Churches were a major provider of social activities, organising socials, bible class camps, picnics, concerts, sports, and musical and other interest groups. The Society for Research on Women (SROW) found 64% of their respondents attended churches and participated in church activities (SROW 1972, p.69). Some narrators reported meeting partners and friends through church activities (Chapters 21, 23). There were public dances and socials, often in church halls and debutante balls and other events for the wealthy. There were women's cultural, sports and hobby groups and organisations, some also holding dances and organizing outings (Robb and Somerset 1957, Somerset 1974, Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, pp.32-33). Between 1850 and 1970 over three hundred women's groups were established in New Zealand, including women's sports associations for hockey, cricket, basketball, tennis, golf and bowls, cultural groups for arts, crafts, drama, music, or gardening, and women's organisations including lodges, service organisations, guilds, clubs, women's rights, political and employment groups (see Else 1993). At the end of the period, SROW found the predominant leisure activities for their respondents were social club and sports (15% each), hobbies, arts and crafts (8%), music (5%), and theatre (2%). The never-married women in the 16-20 and 50-59 age-groups were the most active in these activities (SROW 1972, p.69). In the present study, narrators reported also meeting lesbian friends and lovers through groups associated with these activities, depending on their class, race, and location, and some women in Part 3 socialised through similar activities.

Some women's sports networks and friendship circles were important meeting-places for lesbians. From my own knowledge, lesbians met through cricket, hockey and golf networks in the 1960s, sports that attracted significant numbers of lesbian players. The New Zealand Ladies' Golf Union was established in 1911, affiliated to the Ladies Golf Union of Great Britain (1893), and attracting upper middle class women. There were clubs throughout the country, with competitions and visits, notably the annual New Zealand Ladies' Golf Championship (established 1924), women's golf "peak[ing] in popularity and level of competition during the 1930s" (Northover 1993, pp.428-429). Circles of mainly older lesbians played golf, including for example Ella Plimmer (see Chapter 9).

The New Zealand Women's Hockey Association (NZWHA) was established in 1908, though Nelson College for Girls (where Dorothy Richmond taught, see Chapter 10) had introduced it from 1899. Teams travelled widely for games, Dayle Jackson noting that a Wellington team "singing hymns loudly on a train provoked a fellow passenger to write to the local paper expressing concern at their unladylike behaviour". She reports that "socialising after matches or tournaments" was an important early aspect of women's hockey, though "chaperones were required". International competition began with a tour by an All-England team in 1914, New Zealand teams touring South Africa, Australia and Europe from 1930. By 1958 the NZWHA had 32 affiliated associations, with the Auckland association establishing Melville Park^{xiv} in 1939 as the first women's sport's ground in New Zealand, and others obtaining grounds and building pavilions in the 1950s (Jackson 1993, pp.425-427). Women's hockey attracted significant numbers of lesbian players, including Tighe (see Chapter 23).

Women's cricket is thought to have started in Nelson as early as 1886. By WW1 clubs had been formed throughout the country, and provincial associations were established by the early 1930s, with 687 players by 1938-1939. The New Zealand Women's Cricket Council was formed in 1933, and international competition developed from 1934 with a test match against England, and later matches against Australia, India and South Africa. Prue Hyman notes that there were few Maori women players, commenting that cricket is "time-consuming and fairly expensive". She affirms that women's cricket "has a high level of lesbian participation" (Hyman 1993, pp.434-436). One informant recalled that

after Saturday matches in Wellington, women cricketers met at the Caledonian Hotel, among other venues of the time. After closing, they would move on to private house parties. She thought everyone at these parties was lesbian, “though lesbianism as such was not discussed”. She remembered gossip being passed on, when lesbian relationships ended or new ones were established, and that players knew lesbians in teams from other parts of New Zealand and overseas, especially England.

Women’s national and international sports competitions in all three of the above sports provided important channels for the transmission of information about lesbian possibilities (see Chapters 5 and 6). It is likely that lesbian groups or individuals were involved in other women’s sports, though I have been unable to document. Katie Hogg (Chapter 20) was involved in women’s lifesaving during WW2 in Christchurch, but though she enjoyed the company of women at the club, was unaware of a lesbian presence. Women’s cycling and boat racing clubs were among sports introduced into New Zealand from the late nineteenth century “with the overt aim of claiming for women the right to physical freedom and independence” (Macdonald 1993b, p.406), and lesbians were probably involved in these activities as well as in many other sports.

New Zealand women leading lesbian lives were certainly involved in the women's clubs that were set up from the late nineteenth century. Modelled on clubs for ladies in London, they were established and frequented by so-called “new women”, starting with the Ranfurly Club in Masterton, founded in 1899, which provided overnight accommodation and refreshments. The Wellington Pioneer Club, founded as a feminist and temperance society in 1909, seems to have had a number of lesbian members. Mary Richmond (Chapter 10) became the first president, and Dr Agnes Bennett^{xv} ran the “Every Other Wednesday Circle”. Betty Armstrong (Chapter 19) was a Pioneer Club member, as were several other women in this study (see Chapter 9). The Canterbury Women’s Club began in 1913, the Otago Women’s Club in 1914, and the Auckland Women's Club in 1919, affiliating with the London Lyceum Club in 1922 to become the Auckland Lyceum Club, with over 700 members. The Wellington Lyceum Club started in 1923, the Wellington Women's Club in 1924, while the Magill sisters and their circle established the East Harbour Women’s Club and Jerome Spencer and Amy Hutchinson the Napier Women’s Club (see Chapter 9). Frances Hodgkins (Chapter 10) was a member of the Dunedin

Kahanga Club for women, and Elsie Andrews and Monica Brewster (Chapter 14) founded the New Plymouth Women's Club. A Federation of Women's Clubs began in 1925, and by the end of the 1920s, over 5000 New Zealand women belonged to clubs (Upton 1993, pp.420-422). This level of participation indicates that women's clubs were important pre-1970 meeting-places for middle and upper-class women, undoubtedly including a significant number who led lesbian lives.

All pre-1970 women's organisations were likely to attract some lesbians; there appear to have been individual lesbians or groups of lesbians at least in the YWCA (established (1878), the Free Kindergarten Union and Country Women's Institutes (see Chapter 9), in the Women Teachers' Association (established 1914), of which Elsie Andrews was president, (see Chapter 13), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (established 1916), the New Zealand Federation of University Women (established 1921), the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (established 1931) of which Elsie Andrews was New Zealand president, (see Chapter 13), and the New Zealand Women Writers' Society (established 1932).

From my own knowledge, as well as within formal organisations, lesbian friendship circles existed in women's occupational networks, especially in teaching, nursing, the post office, telephone exchanges, and in the women's branches of the armed forces. Lesbians in this study are represented in all these areas of employment (also see Chapter 7). For women wanting to meet others more casually than through women's recreational or cultural organisations, church activities, or work, pre-1970 options were limited, especially for younger women. Though some homosexual men of the period made contacts in public places including streets, parks, toilets or picture-theatres^{xvi}, there was no culture enabling women to meet in this way. As discussed in Chapter 4, especially young women's access to all public spaces was regulated; in addition women's well-grounded fears of male violence and sexual assault in public places after dark would have inhibited the development of such a culture. The most visible and apparently accessible public meeting-place in pre-1970 New Zealand was the hotel bar, or "pub". However, before 1967, and the introduction of 10 o'clock closing, most women could not enter public bars due to the restrictive New Zealand licensing laws, and the consequent

ambience of a “crowded uncouth watering place with a lavatorial atmosphere, attractive only to boorish males” (Phillips 1999, p.223).

Temperance supporters attempted to control the sale of alcohol from 1835, when the New Zealand Temperance Society was set up. Temperance and women’s groups opposed the employment of barmaids, and after 1910 most were banned (Sinclair 1969, pp.53-54, Dalley 2000, p.51). The prohibition vote was very high in 1911, though did not prevail (Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.183) but in 1918, though the “soldiers’ vote” narrowly prevented prohibition, it was decided to continue the 1917 war-time measure of 6 o’clock closing for the next 50 years, until 1967 (Sinclair 1969, p.238, Phillips 1996, p.267). To discourage prostitution, all women were prohibited from entering public bars from this time (Dalley 2000, p.51). Many hotels also stopped providing a “ladies and escorts’ bar” or other private bar where women could drink. In 1911 the Auckland Licensing Committee instructed the two hotels in Auckland which continued to serve women to “cease doing so”, as “[T]he spectacle of a woman drinking in a public bar, or even in one of the side rooms reserved for the use of her sex, is not a pleasant sight...it would be more seemly for them to take their refreshments in their own homes”. Legislation in 1895 and 1910 prohibited the supply of alcohol to “any female aboriginal native”, meaning Maori women were not served in hotels until the 1945 Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act and the 1961 Sale of Liquor Act, due to fears about the effects of alcohol on Maori (Coney 1993, p.129); in some parts of the country Maori women were not served in pubs until the later 1960s (Dalley 2000, p.51).

These draconian licensing laws meant considerable differences between public lesbian life in New Zealand and in the countries described above where lesbian bar cultures were possible. There was some nightlife in the main centers of New Zealand during the 1920s in which women could participate, including cabarets, “jazzy music” and illicit drinking (Gibbons 1992, p.321). Freda Stark performed at Auckland cabarets during the 1930s and 1940s, reporting that some homosexual men socialised there (Chapter 17). There were venues for dancing, jazz and music clubs, and from the 1950s rock and roll dances such as those at the Auckland Trades’ Hall and Wellington’s Ngati Poneke Hall. There are accounts of individual lesbians cross-dressing and attending dances to meet girls, including one sixteen-year-old in 1958 at a Trades Hall dance in Auckland, who had to

flee when her sex was discovered by a dancing partner^{xvii}, and Bubs Hetet and Piri who attended Nelson dances dressed as boys apparently without discovery (Chapter 22).

Restrictive liquor licensing make it likely that teashops and milk-bars were meeting-places for some earlier women leading lesbian lives. Certainly, from the 1950s coffee-bars became important kamp meeting-places. The Ca d'Oro in Customs Street, Auckland was particularly significant and is mentioned by several narrators in this study. The first "real coffee bar in Auckland", it was opened in 1957 by Jewish actors Harold and Vora Kissin, and frequented by "bohemians", students and artists as well as by kamp men and women (Hoffman 2000). Other pre-1970 Auckland venues where some lesbians met included the El Morocco in Wellesley Street (closed 1959), the Arabian, the Montmartre (where Carmen performed) and the Pink Pussy Cat Club. In Wellington there was the Man Friday in Dixon Street and the Tete a Tete coffee bar in Herbert Street. *Truth* reported lesbians meeting at the Powder Poof and the Lets B Inn (see Chapter 6). Carmen owned several venues in both Wellington and Auckland, attracting homosexual men and some lesbians, including The Balcony, Victoria Street, Carmen's International Coffee Lounge and The Peacock in Vivian Street^{xviii} (Carmen 1988, pp.157-159). There were the unofficial venues of the Auckland "beer-house" scene, notably Mary's beerhouse in Ponsonby and Zelda's in Franklin Road, frequented by some lesbians during the 1960s (ibid 1988, pp.54-56, Hoffman 1998).

Despite restrictions on women in pubs, some lesbians were able to meet at a few pubs in the main centers, but as the drinking-age was 21 years, this was not possible for younger women. The working-class kamp networks in the port cities of Auckland, Wellington and Lyttelton were influenced by British homosexual ship cultures from the "Home" boats. Pubs where these networks developed, though predominantly male, allowed women into some bars, for example, the British Hotel at Lyttelton and the Bistro Bar of the Royal Oak Hotel, Dixon Street, Wellington. Pubs with slightly better facilities which allowed lesbians to meet on the fringes of more middle-class kamp male culture were Auckland's Queen's Ferry Hotel and Occidental Hotel in Vulcan Lane and Mary's Bar at the Alexandra Hotel in Parnell, Wellington's Tavern Bar of the Royal Oak Hotel and the Gresham Hotel in the Square, Christchurch (see Chapters 22, 23, 24). Wellington lesbians approached the manager of the Western Park Hotel in Tinakori Road in 1963 and asked

for permission to drink in the upstairs lounge bar, which remained a meeting place for many years.^{xix} Women's sports groups, especially hockey and cricket players, excluding younger players not 21 years met at several city venues at least from the 1960s (see above). Most venues were the ladies and escorts, or "cats' "bars, mentioned by some narrators (see Chapters 19 and 20).

Some narrators found the pre-1970 hotel bar meeting-places rough, violent and at times frightening. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 4, lesbians making themselves visible in public places could be at risk. The vice-squad were alert to associations with prostitution, drunkenness, fighting or other behaviours suggesting women out of control. Few middle-class lesbians met in pubs before the extension of licensing hours in 1967, instead socialising at private kamp parties and through friendship networks, sometimes even travelling between cities to attend parties (Laurie 1990, Te Awekotuku 1991, Te Awekotuku et al. 1993, Glamuzina 1993; Chapters 21, 22, 23, 24). Barmaids (over the age of 25 years) were allowed back with the 1961 Licensing Amendment Act, creating a somewhat less masculine atmosphere in hotels (Coney 1993, p.129). After 10 o'clock closing began in 1967, some hotels extended facilities for women, providing more pleasant surroundings and actually encouraging women to socialise in hotel bars (Phillips 1999, p.223), though not until feminists carried out "pub liberations" in the 1970s did most hotels serve women in their public bars (Coney 1993, p.129).

Kamp men formed the Wellington Dorian Society in 1963, with a venue providing illegal alcohol for members, but lesbians could not join except during a brief period after 1970^{xx}. Kamp women in Auckland tried to establish meeting places outside pubs and private parties, including the short-lived Phoenix Society (Te Awekotuku et al. 1993, p.549), but not until 1971 did Auckland lesbians, including Bubs Hetet, found New Zealand's first lesbian club, the KG Club in Karangahape Road – "KG" for both Karangahape Girls' Club, and Kamp Girls Club (see Chapter 22, Glamuzina 1993, p.47).

Recognising others: dress and language

Clothes can, in fact take on a heightened significance for lesbians. Self-presentation allows the expression and communication of an otherwise invisible identity. Through dress, lesbians can reconstruct their bodies and transform themselves from 'heterosexual women' into 'lesbians' (Rolley in Hamer 1996, p.46).

How did pre-1970 lesbians recognise one another? Most New Zealand pre-1970 women's clothing styles were intended to make women appear conventionally feminine and attractive to men (Coney 1993, pp.114-115, pp.146-147, pp.156-159). Nineteenth-century clothing restricted and inhibited physical movement, and though there was a campaign for reform dress, including trousers for women, this did not become generally popular as it was a marker of feminism (ibid. pp.112-113). There are photographs showing women playing hockey in 1900 wearing heavy, cumbersome garments (Jackson 1993, p.426). Clothing styles changed markedly after WW1, and the 1920s allowed greater flexibility in fashion, Virginia Woolf commenting, "we are what we wear, and therefore, since we can wear anything, we can be anyone" (Woolf in Doan 2001, p.97). Masculine costumes and hairstyles became popular among modernist women, including lesbians (Doan 2001, p.97), and the fashion of Eton-cropped hair, ties, waistcoats, jackets and even monocles provided ways for women to make public statements about their sexuality. Newton suggests that because for Radclyffe Hall's generation "nineteenth-century models may have seemed more confining than liberating" (Newton 1985, p.10), lesbians claimed their sexuality "as - or with - a lesbian in male body drag" (ibid. p.23). However, Hall was not a marginalised cross dresser in body-drag. Doan points out that she was a wealthy and self-conscious dresser at the height of 1920s women's fashion, until the 1928 trial and banning of *The Well of Loneliness* made "female masculinity" styles unpopular. She suggests it is unclear whether "mannish dress signaled sexual inversion so unequivocally", as masculine fashions for women were also associated with educated women, spinsters and feminists (Doan 2001, p.101). Though trousers for women were acceptable during WW1, most women later "abandoned" them, and even Hall never wore them in public, as lesbians "followed the fashion trends during the 1920s" without singling out trousers as a particular "sign of sexual identity" (ibid. p.107). Janet Flanner, Solita Solano and other Paris lesbians dressed elegantly in tailored fashions, never wearing trousers publicly except at carnivals and dress-ups (Wineapple 1989) as did Natalie Barney and her friends, wearing page-boy and other costumes at private functions (see Jay 1988). If wealthy lesbians did not feel they could wear trousers in public, it is certain that lesbians dependent on earning a wage would not have dared to wear other than acceptable female fashions. Long hair-styles reflecting women's "crowning glory" and pinned up when women reached a marriageable age remained

obligatory until the 1920s (Coney 1993, pp.152-153). However, even Hall did not cut her long hair for some years, despite the flapper fashion of short, shingled styles (Doan 2001, pp.101-107).

“Masculine” styles for women were thought appropriate in some pre-1970 New Zealand contexts. Advice to New Zealand working women during the interwar period on correct office wear emphasized that women should “fit in with the businessman’s suited seriousness and yet not reproduce the masculine emblem of the suit”. Women should “strike the balance”, and wear “sober and masculine styles” which were not “excessively feminine” (Sprecher 1999, p.154). A 1928 photograph shows a man in a suit and tie, with his secretary in a skirt, jacket, blouse and necktie (ibid. p.142). Make-up at work was thought inappropriate. However, the ideal of femininity underwent a shift during the interwar period, with a “new emphasis in heterosexual allure” becoming apparent in advertising (ibid. p.156), and neckties and other forms of “masculine” dress going out of fashion. The “athletic, boyish look” of the 1920s gave way to “making do” during the Depression and WW2, due to financial and social stringencies (Dalley 2000, p.174). Though women increasingly wore “slacks” again during the 1940s because they were “comfortable and practical” (McKergow 2000, p.171), Dior’s post-war “New Look” emphasising a “return of femininity” with “fabrics and styles that enhanced rather than hid the female shape”, was picked up in New Zealand (Dalley 2000, p.174). McKergow notes that though “feminine fashions” were partly the result of conservative sexual politics, many New Zealand women themselves wanted to “move beyond the austerity of war years” (McKergow 2000, p.177). The colour black was “strongly associated with masculinity”, in contrast to the wider use of colour by women (ibid. p.178); interestingly, rural Maori lesbians often wore black singlets and other black clothing (Te Awakotuku et al. 1993, p.548), and Elsie Andrews preferred black dresses (Chapter 13). Black clothing was, and remains, favoured by Maori women generally, raising other questions about the European construction of femininity during the pre-1970 period beyond the scope of this study.

Until the 1960s women were still expected to wear hats and in many cases gloves in public (Coney 1993, pp.154-155). While some New Zealand lesbians resisted these clothing styles, wearing “shirts and pants” as lesbians did elsewhere (Nestle 1987, p.37)

in order to be visible to others, it remained important not to appear deviant at work or in society generally. Many pre-1970 lesbians did not possess extensive wardrobes, as the New Zealand of the times was as Janet Frame observed “a life where people had few clothes” (Frame 1989 in McKergow 2000, p.170). The necessity for acceptable work clothing like frocks, stockings, suspender belts and high-heeled shoes meant that pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians in low-paid, traditional female occupations could not afford many slacks, vests or shirts which fell into the category of leisure clothes (Chapter 7). However, most pre-1970 New Zealand women could sew, and many made their own clothing. Lesbians were no exception to this, and where desirable items like vests, trousers, shirts and other items were unaffordable or not available, they enterprisingly created patterns and either made them, or found friends who could (see Chapter 16).

During the 1950s “youth dress”, developed, modelled on American films and filmstars, including “short, tight pants and sweaters for young women; stovepipe trousers, slicked-back hair and drape coats or leather jackets for men”. Youth fashion in the 1960s introduced denim jeans as fashionable for both men and women (Dalley 2000, p.174, see also Yska 1993). Young New Zealand lesbians wore a range of clothing from these new options, drawing from both male and female fashions; one reported making herself a leather jacket and vest (see Chapter 16). Despite the new options, trousers for women were still not considered acceptable in the work-place; the Public Service first permitted women to wear “trouser suits” to work in 1971. Women’s work clothing remained restrictive, including girdles to flatten the shape, stockings held up by suspenders, uplift brassieres, bouffant hairstyles held in place by hairspray, and compulsory cosmetics for all except religious women (see Chapter 23).

Conservative lesbians fitted in with accepted women’s fashion even during leisure time. For example, in the US and the UK, DOB and MRG respectively attempted to modify members’ clothing. The DOB wanted to assist the “variant” to fit in to society, and did not support “masculine” styles of clothing (Martin and Lyon 1991), and in 1964 there was a heated debate on whether lesbians should wear “masculine” clothing at MRG meetings (Chapman in Lesbian Oral History Group 1989, p.55, Hamer 1996, pp.173-174). Tighe reported that conservative lesbians in Wellington did not wish to greet her when she wore jeans during the day in the city (Chapter 24).

For most pre-1970 lesbians clothing styles were not a choice. What women wore was dictated by what employers, families and the wider society prescribed. Only wealthy upper-class lesbians, or lesbians who existed on the margins of society, could dress as they pleased. Diana Chapman explained that in 1950s Britain “you didn’t walk round with cropped hair and trousers, not unless you wanted to be pointed out in the street. I wore ordinary women’s clothes” (Lesbian Oral History Group 1989, p.50). The meaning attached to clothing outside the conventions was apparent, as indicated by the *New Zealand Truth* comment that the dress worn by some 1960s Wellington lesbians identified them as much as if they had been “carrying placards” (see Chapter 6).

Dress is the most significant aspect of lesbian “performance”, as it visually contrasts against expected female gender performances. Many pre-1970 lesbians were punished for failing to portray femininity, by wearing “masculine” clothing like trousers to work, or even during leisure time (see Chapter 16). Dress was an area where conventional feminine gender performance was enforced through many societal mechanisms, and was an effective method of containing lesbian visibility.

Until language exists, people cannot name themselves or talk about their sexuality. Many terms naming and describing lesbianism were known in pre-1970 New Zealand, as some narrators confirmed. Addressing lesbian inaudibility as well as invisibility, Birch Moonwomon-Baird points out that for lesbians “to be heard or even misheard as lesbians we have to speak”, and that “community is always, somehow, speech community” (Moonwomon-Baird 1997, p.204). Naming themselves, rather than being named by others, was one of the first political activities of pre-1970 lesbians.

Terms used in pre-1970 magazines the British *Arena Three* and the US *Ladder* included “lesbian”, “homosexual” or “homophile” woman. The terms “dyke”, “bulldyke” and “bull-dagger” were used in US lesbian fiction, and common in US lesbian bars (Kennedy and Davis 1993, Nestle 1987). Though imported fiction introduced New Zealand readers to some of these terms they do not appear to have been used here before 1970.

“Kamp/camp” was the term used in pre-1970 Australia for both women and men, and “queer”, “homosexual” and “lesbian” for women (Wotherspoon 1991, Ford et al. 1996).

This suggests that kamp was probably introduced into New Zealand from Australia; almost all the narrators reported using it.

The pre-1970 New Zealand media (Chapter 6) at various times used the terms “sapphist”, “homosexualist”, “homo-sexual” and “lesbian”. They first used “gay” in 1967 (see Chapter 7), introduced from the US. Tony Taylor (1982) reported the term “darl” used among women in New Zealand prisons for their lesbian lovers. The palare (also spelt polari) was spoken and understood in New Zealand in some kamp networks, introduced by homosexual British seamen.^{xxi} Based on Romany, the palare was used in England as theatrical, circus and homosexual slang. Some New Zealand lesbians learned palare from kamp men, and some of the terms these women used or understood included: square = heterosexual; homi = man; polone = woman; homi-polone = homosexual; polone-homi = lesbian; bonar = good; naff = bad, awful; naff off = go away; nanti = no, none; on jon wa = over there; butch = sexually active; bitch = sexually passive; tootsie = active and passive; dill doll = artificial penis (note, not “dildo”); going downtown for lunch = oral sex; varda = look; lily = the law, or the police^{xxii} (also see Lucas 1997, pp.92-93).

In Parts 3 and 4, I note further terms and the oblique references used by some of the pre-1970 women in this study to identify themselves or others.

Summary

Significant pre-1970 lesbian cultures existed in the US, Europe and Australia, including lesbian organisations and magazines. Some pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians knew of these possibilities, and there were New Zealand subscribers to at least *The Ladder* and to *Arena Three*. Though present research has not found any pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian clubs or organisations, women could meet through women’s sports, cultural or church groups, and women’s clubs. Many pre-1970 lesbians socialised through private friendship networks associated with these activities, or through occupational networks.

Women had little opportunity to meet casually in public places or venues. It was difficult for most women to meet in hotel bars before the extension of licensing laws in 1967 and the improvement of bar facilities. Lesbian bars as they existed in the US and Europe could not develop in pre-1970 New Zealand. Some lesbians met at coffee bars, illegal

beer houses, or the few, mainly rough and working-class hotel bars that would serve women, often on the fringes of male homosexual meeting-places. Increasing urbanization and improved transportation and communications assisted the development of visible kamp communities in the main cities by 1970.

Dress and language was among the ways lesbians might become visible or audible to one another, but pre-1970 New Zealand work-places required women to conform to feminine gender expectations in matters of dress; shirts and slacks could be worn only during leisure time. Many terms used by lesbians or others to describe lesbianism were known in pre-1970 New Zealand.

Part 3 of this study follows, with chapters based on written sources that suggest lesbianism.

ⁱ Including Colette, Mata Hari, Elisabeth de Gramont, the Duchess de Clermont-Tonnerre, Djuna Barnes, Romaine Brooks, Dolly Wilde, Nadine Wong, Nancy Cunard and Gertrude Stein (Jay 1988, pp.8-25).

ⁱⁱ Tr. the girlfriend. Lesbian social clubs advertised in this magazine.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tr. The Centre for Culture and Recreation.

^{iv} Tr. The Organisation of 1948, and, the Norwegian Organisation of 1948.

^v Tr. The National Society for Sexual Equality

^{vi} The first appears to have been a mimeographed publication *Vice Versa* by "Lisa Ben" circulated privately in 1947.

^{vii} Personal knowledge.

^{viii} Personal knowledge. I joined MRG from New Zealand and was later a member in London.

^{ix} Founded and produced by former MRG member and US expatriate Sandy Horn for eighteen years.

^x See Hamer 1996, pp.185-186 for an account of the Gateways Club.

^{xi} Personal knowledge.

^{xii} Personal knowledge; see Ford et al. 1996, p.11, for an account of Jan Hillier's parties and her club venues including Pokey's gay bar in St Kilda from 1977, and Penny's lesbian bar; see Wotherspoon 1991, pp.73-76, p.97 for descriptions of pre-1970s kamp parties in Sydney.

^{xiii} Personal knowledge.

^{xiv} Named for the Auckland lawyer and city councilor Ellen Melville, who assisted an Auckland sub-committee to take over a park in Mt Eden to cater for the growing number of women hockey players (Jackson 1993, p.426).

^{xv} Dr Agnes Bennett was reputedly lesbian.

^{xvi} Personal communication from various sources; Interview with Paul Magill by Alison Laurie 2002.

^{xvii} Personal knowledge.

^{xviii} The Peacock premises at 41 Vivian Street were sold in 1974 by Carmen to a group from the Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE), to become Club 41, the first Wellington lesbian club (personal knowledge).

^{xix} Personal knowledge.

^{xx} Personal knowledge; Dorian Society Papers, LAGANZ, MS Papers 359.

^{xxi} Personal knowledge.

^{xxii} Personal knowledge. I was taught the Polari by Royce Sutcliffe in Auckland during the early 1960s.

PART THREE

RE-TELLING THE WRITTEN STORIES

Chapter 9

Lesbian glimpses

Introduction

This section re-tells stories drawn from written sources about pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian experience. Later chapters examine the lives and relationships of selected women in more detail, while this chapter provides brief “glimpses” of lesbian experience, including romantic friends, cross-dressers, a friendship circle in Eastbourne, examples of grave-stone inscriptions and women advertising in the media for contacts. These glimpses illustrate ways pre-1970 women lived lesbian lives, and the circumstances that allowed or restrained their opportunities.

Glimpsing Maori women

Te Awekotuku (2001) provides a lesbian re-telling of “Hinemoa and Tutanekei”, suggesting how pre-contact Maori may have understood sexuality. Hinemoa and her cousin Wai, who is “Passionate...with Moa sometimes”, notice Tutanekei and his *hoa takatapui*¹ (Te Awekotuku 2001, p.5). Hinemoa elects to swim to Tutanekei’s island, avoiding the marriage her parents have arranged, as she was “a woman who chose a man who preferred his own sex- just as she preferred hers” (ibid. p.3). These images differ from women’s same-sex love introduced by European settlers. In her collection of short fiction, Te Awekotuku depicts lesbian relationships among Maori women in Rotorua. “The Basketball Girls” demonstrates lesbian role models, as Tahuri watches Tihi “getting ready for us”, herself and the cross-dressed Cindy/Ahi (Te Awekotuku 1989, p.15). Auntie Marleen gives Tahuri “my first cat. And my very first look at what I could become” (ibid. p.10). In “Mirimiri” Tahuri watches older women visitors to her *marae*, their signals suggesting gender and sexual alternatives, as the woman wearing the suit coat and man’s watch caresses the other woman’s hand and touched it to her lips (ibid. pp.79–80). This mosaic of images convey earlier Maori forms of same-sex love, as well as later European influences.

Cross-dressing women

As elsewhere, cross-dressing was one way working-class women could live as lesbians, by accessing male employment and wages. Probably the best-known episode of cross-dressing in New Zealand was the 1909 attempt by Amy Maud Bock (1859-1943) to marry Agnes Ottaway, her landlady's daughter, while masquerading as "Percy Carol Redwood". This attempt is mentioned in almost all subsequent reports of cross-dressers. Born in Hobart, Australia, Amy came here aged twenty-five, beginning her criminal career with a dozen convictions and several prison sentences for fraud and false pretences. She frequently assumed aliases, all of which were female, before this famous disguise at the age of nearly fifty. Newspapers reported the episode as "The Case of the Female Bridegroom", "A Marvelous Masquerade, A Woman Dressed as a Man, Marries a Port Molyneux Girl" and "In Man's Attire, A Woman's Escapade" (Poole 1991, pp.90-93, Coleman 2001, pp.13-14). Possibly Agnes knew Amy was a woman and was complicit in the marriage attempt. Amy was sentenced to two years imprisonment for fraud, moving to Taranaki on her release, where she reputedly had several lesbian relationships.ⁱⁱ She worked as a housemaid at Mokau, organising plays and entertainments and reputedly becoming "the life of the district". Aged fifty-five, Amy married Charles Christofferson, the marriage ending due to her debts, and probably motivated by money. She moved to Hamilton, was charged with false pretences at the age of 72, and died aged 84 at Bombay in 1943 (Poole 1991, p.92).

Women who cross-dressed without fraudulent purposes could still be arrested. "Bert Rotciv", a New Zealand woman arrested in Sydney for vagrancy and cross-dressing in December 1906, was the pseudonym used by Bertha Victor from Hokitika. Dressed in "male attire", she was described as "The she-male ex-New Zealander", under the headline "The Sapphic Singularities of Bert Rotciv".ⁱⁱⁱ The use of "Sapphic" in a popular newspaper indicates this term was well understood in early twentieth-century New Zealand. A later article headed "Boy Bertha – her Antics at Auckland", describes another "masquerade" in "Man's Attire" after her return to New Zealand. Despite being offered "the garb of her sex", she "persisted in retaining the forbidden garments". In an anti-semitic comment, the article reported that there was "no doubt" about "Bertha Victor, alias Levi...being a Yid. She is tall and dark...and wore a black felt hat which was tilted on one side of her closely cropped black-haired head". Eventually charged with drunkenness, obscene language and vagrancy, she was remanded "to see if the

Rabbi could do anything ", but Auckland's Rabbi Goldstein had "no suggestions". Bertha explained she had "failed to get work when clothed in the garb of her sex", and dressed as a man because "male attire would be more useful", as she was "more able to do men's work."^{iv} There are reports of Bertha during the following decade committing petty crimes, until she too married, probably for money, as there was later a dispute over maintenance.

One immediate consequence of the *Truth* report, was an account in the next issue titled "In Male Attire, Another Boy Bertha". In this story, a woman tea-shop proprietor from Christchurch thought to have been inspired by the earlier report borrowed "the togs of her cook" and "marched along the streets smoking and ogling girls in the manner of the masher" until "recognised by more than one who pointed out the risk she ran at the hands of the police and advised her to streak for home". The paper reported that she did so, condescendingly concluding that she "certainly makes a better Vision of the Tea Tray than a male masquerader".^v This item confirms that women read newspaper reports, and that some were encouraged to defy the prescriptions accordingly. It needs to be remembered (see Chapter 8), that female attire in this period was highly restrictive, and that simply wearing trousers may well have been regarded as a "male masquerade".

Eugenia Falleni (1875–1938) successfully married two women, living as a man for over two decades. Born in Livorno, Italy, Eugenia was the eldest of seven children of Isola and Luigi Falleni who migrated to Wellington in 1877 when Eugenia was two years old. Illiterate, she cross-dressed from an early age, and obtained work as a male at Murphy's Brickyards where s/he was nicknamed "Tally-Ho Falleni". When Eugenia was brought before the court for impersonation, this employer testified s/he was an excellent worker. Eugenia soon left Wellington for Australia where, possibly following a shipboard rape, she gave birth to a daughter Josephine in 1898. Fostering Josephine to Italian friends in Newcastle, Eugenia moved to Sydney and lived as "Harry Crawford" from Scotland. As Harry, Eugenia married two wives, Annie Birkett in 1913 and Elizabeth Allison in 1919 (Falkiner 1988, pp.201–206). Harry's biological sex was revealed following his arrest in 1920 for the 1917 murder of Annie Birkett, allegedly because Josephine had told Annie that Harry was a woman (ibid. pp.22–24). Eugenia was found guilty of murder and received the death sentence, commuted to life imprisonment. On her release in

1931, Eugenia lived as a woman, calling herself “Mrs Jean Ford”, until her death seven years later (ibid. pp.150–162).

Herbert Moran calls Eugenia “a homosexualist” with “none of the brilliant attainments of so many perverts”, and not “aggressively masculine” or a “bearded lady” (Moran 1935 in Falkiner 1988, p.220). Aware of the various discourses on lesbianism, Moran’s conclusion rejects the “man-woman” category in favour of the medical classification of homosexuality. There seems no doubt Eugenia’s cross-dressing was motivated by lesbian desires, as much as by the opportunity to improve her status as an Italian woman by transforming herself into a Scottish man with access to better-paid employment.

Whether Eugenia’s wives knew her biological sex is unclear. Elizabeth could not admit this knowledge without appearing complicit in Annie’s murder and in marrying Harry knowing s/he was a woman. Though the prosecution claimed Annie’s discovery of her sex was Eugenia’s motive for the murder, it is uncertain Annie really was ignorant Harry was a woman. Suzanne Falkiner suggests, in a period when people were often clothed during sexual acts which normally took place in darkness, it is possible neither wife realized Harry was female, as it was claimed s/he used a homemade artificial phallus to deceive them. Whether such deception was possible in shared intimate domestic life is unclear. Perhaps the women chose to believe the deception, rather than admit to a lesbian relationship.

Another apparently successful deception was Deresley Morton, or “Peter Stratford”, who left New Zealand in 1911 for the United States where s/he cross-dressed and lived as a man. After several relationships, Peter married a woman in Kansas City in 1925. After Peter’s death in 1928, his biological sex was revealed, and newspapers published photographs and excerpts from letters, one asserting

No psychological freak intrigues the public imagination more than does the man-woman, that rare specimen who occasionally draws the light of publicity on to incredible escapades.^{vi}

The term “man-woman” links this case to older discourses (see Chapters 4 and 5) and the use in popular newspapers demonstrates that the New Zealand public was familiar with the idea.

In 1945 “Mr X” aged 30, and her friend aged 18, were charged with making a false statement under the Marriage Act when they married in July. Mr X had cross-dressed

and lived as a man for twelve years, had her breasts removed, and had registered as a male under the National Service Regulations for war service. She stated her “wife” knew that she was female before they married, and that they were happy together.^{vii} The police reported both women admitted they were “of the Lesbian type”.^{viii} The court found their relationship was “an extraordinary perversion”, and they were ordered to remain apart as a condition of a three-year probationary sentence and to undergo psychiatric treatment. Glamuzina comments that the court’s expectation was that this separation and the treatment would “normalise” Mr X so s/he would “revert to her original social/sexual gender role” (Glamuzina 2001, p.77). However, as both women were dismissed from their employment as a consequence of public disclosure, despite name suppression^{ix}, even within the court’s own framework this outcome prevented them from leading “normal”, settled lives. The court’s sentence was punishment for gender/sexuality rebellion, through separation, medical treatment and social ostracism. Reverend Raymond Dudley, Convener of the Methodist Public Questions Committee, commented that it was “surprising that legal provision for the punishment of lesbianism is not made as is the case with sodomy,”^x and Rev. Jasper Calder, of the Auckland City Mission warned that “lesbianism is on the increase”.^{xi}

Perhaps some of these women, particularly Mr X who had surgery, actually believed they were men.^{xii} For others, cross-dressing enabled them not only to access male incomes, but to establish domestic arrangements with other women more privately by appearing as conventional heterosexual couples (Dekker and van de Pol 1989, Faderman 1991, Hamer 1996, Oram and Turnbull 2001).

Mary Taylor (1817–1893)

Some women may have come to New Zealand in order to live independent and lesbian lives. One early example is Mary Taylor, who lived in Wellington from 1845 to 1859, and whose New Zealand letters have been edited by Joan Stevens.^{xiii} Born in Yorkshire in 1817, she was the fourth child of Joshua and Anne Taylor and was educated at Miss Wooler's School in Mirfield, where she met Charlotte Bronte (1816–1855) and Ellen Nussey (1817–1897). The three remained life-long friends, their correspondence suggesting they were involved in a combination of romantic lesbian relationships. Mary’s father died in 1840 and Mary sailed to Wellington in 1845 to join her youngest brother William Waring Taylor, who had emigrated three years earlier (Stevens 1972, pp.57–63).

In 1850 Mary established a drapery shop^{xiv} with her cousin Ellen Taylor, which she ran alone for eight years after Ellen's death in 1851 until returning to Yorkshire in 1859. After her return, she wrote articles for the *Victoria Magazine*, (see Chapter 5) published in 1870 as *The First Duty of Women*, where she argued for the right of women to earn their own money. If they did not, they could be "driven into matrimony merely for maintenance, or may have to starve when the husband is gone" (Taylor 1972, p.142). In her novel *Miss Miles*, Mary argued that "a woman's first duty, like a man's, is to earn a living" (Stevens 1972, p.73). Though she took her own advice and earned a good living, buying and selling land as well as running a business, Stevens suggests Mary once considered marriage to Charlotte's brother Branwell. Ellen's brother Henry proposed to Charlotte (ibid. p.13). Such arrangements may have been common, enabling women to remain close and perhaps continue their relationships.^{xv} However Charlotte, in a letter to Ellen (from which Ellen deleted passages), wrote "I doubt whether Mary will ever marry" (Bronte 1840 in Taylor 1972, p.17). Charlotte's relationship with Ellen Nussey was "the vividest colour in Charlotte's life" (Benson 1932 in Miller 1989, p.29) and the correspondence between the three women was often passionate. Charlotte apologized, in one instance, for writing Ellen a note she should not have written to anyone other than "M.Taylor who is nearly as mad as myself", and explained

I will not tell you all I think, and feel about you Ellen, I will preserve unbroken that reserve...but for that I should long ago have been set down by all who know me as a Frenchified fool...I wish I could live with you always...If we had but a cottage and a competency of our own I do think we might live and love on till Death without being dependent on any third person for happiness (Bronte 1836 in Hellerstein et al. 1981, pp.88-89).

Elaine Miller suggests that by "Frenchified fool" Charlotte was referring to George Sand, who shocked Paris by her "public love affairs with women", and to the publication of Sand's *Lelia* in 1833 which contained suggestions of sexual love between women (Miller 1989, p.36). Later in their three-way correspondence, Mary told Ellen that she had "read a French novel called Consuelo which I admire exceedingly", that it was worth learning "French for the express purpose of reading it", and that "I have spoken first of this because it is the thing that has interested me most in the last month" (Taylor 1972, p.49). This confirms that Sand's daring work was available in New Zealand soon after publication (see Chapter 5).

Miller thinks Charlotte was depressed by Mary's long absence in New Zealand, as well as by the deaths of Branwell, Emily and Anne during the winter of 1848 –1849, and that

she married Arthur Nicholls only to secure her father's future^{xvi} (Miller 1989 pp.42–43). The independent Mary never married, as Charlotte predicted, and in 1850, having read *Shirley*, she wrote critically to Charlotte about working women

this first duty, this great necessity you seem to think that some women may indulge in - if they give up marriage... You are a coward and a traitor. A woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not... Work or degradation is the lot of all except the very small number born to wealth (Taylor 1972, pp.93-94, original emphasis).

Mary's success in business and her promotion of women's economic independence perhaps made her an inspiration for nineteenth-century Wellington women. By way of contrast, her brother William Waring, after some wealthy years in Wellington, was adjudged bankrupt. He was "a delicate, ascetic looking man" who was discovered to have stolen trust funds, and sentenced to five years imprisonment. William had "borrowed" from banks, family and friends (Eldred-Grigg 1996, pp.109–110), meaning he probably borrowed from Mary, reinforcing her opinions about the foolishness of economic dependency on men.

The Richmond women

Several women from the prominent Richmond-Atkinson family appear to have led lesbian lives, or had lesbian relationships. Mary Elizabeth Richmond (1853–1949), the eldest daughter of nine children of Emily and William Richmond, was Dorothy Richmond's cousin (see Chapter 10), and the first president of the Wellington Pioneer Club (see Chapter 8). She was educated at the Misses Greenwood's school, Nelson, and in Geneva and Florence. She attended Newnham College, Cambridge, in 1891, trained at the Froebel Institute in London as a kindergarten teacher in 1896, ran a kindergarten in Wellington from 1898 to 1912 and founded the free kindergarten movement, originally known as Richmond Free Kindergarten Union. She also served on the boards of Wellington Hospital and the Wellington Girls' College (Hughes 1991a, pp.565-567).

Mary never married, and lived as an "old maid". Replying to her close friend Connie Monro, who had written announcing her engagement to Philip Dillon in 1875, the twenty-two year old Mary wrote

Alas! Alas! what am I to do without you, you seem already changing into somebody elses - else I meant to say, but I will let the s stand as it is equally true. You must not think that I am not glad...I do not think you would do for an old maid (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.199).

What connotations did the term “old maid” have? Perhaps it was used by New Zealand women leading lesbian lives to describe themselves, and perhaps Mary thought Connie would not “do” as one as she seemed unable to achieve economic independence.

William Shaen brought his daughters Margaret and Lily (see Chapter 10) for a visit to New Zealand in 1885, while Mary was teaching at Wellington Girls’ College (1884-1890). Five years later, in 1890, the Shaen sisters returned here bringing their brother Godfrey, who became William’s secretary. There are claims Mary became briefly engaged to Godfrey, until his sudden death a few months later (Hughes 1991a, p.565, de Fresnes 1997, p.12). However, Mary was herself anxious to deny this rumour, writing to Connie in 1885, who was by then married

It is all stuff and nonsense about Mr.Shaen...he is father’s secretary so...has to come to the house every day, and the Wellington people have engaged us without consulting the principal parties...I am going to be an old maid school mistress, that is my vocation in life. Farewell dear, I am afraid you will be disappointed about my [non-]engagement, but I can’t help it can I? (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.203).

Given Mary’s response to the news of Connie’s engagement, I think this last sentence was a joke shared between them.

Mary lived in England after WW1, during her sixties, becoming involved with the British League of Unitarians and the Kensington Society for Female Suffrage. She died in Wellington aged 95, on 3 July 1949 (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.510; Porter 1995, p.433).

Mary’s close friend was Maud Russell England (1863–1956), a teacher and art dealer. Born in Warwickshire, Maud attended Oxford School for Girls and also studied in Dresden (Hughes 1998, p.161). Here she probably met Margaret Taylor (1823–1888), a Richmond family friend who never married and lived in a castle near Dresden with her married invalid sister, providing a base for the Richmond’s European visits (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.513). Several women in this study visited Dresden. It was a cultural, artistic and educational centre and, like Berlin, may also have been a centre for lesbian culture.

Maud immigrated to New Zealand in 1902 at the age of thirty-nine, apparently for health reasons, but very likely to join Mary, whom she may have met in London or Dresden. She became involved with the Workers’ Education Association (WEA), taught literature at Samuel Marsden Collegiate School in the 1930s and, from 1912, was

on the council of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association with Mary Richmond and, from 1917, on the National Council of Women. She was close to Frances Hodgkins and Mary's cousin Dorothy (Chapter 10) during their 1904–1906 stay in Wellington. Maud's sister ran a bookshop in England, sending Maud "left-wing newspapers and periodicals", while Maud herself "imported books not easily obtainable in New Zealand" for her "magnificent though rather disorganized library" (Hughes 1998, p.161), suggesting she may have acquired some of the information on lesbianism discussed in Chapter 5.

She is described as "tall and angular", with a "formidable presence", suggesting she was not a conventionally "feminine" woman. J. C. Beaglehole regarded her as "the chief intellect among the women of Wellington" (Beaglehole in Hughes 1998, p.161) and E. H. McCormick, himself homosexual, called her "a beacon of erudition" with a "modest salon in Molesworth Street" where "Wellington intellectuals gathered" (McCormick in Hughes 1998, p.161). Her salon may have been a discreet meeting-place for lesbians and homosexual men.

Before her death in 1956 aged ninety-three, Maud told a nurse she was "a bluestocking" (Hughes 1998, p.161). One informant explained that relationships between women like Maud England and Mary Richmond were "recognised and not recognised, in the same breath."^{xvii} Discretion allowed these women to live what appear to have been lesbian lives in Wellington without social ostracism.

A close friend was the younger Edna (Ted) Scott (b.1899), who was trained as a kindergarten teacher by England in 1915, and became Director of Taranaki Street Kindergarten (Scott 1975). Scott appears to have had a lesbian relationship with Enid Wilson, Principal of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association.^{xviii} There seem to have been several women leading lesbian lives at the heart of the early kindergarten movement, including also Joyce Barns, just as in many other New Zealand women's organisations.

Mary Richmond's younger sister Margaret (1857–1933) was also involved in lesbian relationships, while studying for a teaching certificate at Newnham Hall. Margaret wrote to her father William as she began her last term in 1878, that she had "one or two friends" in England

whom I would wish to have always near me and, as that is out of the question, I would rather never see them again than to be able to see them any way but casually (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.202, original emphasis).

Mary wrote anxiously to their other sister Anna, at the same time, that “Newnham has not been altogether wholesome” for Margaret, as she had been “the general pet”, with “so many young lady lovers that Mother and I don't know what to do with her or them”. These women thought it “cruel” of the family to take Margaret away, and it seemed “half the population of England will be broken hearted”. Mary felt inclined to be “very stern and unsympathetic with them”, as she was against letting feelings “run in soft luxurious flow”, because “sentiment whose only outcome is tears I can't abide”. Despite this, she wondered if she was being “too hard on this new development and behind the century”. She pitied “Miss Prideau”, Margaret's slightly older friend, who looked “broken down”, with a “tremulous” mouth and “eyes filled with tears”. Mary believed that Margaret had not “found anyone to adore but only adorers”, concluding that “to live entirely on honey...is bad for the digestion” (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.203).

Why Mary took this position, given her own later friendship with Maud England and their status as “old maids” and “bluestockings”, can perhaps be explained as wanting to protect a younger sister from following a path that would lead to “tears” when a woman lover had to marry. When Mary wrote this letter in 1878, it was only three years since her own friend Connie had married. She certainly thought Margaret should “begin teaching as soon as ever she quits Newnham”, writing to Anna that Margaret needed “outside occupation” to help “steady her” for living at home again, after being so “petted and admired” at Newnham (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.407). Possibly Mary was critical because Margaret had “so many young lady lovers”, and felt that she was trifling with other women's feelings.

On returning to New Zealand, Margaret taught at Wellington Girls' College until 1886 when, aged 29, she married Dr Walter Fell, a family friend whose brother had married their cousin Edith (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.510). Margaret's mother Emily described Dr Fell as “an Elizabethan man...a sweet little creature, so refined and innocently gay”, reporting to her other daughter Anna in 1885 that Margaret felt “like his mother” (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.234). Revealingly, writing to her friend Connie about Margaret's engagement to Dr Fell, Mary thought they did not “care very much about each other but certainly he is a very nice man” (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.203). Perhaps Margaret found a match within the family, choosing a “sweet

little” man to make a life away from the Newnham friends she could not bear to meet “casually”. It has been suggested to me that the establishment of Newnham College a few years earlier created a hotbed of excitement and emotion between women students, and that their relationships should be seen in this light, rather than interpreted as evidence of lesbianism.^{xix} However, I believe that Newnham provided the venue and opportunity for women to meet others and develop lesbian relationships, away from family surveillance. There is no evidence suggesting the women’s relationships were not sexual and, the live-in environment of Newnham would have provided opportunities to express love physically in the privacy of a student’s “room of her own”. Despite these opportunities, only women able to support themselves could go on to make lesbian relationships “the organising principle” of their later lives, and for many, including the unfortunate Miss Prideau and Mary herself when Connie married, lesbian relationships did end in “tears”, when women became “some-one elses”, marrying through economic necessity and family expectations.

Anna Elizabeth (Bessie) Jerome Spencer (1872–1955)

Bessie Jerome Spencer^{xx}, founder of the Country Women’s Institute (CWI) and Townswomen’s Guilds, and Amy Hutchinson were friends and companions for over sixty-five years. They established the New Zealand Theosophy Society and their involvement in the Havelock Work and other esoteric groups indicate that they were alternative thinkers. Spencer’s London connections included several prominent lesbians.

Born in 1872, Bessie was the third child and eldest daughter of the five children of surgeon and Mayor of Napier (1882–1885) William Isaac Spencer and Anna Heatley. Two brothers became doctors, one was an invalid, and her younger sister Josephine married. The family was well connected, her mother claiming a connection to Jerome Bonaparte, brother of Napoleon (hence “Jerome” and “Josephine”), and her father to the Spencers who married into the Churchill family. They lived in several large Napier houses, one with the first tennis court in Napier, and Bessie was educated by governesses at home, before attending Napier Girls’ High School (NGHS) as a foundation pupil in 1884, during the time her father was the Mayor. Here she met her life-long friend Amy Large, whose family were interested in alternative religions and ideas.

Dr Spencer lost the family money through investing in a failed invention and after his death in 1897 the family were no longer wealthy, though they tried to maintain their social position. Bessie Jerome Spencer took employment as a junior mistress at NGHS, was appointed as first assistant in 1898, and then as headmistress from 1901-1909 (Rogers 1985, p.26). She took her BA degree in 1895 from the University of New Zealand, through Canterbury College as an extra-mural student.^{xxi} Amy became the Matron of NGHS boarding hostel and they lived there together, probably both dependent on their teaching salaries. In 1907 Amy married a family friend, the wealthy Frank Hutchinson, moving to the substantial Hutchinson estate at Omatua, Rissington. Three years later in 1909, aged 37, Jerome Spencer retired as headmistress, and moved to Awataha to live with Amy's sister-in-law Geraldine and her husband John Absolom. In 1911 she moved to Omatua, where she lived with Amy and Frank, helping tend the orchards and beehives.^{xxii} Though Susan Upton notes that "it is uncertain how she managed financially as the orchard was never commercially viable" (Upton 1998), I think it most probable that she was supported by Amy and Frank from then on.

Bessie and the Large and Hutchinson families were involved in the movement that became known as the Havelock Work (1909-1939), as well as other religious and philosophical groups. Interested in esoteric thought, the ouija board, and telepathy, Amy, Bessie and her sister Josephine also founded the New Zealand Theosophy Society (Coney 1993, p.298). The Havelock Work began when Reginald and Ruth Gardiner came to Havelock^{xxiii} in 1907. They founded *The Forerunner* (1907–1914), of which Bessie became editor.^{xxiv} A public meeting was held in 1908, with the majority of the small population of 500 people becoming involved in the Havelock Work, to encourage "musical, dramatic and literary" talent through drama and glee clubs, classes for woodcarving and Morris dancing.^{xxv} Gardiner promoted the ideal of "unity in diversity" in the first issue of *The Forerunner*, explaining that "each one of us will add his chosen part as individual units of an orchestral band".^{xxvi} The name Havelock Work itself "had a close connection with the occult, referring to the 'Great Work' of the alchemists" (Wright 1996, p.108).

Amy's father Harold Large resigned from the Theosophy Society in 1907, joining the Anglican Church and holding prayer meetings to contemplate "the esoteric meaning – or Ageless Wisdom - within the Western religious tradition." Large knew similar groups in Britain, bringing Dr Robert Felkin, the Senior Chief of the London Temple of

the Hermetic Order, and the Order of the Golden Dawn to Havelock North. Bessie became the Felkins' housekeeper during 1912–1913 at Stella Matutina, the headquarters, and one of the first “twelve initiates” of Lodge Smaragdum Thalasses No.49, Felkin's hermetic order, with 300 members (Coney 1993, p.298). In 1915 architect J. Chapman Taylor designed Whare Ra as Felkin's home, with the Havelock Temple in the windowless basement (Shanahan 1992).^{xxvii}

The Havelock Work may have had links with Mary Plunkett and A.B. Worthington's Order of the Temple, in Christchurch, which began in the 1890s and advocated “free bisexual unions”. Their temple building was denounced as “monstrous” for concealing “secret vices”, because their followers “anticipated a future” when people would be “bi-sexual...sexless...hermaphrodite”, finding evidence in the Bible that the human race began as “male and female in one” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, pp.129–130). The ideas of both the Havelock Work and the Christchurch Temple suggest influences from English radical thinkers Edward Carpenter and of William Morris (see Chapter 4).

In 1916, Bessie left Havelock for London to undertake war work, and was financially supported by Amy and the group. Bessie wrote to Amy regularly, describing her plans and activities. Having taken work at a YWCA canteen,^{xxviii} Bessie searched for more fulfilling work. She met nurses and doctors from a hospital “staffed entirely by women”, before lunching with suffragette “Miss Hodge” at the Minerva Cafe in High Holborn, and visiting the Headquarters of “the Women Police” where she was “interviewed by a sergeant”.^{xxix} Through “Miss Newcombe” of the Overseas Club, who knew “ever so many interesting women and will probably arrange for me to meet some of them”, Bessie met Maud Royden, “a wonderful woman”, and Miss Pethick, younger sister of suffragette Mrs Pethick-Lawrence and a sergeant of the Women Police, described as

a very striking and attractive personality. Tall, broad, somewhat thickset, a wide, strong face, full of vigour and kindliness...most smart and capable in her neat blue uniform. One feels she is a force.

Miss Pethick invited Bessie to come to the Queen's Westminster Hall to watch her “drilling a squad of 40 women recruits...it was interesting to see the types of women...Miss Damer Dawson (Head of the Women's Police) and the woman next in

rank to her came in and inspected the recruits”. Bessie was introduced to these “charming women”, describing Dawson as “almost small and very neat and trim”.^{xxx} Margaret Damer Dawson (1874–1920) was a “woman of independent means”, who worked for the protection of women, including the prevention of prostitution. She used her personal wealth for “the training and development of a women's police force”, as part of this work, eventually becoming the Commandant of the Women Police Service (WPS) in 1914, with Mary Allen as the deputy mentioned by Bessie, who was also a suffrage activist from the Women’s Social and Political Union (Hamer 1996, pp.43–44). Described as “aggressively uniformed”, with “the utmost aversion for dresses” and wearing “peaked hat, navy-blue breeches, knee-high shiny black boots and monocle” (Lock in Hamer 1996, p.45)^{xxxi}, Allen was in a lesbian relationship with Dawson. She became the best-known policewoman in Britain, making lesbianism “flamboyantly visible” with her Eton-cropped hair, monocle and the police uniform she wore everywhere (Hamer 1996, p.45).^{xxxii} Bessie eventually joined the Women's International Street Patrol, founded to “rescue soldiers from undesirables” (Rogers 1985, p.195). Her connections to Dawson, Allen and their friends, link her with a London network of lesbians, whom she met through introductions from her friend Lady Anna Stout. Anna does not appear to have had lesbian relationships herself, and disapproved of male homosexuality, asserting in 1910 “We have no class of men who are effeminate in dress or intellect or degenerate in morals, as in old countries”, which the Auckland *Observer* called “balderdash” (Eldred-Grigg 1984, pp.168-169, p.277 note). She may have been more sympathetic to lesbianism, or was perhaps unaware that some of her London feminist friends were lesbians.

In 1919 Bessie wrote to Amy that Rissington would now have to be “the place” for their plans, and not the Havelock Work or Felkin’s order.^{xxxiii} She wondered how she could “live up to” Amy’s ideals for her, adding that if “I ever do accomplish anything at all I think it will really be you who accomplished it through me”.

You don't know how badly I want you in everything I think and plan. ...oh, I do want us both to get to work on some of the bigger things . Omatua is our neccessary base, and Mr Frank an essential part of the trio.^{xxxiv}

Perhaps Amy had physical relationships with both Bessie and Frank, perhaps he was “essential” because he financially supported them all, or perhaps the “trio” was an esoteric triangle. Other women in lesbian relationships were involved in triangles. For example, Janet Flanner and Solita Solano included Nancy Cunard in their relationship,

making a threesome described as “1/3” in their letters because, like others in the 1920s, they thought couples should be non-possessive and open (Wineapple 1989, p.79, Chisholm 1979, p.138). Edy Craig, Christopher St John and Tony Atwood were involved in a threesome (see Marjorie Hannah, below). Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge communicated with Hall’s deceased partner Mabel Batten (“Ladye”) through a medium, Hall dedicating her books to “Our Three Selves”, which Castle calls an “erotic triangle” (Castle 1993, p.49)^{xxxv}. A living man rather than a dead woman as part of such a triangle could provide financial support as well as legitimation for Bessie and Amy’s relationship. Perhaps Frank accepted the arrangement because of the trio’s common esoteric interest.

Bessie returned to Omatua in 1919^{xxxvi}, she and Amy withdrawing from the Havelock Work and founding the Country Women's Institute (CWI) in 1921, at the Hutchinson homestead at Omatua, and the Townswomen's Guild in 1931. Bessie told Elsie Locke, “Start with something simple that is widely acceptable” (Coney 1993, p.299), both these organisations providing opportunities for New Zealand women to meet, enabling friendships and relationships to develop. Frank Hutchinson died in 1940, and the two women lived on at Omatua until they retired to Napier (Upton 1998).

Like many others in this part of the present study, Bessie was involved in a woman’s club (see Chapter 8); she was the president of the Hawkes Bay Women’s Club. She died in October 1955 at the age of 83, in Napier, and is buried near Amy in the small private Omatua Cemetery at Rissington. Beatrice Corrigan, Amy’s “housekeeper” after Bessie’s death is buried nearby, as are Frank Hutchinson and other family members.^{xxxvii}

Marjory Lydia (Nicholls) Hannah (1890–1930)

Marjory, the younger daughter of Susan and Harry Nicholls, secretary of the Wellington Harbour Board (Hughes 1989, p.74) attended Wellington Girls’ College, where she edited the school magazine, and was regarded as “one of the best-known and best loved girls of the school” showing “rare breadth of outlook and generosity of spirit” (Harding 1982, p.62)^{xxxviii}. At Victoria University College she was the first woman to win the Plunkett Medal for oratory, produced two Drama Society plays and was active in various other groups, but did not complete a degree. After returning from London in 1916, she taught elocution at Miss Baber’s School (later Samuel Marsden Collegiate), Chilton St James School in Lower Hutt and the Workers’ Education Association. Her

employment at Marsden may connect her to Dorothy Richmond and her association with the WEA to Maud England. She travelled overseas, and in 1920 briefly married John Hannah, a Scotsman living in Ceylon, who died twelve weeks later. In England Marjory studied stage production with Edith (Edy) Craig, daughter of Ellen Terry (Hughes 1989, pp.75–76). Edith lived in a lesbian ménage à trois with Christopher St John and Claire (Tony) Atwood, this threesome being referred to by friends as “Edy Craig and the boys”. After her mother’s death Edith founded the Barn Theatre at Smallhythe, attracting a lesbian circle which included Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Vita Sackville-West, Winaretta (Singer) de Polignac, Ethel Smyth and other lesbian suffragists (Collis 1994, pp.53-69). This connects Marjory to a prominent British lesbian network.

In New Zealand Marjory studied painting with Dorothy Kate Richmond (see Chapter 10), lived in her own flat in Sydney Street, Wellington, and was a close friend of poet Eileen Duggan, who despite being deeply religious, may also have lived a lesbian life. Marjory had many talents, publishing three volumes of poetry and becoming well known in amateur theatre. She was killed in a road accident in October 1930, aged just 40 (Hughes 1989, p.76, Hughes 1991b, p.474).

Marjory boldly wrote

*Rest at an inn (if it come my way)
For I’ll walk any road I please,
Chanting verse from Euripides,
Or Villon’s ballads of yesterday.*

*Or loll Bohemian-wise and dream
About Verlaine or Baudelaire –
A poet strange, with pea-green hair,
Who supped, o’ nights, from a skull of cream
(Hannah 1949, p.65).*

This poem indicates that Marjory was familiar with both classical and French writers on homosexuality and states her resolve to live an independent life, just as she pleased. Living in her own flat, studying with famous lesbians, and travelling round the world, Marjory walked many of her chosen roads.

Mabel Howard 1894–1972

Mabel Howard entered public life as a politician, and managed to remain unmarried, living a lesbian life in Christchurch. Born in Adelaide, Australia, Mabel came to New

Zealand in 1903 aged nine. Her father was Ted Howard, socialist, trade union official and Labour Member of Parliament for Sydenham, Christchurch. She succeeded him in this seat, remaining the only woman in the House until 1945 and, as Labour Minister of Health, becoming the first woman cabinet minister in the British Commonwealth. The Howards lived next door to Professor Bickerton's Federative Home in Wainoni (Chapter 6), where Ted worked for a period (Tolerton 1992, p.30, Gee 1977, pp.39-40). They supported Bickerton's socialist views and probably his liberal views on sexuality and marriage. Mabel strongly advocated women's rights, arguing in her maiden speech in 1943

This war has put women in their rightful place...the rehabilitation of women may be more difficult than the rehabilitation of men...I am not an extreme feminist. But I do know that the woman's point of view is quite different from the point of view of the man...The women's war effort has been second to none...From now on the women of the world are going to be different. They have lost their inferiority complex that kept them back for many years (Gee 1977, pp. 67–74).

Biographer David Gee does not discuss Howard's lesbianism, but provides information from which readers may draw their own conclusions. Dismissing a permanent ministerial secretary, Howard appointed her friend Eileen Mansfield as the first woman private secretary at Parliament, and later appointed Miss Melempre, described as her "guide, philosopher and friend", with whom it is believed she boarded for a time in Wellington. She was described by Sir John Marshall as "a pretty fearsome kind of lady" (ibid. p.109). This may well have been a covert reference to lesbianism.

From 1949 Howard's intimate friend was the wealthy Mrs Blanche Barton-England from Christchurch, for whom she fought a battle with the Christchurch City Council to obtain an invitation for "Miss M. B. Howard and partner", so that she and Blanche might attend a Council reception for the Queen Mother (ibid. p.122).

Howard liked séances, films and card-games, sharing these interests with her close friend Gregory Kane. Kane, a homosexual, hosted Christchurch kamp parties attended by Howard and her women friends, and described Howard as a "careful and discreet lesbian".^{xxxix} Gee calls him Howard's "escort", calling their friendship "short lived" (ibid. p.185). However, Kane remained friends with Howard until her death in 1972 (he died in 1974), so their friendship lasted nearly twenty years.^{xl}

Martin Edmond, artist Philip Clairmont's biographer, claims that in 1952 Clairmont's mother Thelma contacted Howard, then shadow Minister of Health and Child Welfare.

He asserts that Howard offered Thelma a job as live-in housekeeper, which “didn't last long” because “Mabel, a lesbian, made advances to Thelma”, who “locked herself in her room”. He claims that next morning Thelma asked Howard's gardener, painter Colin McCahon, for assistance, who arranged for Thelma to go to Greymouth, and that the taxi-driver who drove her to the station, said “she was one of many young women Mabel had to stay” (Edmond 2000, p.109). I think that this story is highly unlikely. There was gossip about Howard's lesbianism in Christchurch circles,^{xli} which perhaps Thelma had heard. It is doubtful Howard invited strange women to her house and propositioned them, as Thelma claimed. However, the story indicates why women were closeted. Prominent woman known as lesbian might attract publicity-seekers to invent such stories and, despite Howard's discretion, some believed Thelma's story. Also, such stories often circulate and are magnified upon each re-telling.

Howard would probably have used the term “kamp” as Kane and his circle used it. In January 1958, she argued against the official use of the term “spinster”, which she disliked as “it was often taken to mean old maid” (Gee 1977, p.198). This implies that she did not want to be thought of as prudish or non-sexual, despite being unmarried, and that this term no longer held the suggestion that it may have done for Mary Richmond sixty years earlier. When Howard, aged sixty-nine, dressed up smartly to open her last electoral campaign in 1963, a member of the audience asked “Are you getting married, Mabel?”, to which she replied “Married? I've dodged it so far and I will dodge it now” (ibid. p.232). Her comment would have been understood by lesbians and homosexual men, while remaining within acceptable boundaries.

After Howard's enforced retirement from Parliament in 1969, at the age of 75 because of increasing ill-health, she was eventually institutionalised at Sunnyside Mental Hospital until her death at the age of 78 in 1972 (ibid. pp.264-271).

Edith Marion Collier (1885–1964)

Collier's biographer, art historian Joanne Drayton (1999) does not consider Collier was lesbian, as from her perspective, she found nothing she understood to be evidence of lesbian relationships. From Drayton's own work, there are clear indications that Collier associated with lesbians from art circles in Europe, and that from my perspective, she can be said to have lived a lesbian life.

Edith, the eldest of nine, attended Wanganui Girls' College, and then studied art at Wanganui Technical School. In 1913, aged twenty-eight, she studied at St John's Wood Art School, London, with the Australian painter Margaret McPherson. This provided her with connections to lesbian art circles as McPherson had lesbian relationships with artists Bessie Davidson and Gladys Reynell before her marriage to William Preston in 1918 (Drayton 1999, p.34). Collier was a member of the Women's International Art Club, worked with Frances Hodgkins' art class in 1920 and knew her circle of lesbian and homosexual friends and pupils (see Chapter 10). Through her Manchester cousins, Sylvia and Fannie Collier, she may have met lesbians involved in the feminist movement, especially as Fannie, the first woman lecturer at Manchester University, was involved in the suffragette movement (ibid. p.27).

Collier was forced at the age of thirty-seven to return home to Wanganui to care for ailing family members in 1922. Following a 1926 exhibition at the Sarjeant Art Gallery, where locals criticised her paintings, Collier's father burnt many of them, including her nudes, effectively ending her painting career. Two years before Collier's return, homosexuality was widely discussed in Wanganui when mayor, Charles Mackay, was convicted of attempted murder (see Chapter 6). As Mackay had helped establish the gallery, Drayton suggests that "homosexuality, pornography and art" became irrevocably linked in people's minds" (ibid. p.64). Consequently, Collier may have found it difficult to live as a lesbian or as an artist. The lives of unmarried daughters who cared for ailing family members were controlled through their lack of access to independent housing or income.

Ella Gladys Plimmer (1888–1958)

Ella, or "Girly", was the unmarried daughter of Charles Plimmer and granddaughter of the "father of Wellington", the early settler John Plimmer.^{xlii} A Plimmer family historian is said to have noted that, "her mannish attire reflected her character" (Eldred-Grigg 1996, p.132). Another family member reported that Sir Clifford Plimmer said of Ella, "I think we'd have a name for her now, but we didn't know about that then."^{xliii} Ella Plimmer's obituary describes her as "a leading personality in Wellington golfing circles", and a member of the Miramar Golf Club who competed at the New Zealand Women's Golf Championships. She was "one of Wellington's earliest and keenest women motorists" and a "qualified motor mechanic"^{xliv}, unusual for women at this time. According to a family member, Ella died at her home in Boulcott Street, which

she was the last of the family to occupy. She was a friend of fellow golfer and lesbian Ena Gambrell, and part of a wider lesbian friendship network through women's golfing circles.

An Eastbourne friendship circle

Lesbian friendship circles are the earliest communities. A circle of friends could extend as a network throughout the country (for example, Elsie Andrews' circle, see Chapter 13). Other circles developed in one place, women setting up homes near their friends and forming a small community. One such circle developed around the two Magill sisters in Eastbourne, Margaret and Ada.^{xlv}

Margaret "Rem" Magill (1888-1962) and her partner Mimie Wood (1890-1973) lived at 25 Mahoe Street, Eastbourne, from 1920 until Margaret's death in 1962 at the age of seventy-four. Margaret, principal of Thorndon Normal School, became the first woman president of the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) in 1934, serving in this capacity until her retirement. Mimie was secretary, accountant and librarian of the Royal Society of New Zealand for 42 years, until her retirement in 1962. Both women were involved in many social and political activities. Margaret served on the Eastbourne Borough Council for nearly 30 years, some as the Deputy Mayor, and Mimie founded the Eastbourne Lyric Singers in 1937, serving as Secretary/Treasurer for twenty-five years. In 1948 they became foundation members of the East Harbour Women's Club, of which Margaret was President for thirteen years and, like others in this study, were long-term members of the Pioneer Women's Club. Margaret, who was "strongly anti-armament and anti-nationalism",^{xlvi} attended international teaching conferences, as well as conferences for the Red Cross for which she was on the executive committee. These connections make it likely that Margaret and Mimie knew Elsie Andrew's circle. Both Margaret and Mimie received MBE awards for their community and professional work, Margaret in 1957 and Mimie in 1962. Both women were described as hospitable, holding "hilarious dinner parties...with a circle of Eastbourne friends". An interesting connection is provided by Margaret's close friends Lotte Renner and Fosey Earp; there is a postcard to Lotte from Ida Baker, apparently a close friend of Fosey Earp, who lived in England from 1926.^{xlvii}

Interestingly, Margaret was also a member of the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Association (Beaglehole 2001, p.142), which links her with the Richmond, England, Scott and Wilson (see above).

Part of the Eastbourne circle, and also residents of Mahoe Street, were Margaret's sister Ada Magill (1890–1976), a shorthand typist who worked at the Commercial Bank of Australia, and her life-companion Molly Gore, a teacher. For their anniversary in 1947 Molly wrote a letter to Ada, in an envelope inscribed "Carissima mia, for 22nd May".

*For my dearest,
On our 33rd anniversary – in gratitude for everything – for just being you, and for all that you do so cheerfully for me. I can't imagine life without you. I am filled with thanksgiving to God for you. Thank you my dearest...I'm sorry I can't write a letter. Too tired, but please dearest, always know in your heart deep down that I am deeply, deeply grateful to you. My words are few but my thoughts are deep and filled with love for you,
M.G.H.Y.I.K.D.D.A.M^{xlvi}
All my Love,
M.^{xlvi}*

Ada kept this letter until her death in 1976, nearly thirty years later.¹

Daisy Isaacs (1886-1986) and her companion Amy Kane lived in Mahoe Street across the road from Margaret and Mimie.^{li} Daisy Isaacs died aged one hundred, her obituary reporting that she never married and "lived in Eastbourne for 70 years". Amy, who predeceased Daisy, was not mentioned. Daisy taught at Chilton House from 1906, was officer in charge of the Trentham Army Training School during WW2. She was not only a member of the Pioneer Women's Club, but was the catering manager for many years. After her retirement, she travelled extensively, pursuing her "keen interest in amateur theatricals and orchestral concerts".^{lii} Others in the friendship circle living in Mahoe Street or nearby included teachers Rhoda Messenger and Dora Johnson. All of the women were members of either the Pioneer Club or the Lyceum Club^{liii}.

Near Eastbourne, at Lowry Bay, lived the artists Gwen Knight and Helen Stewart (1900–1983). Stewart shared Dorothy Richmond's studio in 1927 and they exhibited together that year (Hurrell 1996, p.66). She lived in Sydney for many years and was associated with Margaret (McPherson) Preston (who knew Collier see above) returning to New Zealand in 1946. Knight studied with Hodgkins in France, who painted her portrait in a work called "Under the Trees". Knight and Stewart were regarded as

wealthy as they could afford to support Wellington galleries and participate in exhibitions.^{liv} It is likely that they knew the Magill sisters and socialised with the Eastbourne circle.

Eastbourne, accessible by a half-hour drive or ferry trip by 1970, was a place people went in order to “get away”^{lv}. The Beauchamp family had a cottage there early in the century and it was the scene of Katherine Mansfield’s romance with Edith Kathleen Bendall in 1908 (Chapter 12). Margaret Shaen bought a cottage in nearby York Bay in 1910 and gave the title deeds to Dorothy Kate Richmond the following year (Hurrell 1996, p.66, see Chapter 10). Lesbians attract others into geographic or spatially based friendship circles.

Seeking contacts

RADCLYFFE HALL, books by, life of etc. Wish contact persons interested in same. T206 Evg. Post.

REFINED lady, lonely, would like friendship of others. T364 Evg. Post

Many women were isolated and not part of such friendship circles. How could pre-1970 women interested in lesbian relationships or friendships meet others? A study of pre-1970 advertisements in the personal columns of newspapers is revealing. These examples from a 1961 Wellington newspaper show how some women made contact with others.^{lvi} Nea Hunt, a former Wanganui Girls' College teacher in her seventies, responded to the Hall advertisement. Her life companion of many years had died and she wanted to meet other lesbians. For some years, she was able to socialise with younger Wellington lesbians. She was a member of several Wellington women's clubs, including the Pioneer Women's Club, but said that, though she knew other lesbian members, no one discussed lesbianism or admitted it even to their friends.^{lvii}

Carol McKenzie, recently returned from London to become a member of the New Zealand National Orchestra, also responded to this advertisement. She was able to pass on information about current London lesbian clubs to lesbian circles in Wellington, including the more recently established Robin Hood Club^{lviii} (Chapter 8). This is an example of how the grapevine was used to transmit information about international meeting-places.

Advertisements in the Personal column were often cryptic, but some women did meet lesbian friends and lovers through them. The Hall advertisement was placed on behalf of a married woman, who was Maori, living in rural Taranaki, by her husband, a former British seaman. As she herself was seeking contacts in her own area, she passed on names so that Wellington respondents could contact one another.^{lix} Using familiarity with Radclyffe Hall in this way was a common code among lesbians.^{lx}

Mrs Janice B, a married Wellington woman, subscribed to and, in 1964, wrote this letter to the British lesbian magazine *Arena Three* (Chapter 8).

Dear Miss Langley
Having just received the July issue I felt I simply must write and say 'thank you'. It's very interesting and stimulating. I especially agree with Audrey Lambert in the matter of dress. It's nice to know there are others who don't consider it peculiar not to wear trousers, etc though I must admit that I lack the figure as well as the inclination! JH's article was also interesting – one of my neighbours has become much more friendly since discovering the company I prefer (another will scarcely speak to me now). Could you print a request for penfriends? If so, here are some relevant particulars: I am 27, married with 3 children, half a BA degree (which I

intend to finish one of these years), interesting [sic] in reading and breeding cats (mainly Siamese) and doing Good Works (to a mild extent). Promise to reply to any letters received. If this request could be printed in A3 I should be very grateful – the lot of a suburban housewife with my particular tastes can become a little trying. All good wishes – (Mrs.) Janice B^{lxi}

This letter is evidence that New Zealand women were aware of *Arena Three* and that at least one pre-1970 New Zealand woman tried to make contacts through overseas lesbian magazines.

Tombstones

Cemetery records provide small glimpses of the lives of the dead. Lesbian couples may not always have been able to be buried together, given family expectations (for example, Effie Pollen and Ursula Bethell, see Chapter 11). One couple buried together is Emma Scott and Alice Mills.^{lxii} Their gravestone at Karori Cemetery, Wellington reads:

In loving memory of
EMMA ADA SCOTT
Late of Launceston, Tasmania
Died 2nd July 1938, aged 69 years
Also her dear friend ALICE MILLS
Died 2nd December 1943, aged 76 years
WE SHALL MEET AGAIN

Records show these women lived together at 158 the Terrace, Wellington.^{lxiii} The grave was purchased by Alice on 9 June 1936, two years before Emma's death in 1938. Alice herself died on 2 December 1943, was cremated, and her ashes interred in the grave on 4 December. Perhaps these women lived in a lesbian relationship. Hamer suggests that sources like this demonstrate that lesbian history already exists in the public record (Hamer 1996, p.3). We can interrogate such records for glimpses of the women's lives. More investigation of such public sources might bring to light material on women who did not leave other records of their lives.

Summary

The glimpses in this chapter have illustrated some aspects of pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian experience. As only a few nineteenth and early twentieth-century women could carry out Mary Taylor's "first duty" to support themselves and become economically independent, the women in this chapter tend to be "exceptional". Many became teachers, one of the few employment opportunities available (see Chapter 7), enabling pre-1970 women to make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives. Most lived discreet lives, meeting in private friendship circles or through women's organisations and clubs, especially the Wellington Pioneer Club (see Chapter 8).

The following chapters provide a more detailed examination of the lesbian relationships and lives of selected women.

ⁱ Tr. intimate friend of the same sex.

ⁱⁱ See www.fiona.clark.taranaki.co.nz/exhibit.

ⁱⁱⁱ *NZ Truth*, 5 January 1907.

^{iv} *NZ Truth*, 27 April 1907, p.8.

^v *NZ Truth*, 4 May 1907, p.6.

^{vi} *NZ Truth*, 13 June 1929.

^{vii} *Auckland Star*, 26 September 1945.

^{viii} *NZ Truth*, 28 November 1945, p.15.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x *NZ Truth*, Wednesday 28 November 1945, p.20.

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} For example, John Penny, a Wellington female-to-male (FTM) transgendered man has claimed "I've always been a man. I'm not a woman who has become a man, I'm a man who has become himself" (Penny cited in *Express*, 8 July 1999, p.2, "FTM Group finds acceptance").

^{xiii} Joan Stevens, the first woman professor in New Zealand, is thought by some to have lived in a long-term lesbian relationship (personal communication from Stevens' former academic colleagues to AJL).

^{xiv} Mary's original shop was on the corner of Dixon Street and Cuba Street, and a subdivision of Town Acre 178. When Mary left in 1859, it was taken over by her assistant Miss Smith and her sister, who sold it in 1866 to James Smith (no relation). It eventually became James Smith's Department Store, at a location on the corner of Manners and Cuba Streets (Stevens 1972, pp.70-72).

^{xv} For example, Sue Gilbert, who may have been the lover of American poet Emily Dickinson, married Emily's brother Austin (Faderman 1981, Messmer 2001).

^{xvi} Miller suggests Nicholls was jealous of Ellen, later refusing permission for her to publish letters Charlotte had written her, to which he owned the copyright, in Nussey's suppressed biography of the Brontes, beginning the trend that "marginalised Ellen" (Miller 1989, pp.50-52).

^{xvii} Personal communication from Frances Porter to AJL, 2002.

^{xviii} Personal communication.

^{xix} Personal communication from Charlotte Macdonald to AJL 2001.

^{xx} Information for this section has been obtained from the Spencer papers at the Hawkes Bay Museum Library, unless otherwise specified.

^{xxi} A 1955 letter from the Registrar to Anna Woodhouse, states the records do not show whether she was an internal or external student. Her journals make it clear that she was an external student (Spencer papers)

^{xxii} The Rissington homestead originally comprised 13,000 acres bought by Frank Hutchinson senior in 1882. South of the Mangaone River, 3500 acres were bought by Frank Junior, his sister Geraldine and her husband John Absolom. When Frank Hutchinson senior died in 1930 the land was subdivided (McGregor 1970, p.194).

^{xxiii} Known as Havelock North after 1910.

^{xxiv} There were contributions from supporters including Harold Large, Miss M.M. McLean, Bertha V.Goring, Miss E.T. Hamilton, Frank Hutchinson, Elsdon Best, Sir Robert and Lady Anna Stout, and Miss Hodge of Woodford House (*The Forerunner*, 1907-1914).

^{xxv} J.H.Von Dadelszen, "The Havelock Work Revisited 1909-1939", typescript, in the Spencer papers.

^{xxvi} *The Forerunner*, Vol 1, No.1, 1909, p.3.

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- ^{xxvii} Some aspects of the Havelock Work are continued by the Tauhara Trust, based at Acacia Bay, on Lake Taupo. The Hermeunetic Order operated until 1978 (von Dadelszen, Coney 1993, p.298, *The Lantern* 1936–1944).
- ^{xxviii} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson April 11, 1917.
- ^{xxix} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson Feb 17 1917, p.3
- ^{xxx} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson March 28 1917, pp 3-4
- ^{xxxi} She may have been depicted in a 1917-1918 painting by Edith Collier entitled “Ministry of Labour – The Recruiting Office for Women” – there is a figure in the painting fitting this description.
- ^{xxxii} Hamer argues that General Sir Nevil Macready, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in 1918, did not regard Damer Dawson, Allen or the WPS as a suitable basis for an official female police force. He objected because it was “full of militant suffragettes”. He thought it important to “eliminate any woman of extreme views - the vinegary spinster or blighted middle-aged fanatic” from the women police, by whom Hamer suggests he meant lesbians (Hamer 1996, pp.47-48).
- ^{xxxiii} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson, 31 January 1919.
- ^{xxxiv} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson, 17 February 1919.
- ^{xxxv} Castle also suggests that Charlotte Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain used Marie Antoinette as their third party so as “to triangulate, and...legitimate, their lesbian relationship” (ibid. p.125, n.).
- ^{xxxvi} Bessie Jerome Spencer to Amy Hutchinson, 27 October 1919, and BJS diary entry October 1919.
- ^{xxxvii} After her death, it was decided to remodel and rename the CWI Dominion Headquarters in Wellington “Jerome Spencer House”, and funds were raised throughout NZ for this (Rogers 1985, p.28).
- ^{xxxviii} Olga Harding taught at Wellington Girls’ College, and is widely believed to have lived in a lesbian relationship for many years with Nita MacMaster, a principal of Wellington East Girls’ College (personal communications from former teaching colleagues of both Harding and McMaster, to AJL).
- ^{xxxix} Personal communications from Gregory Kane and from Mervyn Loper to AJL (1973).
- ^{xl} Ibid.
- ^{xli} Personal knowledge.
- ^{xlii} *The Evening Post*, 8 August 1958, “Obituary, Miss Ella Plimmer”. Both her sister, actress Mollie Plimmer and brother Harold predeceased Ella and also died childless. As a result, Charles Plimmer's estate was left to Wellington to benefit the city (personal communication from family member to AJL).
- ^{xliii} Personal communication from family member to AJL.
- ^{xliv} *The Evening Post*, 8 August 1958, “Obituary, Miss Ella Plimmer”.
- ^{xliv} Information from Paul Magill, the nephew of Margaret and Ada Magill (Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- Other information taken from an undated manuscript of a presentation made by Johnnie Wood (a relative of Mimie’s) about Margaret Magill and Mimie Wood, attributed to Mary Small and based on records from the NZEI, Kenneth Magill, Alan Collins and the ATL Archives; in the possession of Paul Magill.
- ^{xlvi} The Magill family were apparently all pacifists. Paul and Kenneth Magill, nephews of Margaret and Ada Magill, were conscientious objectors during WW2, spending several years in prison for their beliefs (Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library).
- ^{xlvii} Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- ^{xlviii} Paul Magill suggested this meant “May God Hold You”, but he could not decode the rest.
- ^{lix} Letter from Molly Gore to Ada Magill, 22 May 1947, in possession of Paul Magill.
- ⁱ Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- ^{li} Ibid.
- ^{lii} *The Dominion*, 11 August 1986, “Obituary Miss Daisy Isaacs”; death notices *The Dominion*, *The Evening Post*, 11 August 1986.
- ^{liii} Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2002, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- ^{liv} Information from Elva Bett, former gallery owner, Wellington.
- ^{lv} Interview with Paul Magill, by Alison Laurie, 2000, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.
- ^{lvi} *The Evening Post*, Saturday February 25, 1961.
- ^{lvii} Personal communication from Nea Hunt to AJL.
- ^{lviii} Personal knowledge.
- ^{lix} Ibid.
- ^{lx} This could of course misfire. In response to another advertisement placed that same year, the advertiser was surprised to hear from an apparently non-lesbian respondent eager to discuss other literary works of Hall’s (Personal knowledge).
- ^{lxi} *Arena Three*, October 1964, p.9, vol. 1, no. 10, London Lesbian Archives.
- ^{lxii} Plot number 353 H.C.2, Karori Cemetery, date of burial 4 July 1938, Cemetery records entry 5174 Alice Mills and Plot 353 Emma Scott.
- ^{lxiii} This house was demolished to make way for the motorway in the 1970s.

Chapter 10

Artists and Lovers

Frances Mary Hodgkins (1869–1947) and Dorothy Kate Richmond (1861–1935)

Introduction and background

The focus of this chapter is the lesbian relationships of the New Zealand artists Frances Hodgkins and Dorothy Kate Richmond, and illustrates how women who wanted to lead lesbian lives could be assisted to do so through the emotional support and financial assistance of lesbian and homosexual networks.

Hodgkins spent her adult life in England and Europe as an “expatriate”, perhaps a coded expression for homosexual as used by her biographer Eric McCormick. Her lover Dorothy Richmond (other Richmond women appear in Chapter 9) lived overseas for periods and was part of a complex triangular relationship with the wealthy Constance Astley, lover of Margaret Shaen, before returning to Wellington with Frances Hodgkins. Richmond supported herself as a teacher and seems to have been part of discreet friendship circles in Wellington city and on the eastern side of Wellington Harbour (Chapter 9), where the gift of a York Bay cottage from Margaret Shaen had provided her with a roof of her own.

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Born in Dunedin on 28 April 1869, Frances Hodgkins was the third child and second daughter of Rachel and lawyer and artist William Matthew Hodgkins, who settled in Dunedin in 1860. Hodgkins had four brothers and one sister, Isabel, at first regarded as a more talented artist than Frances. However, Isabel married Will Field, Member of Parliament for Otaki. Their son Peter Field recorded that his mother “painted odds and ends to pay the grocer’s bill” (Field in Maclean 1983, p.54). Isabel’s energies after marriage were devoted to her husband and children and, unlike Frances, she had no opportunity for the experiences that may have enabled her to develop further as an artist. Frances attended Dunedin School of Art classes taught by Girolamo Pieri Nerli, spending the years 1890–1900 painting, teaching and exhibiting before leaving for

England in 1901 at the age of thirty-two (McLintock 1966, pp.98-99, McCormick 1954, 1981).

Hodgkins' letters and circumstances suggest she had romances with Dorothy Richmond, Jane Saunders, Dorothy Selby, Lucy Wertheim and Amy Krauss, to whom she remained close at the time of her death on 13 May 1947, aged 78. As she grew older, she became less interested in passionate relationships, explaining that "after one was 60 one could get clear of emotional relationships and the difficulties of making them work...and that then one could really settle down to painting".ⁱ

Stories about Frances Hodgkins

Her biographers acknowledge Hodgkins' close friendships with women, but some explicitly deny that they were lesbian. In an introduction to her edited collection of Hodgkins' letters, Linda Gill acknowledges that three-quarters were written to women, reflecting her "passionate delight in the beauty of women", but argues that it cannot be known whether Hodgkins was celibate or gave her emotions "sexual expression". She claims that though Hodgkins wrote "of and to Miss Richmond in the language of love", this was "sanctioned by the tradition of romantic friendship between women" and is not "necessarily indicative of any closer relationship" (Gill, 1993, p.5). I regard this as a clear example of how biographers can misunderstand romantic friendship and Faderman's (1981) intentions, denying women's lesbian relationships by insisting there is no evidence of (unprovable) sex acts rather than using Faderman's insights to assist their understanding of earlier lesbian existence.

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Hodgkins' biographer E.H. McCormick described Hodgkins' life as an artist, promoted her work in New Zealand and made sure her letters were preserved. He interviewed some of Hodgkins' lesbian and homosexual contemporaries, but unfortunately did not explicitly discuss the possibility that she became an "expatriate" because she was lesbian, as well as an artist. June Opie (1969) was able to interview some of the same people; in the transcripts of her interviews it is clear that she asked questions about emotional relationships. As her narrators were evasive on this topic, little concrete information emerged, though some things may be read from their gaps and silences.

Friends

In Britain Hodgkins moved in lesbian and homosexual art circles among people who supported her desire to become a serious painter. She was a close friend of homosexual painters Arthur Lett Haines (1894–1978) and Cedric Morris (1889–1982) and knew others in their circles, for example, the anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer (1905–1985) and his friend Arthur Elton (1906–1973).ⁱⁱ She was friends with singing teacher Norman Notley (1891–1980) and his partner, singer David Brynley, who owned a cottage in Corfe Castle (Gill 1993, p.465, n.17). Here, Hodgkins met Lady Ottoline Morrell at a party (see Chapter 9), Brynley reporting she was “greatly impressed by Lady Ottoline's beauty, warmth and intellectual awareness” (Brynley 1951 in Hodgkins 1993, p.485, n.39). Though Katherine Mansfield socialised with Morrell, it appears she and Hodgkins never met.

Haines and Morris were close friends of Hodgkins for over thirty years, assisting her financially and arranging exhibitions and buyers for her on occasion. Morris explaining that “we did what we could to help by introducing her to various people, dealers and other painters” including “Ben Nichol森 and the rest of the [influential] Seven and Five group”ⁱⁱⁱ, where she was accepted after they proposed her membership.^{iv} Haines described rescuing Hodgkins when she was 63, from her basement studio where

the water and light were turned off and she had pawned everything that was possible, and I think that she had abandoned herself, covered in newspapers...in bed...I gathered her together and motored her down to the land and fitted her up and set her to work.^v

Morris and Haines' circle of homosexual friends also included Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein in Paris, Christopher Wood^{vi} in Brittany and Duncan Grant in Bloomsbury (Cooper 1986, p.152). However, outside this circle, homosexuality was seen as “an appalling perversion”, and Haines and Morris never made “public” their “private” lives (ibid. p.155). Cooper suggests lesbians in particular found it easier to express their sexuality away from the “confining and defining attitudes of their homes and families”, using Hodgkins' move from New Zealand as an example. Hodgkins was a working artist who needed to sell paintings in order to survive. Cooper contrasts her to wealthy women who could “afford to lead eccentric life styles...with little regard to sales of their work” (ibid. p.87).

Morris and Haines had helped Hodgkins meet St George's Gallery director Arthur Howell, who though he exhibited and sold her paintings (McCormick 1954, p.214), was

at first disappointed to find that the paintings he admired were done by a woman of sixty (Trevelyan 1993, p.17). Because an “aging female's only niche was that of an eccentric old biddy”, Hodgkins’ acceptance as an artist was difficult anyway (Gerrish Nunn 1990, p.89). For her to have become publicly known as a lesbian artist would not have enhanced her sales or reputation. Hodgkins socialised privately in discreet friendship circles with her lesbian and male homosexual friends, Gorer describing her in an interview as “secretive”, not wanting “to show emotion in any way” and as “a very private person”^{vii}, probably just like himself and everyone else in their circle.

Lovers

Dorothy Kate (“Dolla”) Richmond, a member of the Richmond-Atkinson families who were Taranaki settlers, was the third of five children of Mary and James Crowe Richmond, who had moved to Nelson. James, an artist, editor and politician, was elected to the House of Representatives in 1860; Mary died of scarlet fever in 1865, when Dorothy was only four. She attended Miss Bell’s Young Ladies’ College from 1869 –1873, when James took the three eldest children to England for their education, where Dorothy attended Miss Cranch’s school in Blackheath (Paul 1996, pp.432-433). While there, James reported that 13-year-old Dorothy had become “unmanageable”, influencing his decision to take the children to Europe in 1874 (Reid 1984, pp.4-5). They attended school in Zurich under the supervision of Margaret Taylor, before being sent to school in Dresden from 1875-1876 together with their cousin Margaret Richmond (see Chapter 9). There, James wrote of Dorothy that “I have often been puzzled by her waywardness”, noting she had developed “much more self-control”, and that he was pleased by her interest in art as she “wants a darling pursuit to quiet her and drive her out of a certain waywardness” (ibid. p.5). Dorothy’s rebellious spirit and excellent education (the progressive Richmond family supported equal education for girls) provided the foundation for her later independent life. She studied at Bedford College for women and the Slade School of Art in London (1878–1880) before returning to Nelson in 1881, where James was elected to the Legislative Council. Dorothy lived with him, becoming art mistress at the recently established Nelson College for Girls in 1883, aged 22, resigning when they moved to Wellington in 1894, where she attended James during his declining health until his death in 1898. Left financially independent, Dorothy then returned to England (Paul 1996, pp.432-433).

In England, Dorothy stayed with the Shaens, unitarians and family friends, and with Constance (“Connie”) Charlotte Astley (1851-1935) at Arisaig in Scotland. The relationship between Richmond and Constance Astley, who was ten years older, seems to have begun in January 1898 in Wellington, when Astley was touring New Zealand with her lover Margaret Josephine Shaen (1854–1936).

Jill de Fresnes has edited and introduced a published version of Astley's “journal letters” describing this journey.^{viii} Despite referring to Astley and Richmond's “passionate friendship” (de Fresnes 1997, p.18), de Fresnes does not identify it as lesbian. Astley's family were prosperous English gentry, with many socialist, utopian, humanitarian and unitarian friends, including artist and socialist William Morris and his group, and Astley was educated in the classics, mathematics, literature, languages and basic science. The family lived at Arisaig House on Arisaig Island, Scotland; when Astley was twelve her mother died (of a bronchial ailment), and her father when she was eighteen. He left his estate equally to his children, including the daughters. Constance and her sister Gertrude moved to London, continued their education, including art classes, and supported women's suffrage and women's rights. They returned to Arisaig House in the 1880s, where they lived until Gertrude's marriage, and after this Constance lived there alone (de Fresnes 1997, pp.6–11). Astley, then, held progressive religious and feminist views, knew the classics, and probably knew Carpenter's work as well as Morris' (see Chapter 4).

Constance Astley's father, Francis Astley, was a friend of fellow unitarian William Shaen. William's eldest daughter, Margaret Shaen, was a strong temperance supporter as also a unitarian. Constance and Margaret became close friends, travelling together first to Europe and then making an extensive journey to New Zealand in 1897–1898 (ibid pp.10–11). Here, they spent time with the Richmond and Atkinson families, and though Shaen and Astley were lovers, the strong attraction between Richmond and Astley is evident from Astley's journal. During their visit Richmond's father died but, despite this sad event, the women were able to spend time together,^{ix} all three taking a return cruise on the *Isis* from Nelson to Tonga. Astley wrote

I found to my joy that Miss Dorothy Richmond was coming on the cruise...We retired to bed in a much more complete manner about 7p.m. D.R. on the floor, which she declared preferable to a downy couch if shared with C.C.A.^x

A later entry read

the Wellington boat Rotorua left in 2 hours, which meant a great rush for D.R. & me...Still...I had the great consolation of D.R.'s sweet company...She has the most beautiful grey eyes & one of the sweetest faces I have ever seen.^{xi}

The parting was not for long. She noted that Richmond was coming to Wellington,^{xii} where she could see her every day, though unfortunately it was difficult to be alone:

M. & I went up to call on the Maurice Richmonds & see Dolla...there seemed to be a constant succession of female visitors which was not favourable to peaceful intercourse.^{xiii}

At the end of April the women had to say goodbye; after their boat sailed

there was just time to go up & see Dolla before lunch...We were so exhausted by our exertions & emotions that we remained in a state of coma in the Music Room after dinner.^{xiv}

De Fresnes suggests that Shaen and Astley planned to live together at Arisaig after their return from New Zealand (De Fresnes 1997, p.18), but this did not eventuate. The following year, in 1899, Richmond travelled to Scotland to stay with Astley and Shaen. By 1901 letters to Richmond from her married sister Alla reveal that a complex love triangle had developed, between Richmond and Astley, Richmond and Hodgkins, and Astley and Shaen.

The relationship between Hodgkins and Richmond seems to have begun at Norman Garstin's 1901 art classes in Caudebec-en-Caux, France, when both were mature women, Hodgkins aged thirty-two and Richmond forty. The meeting was initiated by Richmond who wrote to Hodgkins "I think companionship doubles the pleasure and halves the sorrows of life" (Richmond 1901 in McCormick 1954, pp.58-59). After Garstin's school they travelled together through Europe, Hodgkins writing to her mother Rachel in July, "the most delightful part of it is that Miss Richmond is coming with me", and that "I am a lucky beggar to have her as a travelling companion" (Hodgkins 1993, pp.92-93). By August she was writing

Miss Richmond has decided not to go to England so we shall not lose sight of each other even for a few weeks. I have grown so fond of her, I don't know how I am ever going to let her go, she is one of those people whom you want always with you (ibid. p.94).

Describing Richmond to Kate Rattray in terms similar to those used by Richmond's other admirer Astley (see above), Hodgkins gushed that she was "the dearest woman with the most beautiful face and expression I think I have ever seen" (Hodgkins 1901 in McCormick 1954, p.58). She informed her mother that the other students called Richmond "The Divine Lady":

When I am particularly down Miss Richmond comes and tucks me up...[she] goes to England today it is very sad saying goodbye to a face like hers even for a short time. I wish you could see her...at night with a black dress with a crimson fichu[I] have insisted on her wearing it every night (Hodgkins 1993, p.96).

In November, Hodgkins confided to her sister Isabel that Richmond was

the dearest piece of perfection I have ever met and unlike most perfection not in the least tiring to live up to (Hodgkins 1993, p.104).

On their return from Europe, the two women lived together in Cornwall, but then had to “dwell sundered” while Hodgkins stayed in London with “Miss Robertson and Miss Cargill, two Dunedin friends” and Richmond traveled to Invernesshire, Scotland, (McCormick 1954, p.70), to stay with Astley again.

Letters to Dorothy Richmond

The letters are all sequentially numbered, except for a few special letters marked “Private”. Numbered letters were intended to be passed around the Richmond family circle and there are references to this extended readership,^{xv} that included Hodgkin’s sister Isabel Field’s family, where their mother Rachel Hodgkins now lived, after Richmond and Hodgkins established their relationship. The confirmation of a public distribution of letters is significant, explaining why these letters do not reveal explicit details of lesbian relationships.

Many of the surviving letters were written by Ann Elizabeth (“Alla”) Atkinson^{xvi} to Dorothy, who preserved them. Alla reputedly “acted as surrogate mother to her siblings” after their mother died (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.489), though only three years older than Dorothy, and seems to have been her main confidante. The letters marked “private”, which were not for general reading, suggest an inner circle of confidences about women’s love relationships.

In the following letter, Alla gossips to Dorothy about “Blanche” and her German “lady-husband”. Perhaps this term describes a lesbian category now lost (see Faderman 1994, p.viii, 1999, p.73).

Blanche & her German friend were on the Papanui...she rushed away to get lodgings for herself & friend at Wanganui without seeing all her relations...she looks well, but old rather & very gentle-eyed - she is a dear creature - we all feel rather burdened by the lady-husband.^{xvii}

From these letters, it appears that Alla approved of Dorothy's relationship with Hodgkins – “I am very glad you are finding you can make a friend of Miss Hodgkins”,

also making it clear that she was in regular correspondence with Astley: “What does Connie mean in her letter to me by saying that she is thankful you & Miss Hodgkins are thinking rather of Italy than Spain”, she asked Richmond^{xviii}. Later, she affirmed her support of Hodgkins as a companion:

I have been very much excited about Miss Hodgkins...I am so glad you are to be with Miss Hodgkins both from the human & the artistic point of view - I am sure you will blossom more with some appreciative artfriend than alone.^{xix}

Other family members were also in support of the relationship. According to Alla, “Uncle Arthur”^{xx} was pleased Richmond had been “called the divine lady” and he “understands everything”, saying that “so far this affair has been a great success we may say”.^{xxi}

A later unnumbered letter is marked “Special Extra Private”, and indicates Alla knew about the three-way relationship in Arisaig, with Hodgkins as a fourth participant in France. Shaen had been writing to Alla, attempting to gain her support to end the relationship between Dorothy and Astley for “health reasons”. Astley suffered a bronchial illness with suspected consumption. Alla feared that if Dorothy continued her “habit of getting into bed with Connie”, she might become infected. In this letter she encouraged Dorothy's relationship with Hodgkins, as a “healthier, saner, more manly life.”

Margaret's letter made me desperately anxious & sad because she tells me that you are not being...careful...she says she feels like a spy to be telling me but...as to that habit of getting into bed with Connie...you [said you] had given it up & promised not to take to it again - she thought she ought to tell me...& I feel very angry with dear Connie, for even wanting you to be so near her...I long to have you out of reach of Connie, when you show you can't be trusted - & my heart sank when I heard she was to follow you to Arles...[show] a little self control & common sense - & for Connie's own sake you must keep yourself in hand...it would be horrible for her to think she had passed this deadly thing onto you, whom she loves - I love you to have such a friend, yet I feel infinitely happier for you when you are away with Miss Hodgkins - it seems a healthier, saner, more manly life...I will finish off this private sheet and start again on another piece for more general reading.^{xxii}

Later, pleased that Dorothy had gone to Arles with Hodgkins, Alla wrote she was “so glad you and Miss Hodgkins are together”, but her response to the news that Astley had followed Dorothy to Arles was not enthusiastic, especially as Shaen did not go; she thought “you & Connie in conjunction at Arles were a mistake unless Margaret had been there”^{xxiii} However, in a later letter, Alla encourages letter writing between Astley and Dorothy, apparently contradicting her previous attempt to separate them, but perhaps as an alternative to visits.

I don't think you ought to think that Connie had better not write to you because it tires her - you don't believe that the great object of existence is just to keep alive - it is better than she should be tired in that way & have such pleasures as your correspondence...don't forget that it is better to live a short time & really live than to be shut away from all joys & work & keep alive perhaps a few years longer...I should not reproach myself that she enjoyed your visit too heartily - that is life to her.^{xxiv}

Again confirming the existence of two strands of correspondence, Alla wrote to Richmond that she had received “your two letters private & public”.^{xxv} In her next unnumbered letter marked “private”, Alla suggested it would assist matters “if one of you three would turn into a man” or “a fourth person” became involved. She again seemed to encourage Richmond and Astley’s friendship.

I am sorry you have all been making one another unhappy...I can quite see that it was rather tragic for poor M.J.S. too...it would solve the difficulty if one of you three would turn into a man - but I suppose there is no hope of that or even, what is more likely - if a fourth person, & he a man came onto the scene - I don't see why you should not all love one another, as you can't help it, without taking any notice of what the third person is doing - I feel really as if C.A.A.'s love for you was more that of a lover than her equally strong but less exciting love for M.J.S. - but Margaret feels more of a lover's love for Connie and that makes it a pain to her to see her give out to you what she does not give to her - & yet it does not mean that she is not faithful to Margaret or that it is anybody's fault - Also I think Margaret does not realize that it is better to live a full life & a short one than an empty one & a long one...I don't think Connie would endure anything like that, & yet that is what Margaret seems aiming at, when she says it tires C. to have you...let it tire her - it is life to the spirit of her...I know I think a feverish friendship does unfit you for daily work & of course I am quite against your coming into such personal contact as is physically harmful with Connie when she is ill, but otherwise I can't see how your being together can be anything but a good & a pleasure.^{xxvi}

The comment about “turning into a man” suggests familiarity with the discourse on this subject (see Chapter 4); Alla’s dislike of “feverish friendships” is reminiscent of Mary Richmond’s attitude to the Newnham College romances (Chapter 9). De Fresnes suggests Shaen appealed to Mary Richmond to help end the relationship between Richmond and Astley. Perhaps Shaen knew of Mary’s role with Margaret Richmond and her Newnham College lady lovers. Mary Richmond responded by writing directly to Astley, asking her “to take more care of Dolla for her family's sake”. De Fresnes calls Astley’s reply to Mary’s letter “defensive”, but I see it as a passionate response to someone she knew enjoyed lesbian relationships herself:

I of all people to be taking possession of and monopolising that beautiful heavenly creature? and my only right of claim being that her eye met mine just then - she who has a world of hearts to choose from?...Meantime she is not here but there, and that is not true either for she has been present with me ever since that day when I had to leave her in that anguish of suspense, and a glimmer of all too soon extinguished hope, and whether she comes or not, we grow daily nearer. Should we never meet

again I ought perhaps to rejoice, that I should seem then to her like the "far hills" which, as the Proverb has it, are the "blue ones". At any rate the "golden bond" can stretch the world's width without snapping and I cannot choose but hold her in my heart (de Fresnes 1997, p.19).

Astley remained at Arisaig for the rest of her life. Though she had kept journals for over thirty years, these ceased in 1902, a last page containing a postcard from Richmond to Astley from Land's End. Though Shaen spent several months each year with Astley, she never made Arisaig her home. A portrait of Richmond remained in the sitting-room for some years after Astley's death in 1935, but after Richmond returned to New Zealand in 1903, she and Astley did not meet again (ibid. p.19). However, Margaret Shaen and her sister Lily visited New Zealand in 1910 and perhaps it was Astley who made Richmond the gift of a cottage through Shaen at that time (see below).

Letters from Frances Hodgkins

How did Hodgkins react to Richmond's relationship with Astley? Writing to Richmond from France in 1902, Hodgkins asked

*Are you really coming on the 4th. It seems too good to be true. I was indeed sorry to hear of the return of Miss Astley's trouble [tuberculosis]...It does not look as if Scotland was quite the best place for her does it? Please give her my love...& tell her I didn't in the least grudge you to her. At first I felt a little furious & thought if I wrote to you at all I should begin it with a d-n...but slept over it & calmed down & decided to let matters take their own course...I am most comfortable **but lonely** – and I shall be very glad when I shall have you sitting opposite me again at meals...I don't see over much of Maud [Nickalls] nowadays. She is very much taken up with Miss Crompton (Hodgkins 1993, p.132, original emphasis).*

Hodgkins seemed anxious to reassure Richmond that her own friendship with Maud Nickalls was not a love affair ("nowadays?"), as Maud was involved with Miss Crompton. She told her mother that "Miss Richmond is still in Scotland - nursing her sick friend Miss Astley...It is horrid without her" (ibid. p.133), reporting later that "Miss Richmond came a week ago looking beautifully well & brown after her 2 months in Scotland...she hates the idea of my going back to N.Z. without her" (ibid. p.135). The following month she told her sister Isabel:

Miss R. and I go to London...& after that our ways be seporate [sic] - I don't know what I am going to do without her - we have taken a long time to consider what is best for us both...I shall be alone once more (ibid. p.139).

By 1903, Hodgkins was in Tangier where, in March, asked Richmond how did her letters "compare with Miss Astley's", commenting that

of course I know that you wld rather nurse one of her [Miss Astley's] empty envelopes than read the outpourings of my innermost soul - however I mustn't expect too much (ibid. p.156).

This indicates that despite good intentions, Hodgkins remained jealous about Richmond's relationship with Astley. A fortnight later, she appealed to Richmond

Come to Tetuan - come - catch the next steamer. cancel all engagements, chuck the studio let everything go to the winds only come without a moments delay...There is only one crumple in the rose leaf & that is that you are not here...but you must come (ibid. p.157).

Richmond did not come, but Hodgkins rejoined her in London a few weeks later, reporting to her mother that it was “very delightful to see Miss Richmond again”, and that they were “very comfy” with two bedrooms and “the use of Miss Weltons cosy sitting room” in what was “a sort of ladies club” (ibid. p.164). They lived there until returning to New Zealand together in December, where they established their studio on the corner of Lambton Quay and Bowen Street, Wellington, in a disused carriage house belonging to Alexander Turnbull (McCormick 1990, p.51) who was reputedly homosexual.^{xxvii} They gave joint exhibitions and also took pupils; one was Edith Kathleen Bendall, later Katherine Mansfield's lover (see Chapter 14). McCormick reports that Bendall told him that Hodgkins was “unconventional”, though “stimulating” as a teacher (McCormick 1954, pp.96–97), but he does not explain the nature of Hodgkins' unconventionality.

During this period, Hodgkins, now aged thirty-five, suddenly announced her engagement to English journalist and writer Thomas Boughton Wilby, a year younger than herself. She met him briefly on the ship *Ophir* during its short passage between England and Cairo, in November-December 1903. They became engaged by post a year later without meeting again (December 1904) and then broke it off in 1905 (McCormick 1954, pp.98–99; Gill 1993, pp.175–176). Hodgkins seems never to have met him again after their brief shipboard encounter. McCormick claims it was “one of the unhappiest periods of her life”, and that Hodgkins “sought in Miss Richmond's company the consolation of friendship and perhaps relief from the inquisitive eyes of a small city” (McCormick 1954, p.101). However, I think it more likely that this improbable engagement was one way to distract the “inquisitive eyes” from her relationship with Richmond. In addition, it may have been a response to problems in that relationship, such as Richmond's continuing interest in Astley. Whatever the case, the relationship

with Richmond did not hold Hodgkins in New Zealand and she left again in January 1906, writing to her mother after her arrival that she would

contrive to have someone with me till Miss Richmond comes, if she does come but I do not want to ask or persuade her. It is for her to decide & I think if I were in her place I should stay where I was (Hodgkins 1993, p.183).

In August she wrote of a new companion Miss Hill, calling her

a nice elderly woman...rather resembling Miss Richmond in face & manner & she and I have decided to join forces for a while (ibid. p.192).

As Hodgkins' letters were also shared around the family and with Richmond, this may be a message to Richmond about a new lover, especially the comment on Miss Hill's similar "manner" to Richmond. Further letters may exist which shed more light, but current evidence suggests their romance ended in 1906, when Richmond was forty-five and Hodgkins thirty-seven. In September of that year Hodgkins wrote to her mother

Miss Richmond says she will come when I say the word but I hesitate to ask her. I really believe she is happier in the simple country life she is now leading in Nelson (ibid. p.193).

Hodgkins returned to New Zealand seven years later in 1913, staying for a few months (McCormick 1990, pp.78-81), but it seems unlikely they resumed their love relationship.

Richmond kept the Bowen Street studio and continued teaching private pupils. From 1907 until her retirement in 1924, she taught at Fitzherbert Terrace School (Miss Baber's School), in Wellington, renamed Samuel Marsden Collegiate School for Girls in 1920. She received some recognition as an artist, serving terms on the Council of the NZ Academy of Fine Arts (Hurrell 1996, p.65, Paul 1996, p.432). She produced most of her work in her studio at 83A Hill Street, and at one above McGregor Wright's gallery on Lambton Quay where she moved in 1924, as well at her studio in York Bay (Reid 1984, p.14).

Margaret Shaen visited Richmond in 1910, she and her sister Lily buying a cottage at 10 Taungata Road, York Bay to live in during their stay. On their departure in January 1911, they gave Richmond the title deeds (Hurrell 1996, p.66, Reid 1984, p.18); she tellingly named the cottage Arisaig.^{xxviii} Probably the wealthy Astley paid for the cottage as a gift for Richmond..

In 1927 Richmond, aged sixty-eight, established a studio with the younger artist Helen Stewart (see Chapter 9), one of her “nieces”^{xxix}, suggesting they were part of the same lesbian friendship circle. She had family members in Taranaki, and was related to Monica Brewster, so had connections to Elsie Andrews’ circle (see Chapter 13). Richmond died at the home of a niece in North Terrace, Wellington on 16 April 1935, aged seventy-four, the same year as Astley. She found a way to live as a lesbian and work as an artist in New Zealand. Perhaps her experiences with Hodgkins in Europe decided her against the difficult life in exile that Hodgkins led and at forty-five she may have wanted a more comfortable and settled life in Wellington. With the knowing support of her sister Alla, and perhaps a discreet lesbian friendship circle where she could socialise with her cousin Mary and Maud England, Dorothy Richmond had little reason to live as an expatriate.

Like Richmond, Hodgkins had other lesbian relationships and friendships. Art dealer Lucy Wertheim supported Hodgkins financially and emotionally. McCormick calls her Hodgkins’ “wealthy Manchester friend” and reports that in the summer of 1929, while Hodgkins was in Sussex, she would arrive at the cottage with her chauffeur and in her “kindly, queenly manner whisk Frances off to her summer home on the south coast or her flat in Regent's Park” (McCormick 1990, p.109). However, Gill comments that although Werheim was

a generous benefactor...she ignored the boundaries Hodgkins had drawn and was sharply, even harshly, rebuffed. Hodgkins did not allow financial dependence to imply any other kind of dependence (Gill 1993, p.6).

Hodgkins’ most important friends were Dorothy Jane Saunders and Hannah Ritchie. She called Saunders by her middle name, “Jane”, perhaps to distinguish her from Dorothy Richmond. Art teachers at Manchester High School for Girls (ibid. p.322, n.21), they were the subjects of Hodgkins “Double Portrait”, 1922, which seems to emphasise individual independence within an open relationship, perhaps the result of Hodgkins becoming lovers with one or both women. She lived in Manchester for four years, between 1923 and 1927, while Ritchie and Saunders assisted her financially, helping her obtain paid work which allowed her to remain in England (McCormick 1954, p.207). The Manchester connection suggests exposure to Carpenter’s and other progressive ideas. Saunders remembered Hodgkins as “a wonderful friend, pouring out her knowledge and experience of life”^{xxx}, while Ritchie said “Frances was a friend to whom we felt we could speak our real feelings, but – not a chatter. It was real thoughts only, otherwise, be quiet”.^{xxxi}

Hodgkins met yet another Dorothy, Dorothy Selby, amateur painter and head of a secretarial college, described by McCormick as “generous, handsome, dependable” (ibid. p.124). Selby seems to have been in a relationship with art teacher Elsie Barling (Gill 1993, p.370, n.23). Barling said Hodgkins read widely and was particularly interested in films, explaining that “I think she gave me a more open mind altogether”, and that she had “met all sorts of interesting people through her”.^{xxxii} During the summer of 1927, at Treboul, Hodgkins, now aged fifty-eight, painted with her circle of lesbian and homosexual friends; Dorothy Selby and Elsie Barling, Hannah Ritchie and Jane Saunders, Cedric Morris and Arthur Lett Haines (McCormick 1990, pp.104-105). In fact, it appears that Hodgkins was part of creating these circles. Selby helped Hodgkins financially from this time, Hodgkins writing to her that

I was asleep when you slipped away silently this morning...and at once the house felt lonely...Impossible to thank you enough for the fat wad of notes - far too much - how generous! (Gill 1993, p.402).

As well as a benefactor, Selby became an important friend and confidante, in what I recognise as a typical lesbian friendship style. Hodgkins passed on lesbian gossip to Selby, a letter in 1931 describing Daphne du Maurier as Sir Gerald’s “rather beautiful son-daughter”, and

a rather disturbing feature in the extremely homely little village. She will wear male attire - very attractive but theatrical - wh. she is not, I believe, only merely literary. (ibid. p.446).

This letter seems to indicate an understood code – Daphne was not “theatrical”, i.e., lesbian, just literary or eccentric and though, she was a cross-dresser, Hodgkins did not think she was lesbian. Relationships in this private lesbian world were another subject of gossip. Hodgkins told Selby about Saunders and Ritchie, who appear to have ended their relationship by 1931, that

Jane Saunders (after she has de-janed herself from Hannah the Forlorn) wants to come and work with me but I can't take her on - I am...no longer equal to such a strain (ibid. p.442).

In 1933 she reported to Selby about Ritchie, who now appeared to have got over Saunders and found a German lover, writing that she had not “heard how Hannah & her lady German doctor are getting along”, and adding that she hoped the “lady doctor hasn't eaten poor Hannah” (ibid. p.459). Six years later, in 1939, the now seventy-year-old Hodgkins gossiped to Selby that Jane Saunders had now broken up with the girlfriend who had replaced Hannah Ritchie,

Jane's girl friend aged 40 has gone off to Italy with a younger girl friend aged 20...One of those infatuations difficult to explain & disastrous in its reactions - Jane however, is behaving well having done all she humanly can to save the situation has now faced up to it & is looking brighter and happier than I ever remember her...a bit of an actress perhaps (ibid. p.487).

Two years later Hodgkins wrote to Saunders commenting about her new friend (Elizabeth Shaw?), who appears to have been jealous of Hodgkins, “**Don't try to write** letters to me or strain on your leesh [sic] more than you can avoid” (ibid. p.520, original emphasis).

Hodgkins moved to Corfe Castle, Dorset, in 1941, writing to Saunders after Manchester was bombed, “I am going down to that rather Hellish bit Corfe Castle where AK [Amy Krauss] still remains God Bless her unbombed and unscarred” (ibid. p.510). She remained close to the potter until her death. McCormick suggests Krauss was “an old friend...and a resting place several times in the past” (McCormick 1954, pp.235–236). Perhaps they had once been, or still were, lovers.

Hodgkins and her friends may well have destroyed revealing letters. Aged seventy-seven, in 1946, Hodgkins wrote to Selby that “Amy is back again...I enclose her letter...**tear it up when read**” (Hodgkins 1993, p.568, original emphasis). Perhaps other letters met this fate. The paper trails that do remain suggest that Hodgkins was able to lead a lesbian life by living as an expatriate and becoming established as an artist and teacher through the emotional and financial support of overseas lesbian and homosexual art circles and networks.

ⁱ Transcript of an interview with Winifred Nicholson by June Opie, AG-583-19, p.17, Hocken Library.

ⁱⁱ Geoffrey Gorer studied with Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict (Gill 1993, p.427, n.26); they had a significant lesbian relationship (see Lapsley 1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Seven & Five Society was named for the seven painters and five sculptors who were members (Cooper 1986, p.152).

^{iv} Transcript of an interview with Sir Cedric Morris by June Opie, AG-583-18, p.2. Hocken Library.

^v Transcript of an interview with Arthur Lett Haines by June Opie, AG-583-18, p.4, Hocken Library.

^{vi} In 1930 Christopher Wood killed himself as a result of opium addiction, acquired during his homosexual relationship with Antonio de Gandarillos and encouraged by their friend Jean Cocteau (Cooper 1986, pp.140-142).

^{vii} Transcript of an interview with Geoffrey Gorer by June Opie, AG-583-18, pp.6-7 Hocken Library.

^{viii} Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”. I have used the typescript of the original “Journal Letters” for extracts and other information, Micro-MS-0920, typed transcript on microfilm, ATL.

^{ix} Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”, Wednesday, January 19, 1898, p.103

^x Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”, 6 April 1898, p.239. Astley refers to herself by her initials as “CCA”, to Shaen as “M”, and to Richmond as “DR”.

^{xi} Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”, 13 April 1898, p.246.

^{xii} Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”, 18 and 22 April 1898, p.249, p.252.

^{xiii} Constance Charlotte Astley, “Journal Letters 1897-1898”, 24 April 1898, p.254.

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- ^{xiv} Constance Charlotte Astley, "Journal Letters 1897-1898", 29 April 1898, p.257.
- ^{xv} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09, letters from Alla Richmond to Richmond Richmond 1901-1905.
- ^{xvi} Alla Richmond (1858-1916) married her cousin E. Tudor Atkinson in 1887. They lived in Otaki and Wellington (Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.489).
- ^{xvii} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09 No. XXIII July 1, 1901 p.4
- ^{xviii} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXVI September 3, 1901, p.5.
- ^{xix} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXV September 24, 1901, p.1.
- ^{xx} Arthur Atkinson, their maternal uncle.
- ^{xxi} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXV October 14, 1901, p.4.
- ^{xxii} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, November 26, 1901.
- ^{xxiii} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXXI, December 18, 1901 pp.1-4.
- ^{xxiv} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXXIII January 20, 1902 p.5.
- ^{xxv} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, No. XXXV March 6, 1902 p.1.
- ^{xxvi} Atkinson Papers, MS Papers 4863-09, 13 March 1902.
- ^{xxvii} For a discussion of Alexander Turnbull's homosexuality see *Campaign*, 25 and 30, 1978; note also Eldred-Grigg 1984, p.170.
- ^{xxviii} Reid mistakenly claims this was "after the Shaen's home in Scotland" (Reid 1984, p.18); her paper was written prior to the publication of de Fresnes (1997) on Astley.
- ^{xxix} Most of Richmond's nieces were "actually Atkinson, Richmond and Hursthouse cousins of varying degree" (Reid 1984, p.18).
- ^{xxx} Transcript of an interview with Jane Saunders, by June Opie, AG-583-18, p.1. Hocken Library.
- ^{xxxi} Transcript of an interview with Hannah Ritchie, by June Opie, AG-583-18, p.6. Hocken Library.
- ^{xxxii} Transcript of an interview with Elsie Barling by June Opie, AG-583-18, p.5. Hocken Library.

Chapter 11

Consort and mother

Mary Ursula Bethell (1874–1945) and Henrietta Dorothea “Effie” Pollen (1879–1934)

Introduction and background

The lesbian relationship of the poet Ursula Bethell and the woman she called her “consort”, Effie Pollen, lasted over thirty years. The women lived as expatriates and did not return to live in New Zealand until they were in their forties and able to establish an independent and private domestic life, probably after a conventionally accepted marriageable age. Bethell’s wealth created an idyllic context for the relationship, with their domestic and creative life protected by her class position in the affluent Christchurch suburb of Cashmere. Bethell wrote most of her poetry during the period of her relationship with Pollen, describing their home, garden and life together, and was devastated by Pollen’s death in 1934.

Their relationship has been presented by some biographers as “platonic” and “maternal”, and Bethell herself sometimes used the term “maternal” to explain her feelings. However, from the early twentieth century there was an influential “homosexual-maternal” discourse explaining lesbianism (see, for example, de Lauretis 1994, pp.149–202) and the well-educated and travelled Bethell must have been familiar with this material. Bethell’s expression “maternal constituent”, then, may function similarly to expressions like spinster, old maid, bluestocking and lady-husband in the previous chapters, as another “lost” category of lesbian relationships (see Faderman 1994, p.viii, 1999, p.73).

Ursula Bethell was the first child of Isabel and Richard Bethell, born in Surrey on 6 October 1874. The family returned to New Zealand the following year, living at Nelson, where her brother Marmaduke was born, and then at Rangiora, where her sister Rhoda was born, and where their father Richard died in 1882, leaving the family moderately wealthy.

Bethell attended Christchurch Girls' High School, and was then educated overseas, at Miss Soulsby's School, in Oxford, England, and at a Swiss school in Nyon, Lake Geneva, returning to New Zealand at the age of eighteen, in 1892. She did social work in the Christchurch Anglican diocese until her second trip to England in 1895, when she studied painting in Geneva and music in Dresden, placing her in this city during the same period as the Richmonds. She joined the Grey Ladies, an Anglican women's community in London, where she met Effie Pollen during 1905, when she was thirty-one and Pollen was twenty-six. When Pollen returned to New Zealand, Bethell followed and from 1910 lived with her mother at 47 Webb Street, St Albans, Christchurch, where she continued work in the parish. She returned to London for wartime work from 1914 to 1918, the two women settling back in Christchurch from 1919, when Bethell was forty-five and Pollen forty. Bethell purchased Rise Cottage, 36 Westenra Terrace, on the Cashmere Hills, in 1924 (Laura 1998, Holcroft 1975, pp.4–12). At these ages, it was probably accepted among family and friends that they were unlikely to marry and, as two spinster ladies, they could live together without comment. The house was not far from where Bethell's mother Isabel lived until her death in 1927,ⁱ and was purchased by Bethell aloneⁱⁱ; the couple did not remain living with Mrs. Bethell. They lived at Rise Cottage until Pollen's death in 1934, when Bethell moved back to 47 Webb Street, Christchurch, until her death from cancer of the right cheekbone on 15 January 1945. She was buried in the Bethell family grave at Rangiora.ⁱⁱⁱ

Effie Pollen was the daughter of Dr Henry Pollen from Ireland and Katherine Bourke from Napier, with one younger sister Dorothy. The family lived in Gisborne, where Effie was born, and where Dr. Pollen practised medicine and started the local hospital, later moving to Wellington where he established his medical practice and residence at 10-12 Boulcott Street. Effie's mother, Katherine, died in 1894 at the age of forty when Effie was only fifteen, from cancer of the stomach^{iv} and Dr Pollen died during the influenza epidemic in 1918.^v They were buried in the family plot at Karori Cemetery, in Wellington.^{vi} Effie was buried here following her death from a brain hemorrhage on 8 November 1934, aged fifty-five.^{vii} Despite their thirty-year relationship, there seem to have been family expectations that each would lie in her respective family plot.

Stories about Bethell and Pollen

The New Zealand literary magazine *Landfall* published "memories" of Ursula Bethell by several male writers in 1948: H.C.D.Somerses, D'Arcy Cresswell, M.H.Holcroft,

John Summers and L.G.Whitehead. Somerset described Bethell and Pollen as “different in appearance and outlook”, as Bethell was “tall and slight with patient, sensitive, almost austere features”, and Pollen “full of nimble warmth with rosy cheeks and jet black hair”. Pollen was “the practical one, caring for the home and the cooking and pretending to think nothing of philosophy or flower gardening”, while Bethell “made a good show of despising cookery books and rows of vegetables”. Somerset describes one instance where Pollen “slipped away into the kitchen” while Bethell and “varied company assembled” were engaged in “abstruse” conversation. She spent the time bottling a whole shelf of apricots, showing them to the visitors and explaining that this was “my idea of a working hypothesis” (Somerset et al. 1948, p.278, original emphasis). Holcroft describes Bethell as “a companion so unobtrusive that I did not suspect the depth and strength of her relationship with Miss Bethell”, explaining how she “dispensed the tea and cakes, chatted brightly and amiably” and then disappeared, leaving Holcroft and the others to talk. He admits that he did not “understand Ursula Bethell”, because there is “much in every life that is hidden from us” (ibid. pp.285–289).

Cresswell (who was homosexual, see Chapter 6), believed Bethell “always seemed to be alone when I went there, but in fact she had a companion whom I think I never met”. Afterwards when “this other woman died” (he does not name Pollen), he was “astonished to learn of the profound friendship there was between them”, as there were “spiritual depths in that house of which I had known nothing”. He thought “the house was withdrawn, reserved; so were its occupants, one of them strangely so”. Describing Bethell as “quiet, rugged, darkly-brooding” and an “emigrant gardener”, he revealingly adds, “I don't believe I ever saw her. I think she was short and dark, a bit grey. I'm not sure. Women are hard to see, they disappear so into their clothes. Perhaps it's as well” (ibid. pp.282–283).

In a later critical study, Holcroft argues Bethell and Pollen's relationship was not lesbian, citing as evidence a letter Bethell wrote to him shortly after Pollen's death, containing two statements he regards as “significant”. She described her feelings for Pollen as “prevailing maternal” adding, “They are mistaken who think that such relationships are only known when physically based”. Describing Pollen as “the practical one” who cooked, bottled fruit, and drove their four-cylinder Essex motorcar, Holcroft suggested she was Bethell's “companion” in the “narrower meaning” of an

unmarried woman who lives with another woman “to keep her company, and perform light duties, in return for accommodation” (Holcroft 1975, p.13).

Writing on Bethell and “her women friends”, Rosemary Brewer admits the “love we have for our women intimates may be the most intense and enduring of our lives”, asserting that “sometimes it is expressed sexually, most often it is not”. She insists that all Bethell’s friendships were “platonic”, echoing Holcroft’s claim that Pollen was originally a lady’s companion, and asserting that when “the prosperous Bethell women, Ursula, Rhoda and their mother” shared a house in Hampstead, London in 1906–1908, they invited Pollen to live with them, to help “Ursula keep house” (Brewer 1996, p.68).

In his introductory essay to a collection of her poetry, Vincent O’Sullivan describes Pollen as “a young New Zealand woman who became the centre of [Bethell’s] affections for the rest of her life” (O’Sullivan 1997, p.xi). He mentions Bethell’s “distress” on the anniversaries of Pollen’s death, citing a letter she wrote in 1936 to Eileen Duggan (see Chapter 9), where she explained “Now I am a tree struck by lightning – dead. I can think things but not feel them...all joy is lost” (ibid. p.xxi), without explaining why she should have been so grief-stricken. Anne Else (1985), in an article on the treatment of women poets, was the first writer to acknowledge that Bethell was lesbian. Janet Charman addressed Bethell and Pollen’s relationship as lesbian, suggesting that “blurring their precise personal status permitted Bethell to achieve and maintain the unorthodox friendship”. Commenting on Bethell’s first collection, published under the pseudonym “Evelyn Hayes”, Charman suggests she also blurred “her identity as an author” enabling her to describe their relationship “as a marriage” in these pseudonymous poems, demonstrating that this was indeed “the love that dare not speak its name” (Charman 1998, p.97). Though O’Sullivan notes that in a “small community there was no secret as to who the author was” (O’Sullivan 1997, p.xiii), Charman points out that though readers might have wondered about the shifting masculinity and femininity of “Evelyn Hayes” in these poems, and how this affected the “life and work of Ursula Bethell the well-to-do Anglican spinster”, no-one challenged Bethell. However “allowing her poems into public view at all”, suggests Charman, meant that “the risk of identification as a lesbian was always a possibility” (ibid. p.100). She concludes that Bethell “constructed a satisfactory path through the homophobia of her own time”, and that she is now “entitled to recognition as a lesbian” (ibid. p.105).

Bethell and Pollen's relationship

In 1905 Effie Pollen and her sister sailed to England^{viii}, where she became involved with Ursula Bethell, living with the Bethell family. However, she did not need to do this, as Dr Pollen had a prosperous medical practice in Wellington, which continued until his death in 1918. There is no evidence that Pollen needed to become a housekeeper or "lady's companion" in order to support herself and it is unlikely that this was the reason she moved in with Bethell. It is more probable that, once Bethell and Pollen began a lesbian relationship, they decided that the best way for them to live together would be for Pollen to live with the Bethell family. However, the Bethell family may have presented Pollen to others as Bethell's "lady's companion", as a recognised relationship and a way to explain why they lived together.

The life they subsequently lived together, in their home at Rise Cottage, is described by Bethell in her poetry. In "Grace" she calls Pollen her "little Raven"

*I have a little Raven
Who brings me my dinner,
Her tresses are raven,
Her tresses are raven,
She brings me my dinner –
But not by a brook.
She feeds me, she scolds me,
She scolds me, she feeds me,
I'm a hungry old sinner,
She brings me my dinner,
She cooks it in the kitchen
Beside a cookery book.
(Bethell 1997, pp.3-4).*

"Little Raven" was a famously "lively" racing pony of the 1890s and perhaps Bethell's pet-name for Pollen was based on this characteristic.^{ix} The activities expressed in the poem suggest energy and liveliness; "the hungry old sinner" a reference to a stereotypical New Zealand masculinity, "scolded" by the "consort" in the poem "Discipline". Pollen seems to have determined the pace of life at Rise Cottage.

*I said: I will go into the garden and consider roses;
I will observe the deployment of their petals,
And compare one variety with another.
But I was made to sit down and scrape potatoes.*

*The morning's rosebuds passed by unattended,
While I sat bound to monotonous kitchen industry.
Howbeit the heart of my consort was exhilarated,
And for virtuous renunciation I received praise.*

*The taste of the potatoes was satisfactory
With a sprig of fresh mint, dairy butter, and very young green peas.
(ibid. p.9).*

Pollen seems to have taken a practical and cheerful approach to life. Bethell wrote,

*my darling announced one day that as for her she couldn't see anything in life,
which consists of doing what you didn't want to do, and going without what you
require, and she just didn't agree with Creation!*^x

This suggests that her ideas on lesbianism were positive. Perhaps Pollen was influenced by romantic evangelicalism and other forms of radical Christian thinking that did not regard any loving relationship as sinful (Sahli 1979, p.26). Probably Bethell held similar views, with religious ideas in harmony with their relationship. The comment on “what you require” suggests they may have held modern ideas on health and sexuality and could have thought lesbianism was either inborn, or due to unchangeable psychological causes.

Though they may have been positive about their relationship in private, the women discreetly blurred, as Charman suggests, their domestic arrangements. While guarding their privacy, they invited friends to visit, including homosexual men and lesbians. The bisexual artist Toss Woollaston^{xi} was a friend and, in an interview^{xii} relates how his landlady asked Bethell, as she had been involved in social work, “to take an interest in this young man”. Together with the wealthy homosexual poet Charles Brasch^{xiii}, Bethell obtained a scholarship for Woollaston to attend art school, which he supplemented through gardening jobs. When homosexual poet Walter D'Arcy Cresswell visited in 1932 Bethell also invited Woollaston. Cresswell arrived and “read in her library”. Soon Bethell emerged, “clad in a linen jacket and breeches for wood chopping”. Then, said Woollaston, “Effie Dorothea Henrietta Pollen, the co-inhabitant of the cottage, appeared”, telling Bethell “when you come out of your wood-chopping dream will you come and consult what we are going to have for lunch”. Woollaston gave Pollen’s name in full, chuckling as if there were a private joke he did not share with listeners.

After lunch they drank “china tea...talking and listening”, until Woollaston and Cresswell left together.^{xiv} Later, Cresswell denied ever meeting visitors at Bethell’s house, seemingly disinclined to mention Woollaston, though admitted meeting Ngaio Marsh^{xv} there, referring to her as “the brilliant, artful, antipodean Pythoness” (Somerset et al. 1948, pp. 282–283). Woollaston thought Pollen was present for lunch, but

Cresswell denied this, claiming, “it seemed we weren't supposed to meet”. She may have been present and he did not “see” her or, if she was absent, perhaps they were worried Cresswell would recognise their relationship was lesbian if he met Pollen, and could not be trusted to keep this confidential. They would have known Cresswell was homosexual and could have regarded him as unreliable, because of the 1920 Wanganui scandal (Chapter 6).

Woollaston described an incident when his landlady gave him a jar of cream for the “ladies at Rise Cottage”. He knew one “ought not to visit them without it being arranged and expected”, so felt nervous at the “extremely active silence coming through the pores of the front door”. The door opened and a “voice whispered loudly – ‘who is it?’ ”, while another whispered, “I don't know - are you expecting anybody?” answered by “No, are you?” and then a “powerful silence”. Finally, the door opened and he saw “a hat being put on a head in preparation for saying ‘we're just going out’ ”. When they realized it was Woollaston, Bethell said “Oh, it's you is it... I suppose I'd better be nice to you. Come in”.^{xvi} Pakeha middle-class urban etiquette of the time enabled domestic privacy, as calling on people unexpectedly, prying or asking personal questions were considered impolite, and lesbian couples like Bethell and Pollen benefited from this convention.^{xvii}

One close friend was Woollaston's lover Rodney Kennedy (1909–1989)^{xviii}, also a friend of Charles Brasch. Kennedy was a flamboyant and entertaining man, of whom Brasch wrote “Watch him, this Puck of ours” (Garrity et al. 1990. p.3). Kennedy worked as a stage-set and costume designer with Ngaio Marsh and the Canterbury Players, was imprisoned as a conscientious objector during WW2, became a medical artist, was involved with the Workers' Educational Association and gave “flamboyant parties” at his home in Dunedin (ibid). After her bereavement, Bethell corresponded extensively with Kennedy. Writing to him about “personal” matters, she confirmed,

I am sure that any paragraph composed by you would be reticent & in good taste...Being a Victorian...I can never understand how people part with their privacy so readily. That is, private people. The great, who are in the public eye, have to do so - but why rush before the curtain!^{xix}

Another story from Woollaston, relates to the portrait he painted of Bethell in 1938, when she stayed at his rented cottage near Scarborough, Christchurch.^{xx} Woollaston reported that Bethell felt “doubtful” about this portrait, complaining it “was a bit mannish and not quite the right thing to have painted of her”. Woollaston thought that though she was “a very strong woman...she didn't want to appear as strong as she was”.

He seemed amused that he had painted Bethell as he saw her privately, and that she did not want to appear “mannish” in a painting that might be exhibited publicly.^{xxi}

A few days after Bethell's sixtieth birthday, in October 1934, Pollen complained of severe headaches, went to bed, and died three weeks later. Grief-stricken, Bethell could not bear to remain in their cottage and moved into the St Albans house she had previously given to the Anglican church for training women social workers (Holcroft 1975, p.10).

Despite the private nature of their relationship, the distraught Bethell wrote openly of her grief for Pollen, in letters and in the “Six Memorial Poems”, composed on the anniversaries of Pollen's death. The poems were not intended for publication, though she sent copies to friends (O'Sullivan 1997, p.xxi, p.107). They were not published until five years after her own death. In her first memorial poem, “October 1935”, Bethell wrote

*The green has come back, the spring green, the new green,
Darling, the young green upon the field willows,
And the gorse on the wild hills was never so yellow,
Together, together, past years we have looked on the scene. [...]*

*You were laughter, my liking, and frolic, my lost one,
I must dissemble and smile still for your sake,
Now that I know how spring time is heart-break,
Now you have left me to look upon all that is lovely, alone.
(Bethell 1950, p.99).*

As the second anniversary of Pollen's death approached, Bethell wrote to Kennedy that

The loneliness closed round me again to which I am growing accustomed and only sometimes dare to think of the years when everything was shared. ...I am not proud, Rodney, of all this sadness of looking back; I think it is limiting God, because it is as good as saying that His resources have run out, that He can't do as much again, that something uniquely beautiful has perished - I don't really hold with that – but...it does seem as if this darkness were something I have to endure.^{xxii}

She thought, too, that though it was “very sad settling my things alone”, she could not go on in a “muddle”, and that her “lost friend” would “rather have me found in pleasing surroundings so I shall have to go on with it to please her”.^{xxiii} In the second memorial poem, “November 1936”, Bethell wrote that she had tried to brighten up the Webb Street house:

*Today I trimmed my lonely dwelling place with flowers;
Memories ask garlands;
I see you, darling,*

Dispose deft-handed, your bright bunches in that happy home of ours. [...]

*Because the years to months diminish, days to hours,
And love is stronger
Than death's anger
I have adorned today, alone, my brief abiding place with flowers.*
(ibid. p.99).

John Summers thought Bethell could not feel “God's forgiveness for those impulsive moods of hers which had cast a shadow over her memory of their companionship” (Somerset et al. 1948, p.293). Bethell herself felt she had never appreciated Pollen enough. As the third anniversary approached she wrote to Kennedy, “the utter devotion and love of an exquisite person was squandered daily, hourly on me”, adding that for “these three years I have been waiting to know what to do with this desolation”. The first task “was to go on living without tenderness, without joy, without fun, without sharing, needed by no-one...and going deep into the bitter knowledge of how much more I might have given”. She warned Kennedy that if one offers everything to God, then “know what you are doing”, because if God takes it, “you are left in great darkness and dread”. Deciding to remain at home for this anniversary she wrote, “Perhaps I ought to stay put now, though my impulse is to get away for Race Week, that week she lay dying.”^{xxiv} Her third memorial poem, “November 1937”, on the Webb Street garden, mourns, “Left with all this, I lack what made it mine” (Bethell 1950, p.100).

For the fourth anniversary of Pollen's death, Bethell visited the Pollen family grave at Karori Cemetery, Wellington, where she had previously been with her lover, now also buried there. In “For November 1938” she wrote “Dearest, these four years I have been consenting to live onwards alone” (ibid.p.101), explaining in a letter to Kennedy that though they did not visit the Pollen family grave often, they “always meant to go back”. Now, the thought of going there

without the companion renews the desolation. I have no superstitious feelings about cemeteries, but it will be something to do on that 8th of November, when she was caught away, to go out & put a bunch of flowers beside her name.

The fifth memorial poem, “November 1939”, written at Akaroa, a seaside town an hour from Christchurch on Banks' Peninsula, explains

*Once again, my darling, it is come, the time you died,
And on this quiet harbour once again I look [...]*

*Return I now to join a casual throng. No more
Rounding, alone, a coign of the sea-scalloped track
Shall I, surprised, perceive my dear, with eager pace
Coming to meet me, and with eager look of love,*

*And go companioned; nor may I ask to know
Such cherished company, such tender love again. [...]
(ibid.p.102)*

Bethell told Kennedy there were “many reminders in Akaroa, where we used to come together, but it is so quiet and beautiful, it is healing”.^{xxv} However, in the sixth and final poem, “Spring 1940”, written in Christchurch, she again mourned the coming of spring, and the anniversary of Pollen’s death, asking God,

*Match Spring with vision, Spirit of Beauty, bring
With your persuasive love to the inward eye awakening,
Lest looking on this life to count what time has taken
I cannot bear the pain.
(ibid.p.103).*

Holcroft thought these poems “remarkably revealing for a woman as reticent as Ursula” (Holcroft 1975, p.13). Soon after Pollen’s death, she wrote to him that it was

*a complete shattering of my life; from her I have had love, tenderness, &
understanding for 30 years, & close and happy companionship...in this house for 10
years. I shall not want another home on this planet.*

Bethell may have regretted writing this revealing letter, which is perhaps why she wrote to Holcroft again, “a few weeks later”, explaining that her feeling for “Miss Pollen” was “prevailing maternal”, and adding, “They are mistaken who think that such relationships are only known when physically based” (ibid.pp.13-14).

Bethell would certainly have disapproved of relationships that were only sexually based. Like many women, she probably thought relationships should be based on love and commitment. This is not the same thing as believing that sexual passion has no place within a committed relationship. Bethell wrote to Kennedy that if one “has an ardent wish, in a childlike and sensitive heart to give another an immense pleasure - it can't help being a hurt if the pleasure doesn't come off. I loved to watch her joy when she was quite sure that it had”.^{xxvi} This might well be read as a sexual reference, and to the delight of giving a lover sexual pleasure. Further, her statement that people were mistaken who thought relationships that were not physical were not “known”, might be interpreted as “physical” meaning genital sex in the sense of heterosexual intercourse involving a penis, and “knowing” in the Biblical sense of carnality, and thus an affirmation that their lesbian relationship was indeed sexual and “known”, despite “the lack” of a penis.

The “maternal constituent”

Bethell’s description of her feelings for Pollen as “prevailingly maternal” suggests that she saw this as a feature of their loving relationship, probably because maternal love acceptably permitted physical expression and emotional connection between women.

She used the term in a letter to Kennedy, explaining

I have had everything in my life, and then had all taken quickly away - enough given to make one hungrier and thirstier than before... The last love was maternal, which means so unspeakably much to a woman.^{xxvii}

Like Reinstein’s friends (Kennedy 1996), Bethell’s circle may not have specifically named lesbianism. They may have used “maternal” as their code for a category understood to mean love relationships between women (see Faderman 1994, p.viii, 1999, p.73). Bethell was familiar with the progressive writers of her time. O’Sullivan believes “it was their shared debt to the Bible” that drew her to “so different a mind as Walt Whitman” (O’Sullivan 1997, p.xviii), apparently unaware of his significance for early twentieth-century comrades and lovers. She was “always waiting for ‘ocean-mail’” (Holcroft 1975, p.17), and subscribed to the English feminist paper *Time & Tide*, where she would have read articles on sexuality, including Brittain’s report of *The Well of Loneliness* trial (see Chapter 5). She gave Kennedy books by Virginia Woolf, commenting to him in a letter about Oscar Wilde’s writing.^{xxviii} She must certainly, like other educated people of the day, have been familiar with Wilde’s views on the love of an older person for a younger of the same sex (Hyde 1972). In a reference to Sappho, whom she had not read, Bethell told Kennedy

I have only a notion from schooldays that she was lamentable! and perhaps not quite respectable? or is that a mistake? I confess that I wondered whether D'arcy had ever read her^{xxix}... In my youth my notion was Greek Classic Dignity Restraint but later learnt how very unrestrained they really must have been.^{xxx}

This affirms that she had some knowledge of the classical literature on homosexuality, which also included references to same-sex relations between older lovers and their younger beloveds. The well-read Bethell kept “letters from England, clippings from *The Times* supplements, snippets from newspapers of all sorts...book reviews, pamphlets, books everybody ought to read”, welcomed “the new enthusiasm that was abroad in religion, in adult education, in the Little Theatres” (Somerset et al 1948, p.276), and had “a library of noble proportions” (ibid. p.285). Her references to the maternal indicate her familiarity with the new psychological theories of lesbianism, which she may well have preferred to the older ideas of sexual inversion, given her dislike of appearing “mannish” in Woollaston’s portrait. Popular psychological theories of the time included

the “maternal-homosexual”. Freud had suggested that homosexuality was caused by “a certain arrest of sexual development” (Freud 1903 in Abelove 1993, p.381). His followers theorised lesbianism as a desire for “the mother” (Lampl-de Groot 1928 in de Lauretis 1994, p.55), or even a “return to the mother” (Deutsch 1935 in de Lauretis 1994, p.61). Many later bizarre and sexist pre-1970 theories continued the theme. Caprio associated lesbianism with immature “masturbation”, claiming cunnilingus was “the equivalent of breast sucking” (Caprio 1955, p.22), and that though “mannish lesbians” preferred “feminine” women partners, they “under the disguise of the husband-wife relationship...act the child-mother relationship” (ibid. p.305), while Edmund Bergler thought that lesbians experience female masochism through “unresolved maternal conflict...related to the lesbian’s presumed inability to separate from her mother’s breast” (Bergler 1956 in Browning 1984, p.16).

Charlotte Wolff, more sympathetically, argued for the naturalness of homosexuality in women, based on Freud’s ideas, though rejecting his concept of the Oedipus complex. She thought the strong love of the child for the mother played a more important part in “the girl’s psychosexual development than in that of the boy” (Wolff 1973, p.51), meaning “all human beings are throughout their life governed by an emotional matriarchate” (ibid. p.53) and that “emotional incest with the mother is indeed the very essence of lesbianism”(ibid. p.60). Gluckman (1967) described the “Moms and Bebs” relationships at a Maori girls’ school, identifying them as lesbian. Other lesbians have also acted out mother-daughter or even mother-son relationships, which include sexual passions. Bethell’s contemporary, Radclyffe Hall used child imagery in her erotic letters to Evgenia Souline, telling her that

since you cannot give me a child you must sometimes become...the little child for who I so much long! ...my little child - please take me in your arms...please tell me that you want me as I want you, and then kiss me [the] way I taught you to kiss, even though you were a backward pupil! (Glasgow 1997, p.54).

In Bethell and Pollen’s relationship, did Bethell regard herself as baby or mother? She was not actually the main “mother”, as Pollen did the main mothering and looking after, doing the housework as well as driving the car (Somerset et al. 1948, p.278, p.289), as did Alice B.Toklas in her relationship with Gertrude Stein. Toklas even referred to Stein as “Baby”, Marianne DeKoven suggesting, “the fact that she was Baby needn’t undermine her power as long as Mama was also subservient wife” (DeKoven in Benstock 1987, p.188). Virginia Woolf wrote that Vita Sackville-West “lavishes on me the maternal protection which, for some reason, is what I have always most wished

from everyone”. (Woolf 1980). Woolf probably had her only sexual relationship with Vita, rather than with her other “mother”, Leonard Woolf.

Maternal feelings do not preclude sexual passion, and lesbian relationships are variously performed. Holcroft and Brewer’s arguments are unconvincing when considered in the light of the above discourse. For earlier generations of psychologists, Bethell’s description of her feelings for other adult women as maternal would have been regarded as proof that she was a lesbian.

Kathleen Taylor and the encouragement of heterosexual marriage

Bethell favoured Woollaston’s marriage to Edith Alexander, to Kennedy’s distress. Her support was typical in a homosexual generation who thought that if people had a chance to lead “normal” lives they should do so.^{xxxii} She wrote to Kennedy “Toss says he shall be married in Christchurch and you must be there. Of course you must!...I’m all in favour of his plans”.^{xxxiii} The following month she chastised him, apparently because he was upset about the marriage, advising him that Edith could also be his friend and encouraging him to accept the marriage. She explained that losing a partner to someone else is not as terrible as losing them to death, as has happened to her.

when its two happy people who go, one can give them to each other - there they are tangible, concrete, alive - Not like this goneawayness of death. In spite of all one's faith and hope, in spite of the giving back to old impulse, the darkness that rises up and quenches every thing is terrible sometimes.^{xxxiii}

Later, after Woollaston and Edith visited, Bethell wrote to Kennedy,

It was so delightful having those two happy ones. I thought I should feel lonelier then ever - But it has left a kind of peace I had not before...I would say this about Toss and Edith, that I for my part believe that she has been given to the one who needed her most.^{xxxiv}

Bethell and Kennedy quarrelled about “things” which she did not “want to talk about”, including Kennedy’s relationship with Woollaston and his Dunedin friendships.

I was 'stupidly cruel' you have said...I did not want to talk about those things & my feeling for you at the time was entirely kind...I cannot at the moment remember anything I ought to withdraw, except perhaps some impertinent criticism of your friends...I probably did wrong to intervene about a relationship where I do not belong - but did so with good intentions and in the hope of helping you not to make mistakes.^{xxxv}

Kennedy grieved for the breakup of his relationship and Woollaston’s marriage, and remained jealous of Woollaston’s relationships with women.^{xxxvi} Bethell’s letter refers to her criticism of Kennedy’s friends. He may well have been acting without “restraint”

after the break-up, and Bethell would undoubtedly have disapproved of the flamboyant homosexuality, excessive drinking and “physically based” casual sex, which reportedly took place in Kennedy’s homosexual circles in Dunedin.^{xxxvii}

Bethell also appears to have encouraged the marriage of Kathleen Taylor to Merlin Davies. She met Taylor, a teacher, in 1941 when she was already sixty-six and Taylor in her early twenties. This relationship may have been “platonic”, though Bethell's letters to Taylor are passionate and loving and, significantly, she did not write further despairing memorial poems about Pollen after meeting Taylor. Bethell may have thought that God had managed to do “as much again”, when Taylor came to live at Webb Street. However, two years later, in December 1943, Taylor married Davies and he moved into the house.

Bethell wrote to Taylor that it was “curiously natural to have you about - Katya, I felt it almost from the first”, and later that she had “ventured to put in my prayer - seeing that life was going on - that, if it were possible, three things might come to me again - love, & poetry, & a home”. Then, she adds, “how strangely and unexpectedly your dear little love came!”, comparing it to “my Effie coming 37 years ago”, because

before I knew her I felt sorry about her being lonely... Similarly, I didn't take you in at all the first evening. I asked you to come again because Paul said you were lonely in yr. lodging & I asked him whether you wd. care to come - The second time I remember seeing that you were a very right-minded young woman! & then I was charmed by your being hungry! - like a boy.^{xxxviii}

Bethell’s attraction to Taylor’s boyish and youthful hunger (maybe for food, and maybe referring to other urgent physical needs), suggests a mother-son attraction, if their relationship is to be called “maternal”. Brewer (1996) bases her claim that all Bethell 's friendships with women were platonic and maternal mainly on the relationship with Taylor. Given their forty-year age difference, their relationship may not have been particularly, if at all, sexual. Or, because of her enduring love for Pollen, Bethell may well have regarded subsequent physical relationships as faithless to her memory. A letter, written to Taylor on her honeymoon with Davies and interpreted by Brewer as referring to Bethell’s “life-long celibacy” (Brewer 1996, p.69), can instead be read as a comment on heterosexuality.

Not that it's everything, this two-sided sexuality. I think my poetry shows that pretty clearly, don't you - There was peace & happiness (for all the blemishes) at Rise Cottage, and fun, such fun! & you don't have fun without peace - Lots of anxiety too, & therein perhaps the maternal constituent was having its day.^{xxxix}

What other kind of letter could Bethell have written to Taylor on her honeymoon? The expression “maternal constituent” could obliquely refer to a private lesbian relationship. Davies might have been expected to read letters received by his wife on honeymoon, and the letter constructed with this in mind. Bethell’s comment on “Two-sided sexuality”, i.e., male and female heterosexuality or sexuality between two different sexes or sides, her point that this is not “everything”, and her reference to Rise Cottage, affirms Bethell’s own same-sex relationship with Pollen, lesbianism perhaps providing more “peace & happiness” and “fun” than “two-sided” heterosexual relationships. Her remark that “the maternal constituent” caused “anxiety” may mean that she thought her “maternal” feelings for Pollen and later Taylor made her feel passionate, protective, possessive – and stressed because of Taylor’s marriage. Bethell wrote to Kennedy at the same time that there had been

a crisis or big event in my life every ten years so far...I was quite expecting some new turn of the wheel. Miss Pollen died in 1934, and that changed everything for me as you know - the companionship of a charming girl has bought back some of the Rise Cottage atmosphere. 'Calmed and confirmed' I've always felt myself to be at Webb St, but the new circumstances should give it a different feel.^{x1}

This letter may be read as indicating that Bethell saw Taylor’s marriage not as happiness, but actually as similar to Pollen’s death, as it was another ten-year change bringing “new circumstances” and a “different feel” to that of being “calmed and confirmed” at Webb Street, now the Davies’ would live there as a married couple. By this time Bethell was nearly seventy. She cannot have seen a future for herself and Taylor and would have encouraged this marriage as she had Woollaston’s - her words to Kennedy then indicated that she encouraged heterosexuality for those who could manage it and thought losing someone to marriage was preferable to permanently losing them through the “goneawayness” of death that she had experienced when Pollen died. Bethell herself died in 1945, a year after Taylor’s marriage.

Bethell and Pollen were able to successfully lead a pre-1970 lesbian life in New Zealand, their class backgrounds and wealth providing economic independence and privacy. Bethell’s presentation of lesbian relationships as based on maternal love suggests she may have appreciated these lines from Adrienne Rich on the topic:-

*Birth stripped our birthright from us,
tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves
so early on [...]*

*Only: that it is unnatural,
the homesickness for a woman, for ourselves [...]*

*This is what she was to me, and this
is how I can love myself –
as only a woman can love me. [...]*

*...two women, eye to eye
measuring each other's spirit, each other's
limitless desire,
a whole new poetry beginning here.
(Rich 1984, pp.267-268).*

ⁱ Isabel died on December 13, 1927 of heart disease and was buried at Rangiora. (Death certificate Isabel Anne Bethell, 13 December 1927).

ⁱⁱ Certificate of title CB315/156, Lot 36 DP 4030.

ⁱⁱⁱ Death certificate Mary Ursula Bethell, 15 January 1945.

^{iv} *Sharland's Trade Journal*, July 7, 1894, p.58, cm.1; death certificate Katherine Jane Pollen, 27 June 1894.

^v *NZ Medical Journal*, Dec.1918, Obituary, Dr Pollen, death certificate Henry Pollen 23 November 1918.

^{vi} Area 01, Block A, Row 11, Plot 001. The inscription reads, "God is love. Katherine J. Pollen 1854-1894, Henry Pollen 1852-1918- Amaverunt-Amantur - Effie 1879-1934, Mother 1826-1904".

^{vii} Death certificate Effie Henrietta Pollen, 8 November 1934.

^{viii} *New Zealand Mail*, 15 March 1905, 57c.

^{ix} *NZ Observer*, Saturday May 11, 1895, p.10.

^x Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, Oct 26, 1937. Included with this letter is a news clipping from *The Times Literary Supplement*, Saturday May 9, 1936, about Geoffrey Gorer, a homosexual friend of Frances Hodgkins (see Chapter 10). Did Bethell or Kennedy know him?

^{xi} Later Sir Tossell Woollaston.

^{xii} Interview with Toss Woollaston by Sherrah Frances, 6 July 1977, OHC, ATL. Also see Woollaston (1980).

^{xiii} Charles Brasch lived a discreet homosexual life in New Zealand. Interview with James Mack, by Marian Evans, 2001.

^{xiv} Interview with Toss Woollaston by Sherrah Frances, 6 July 1977, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.

^{xv} Ursula and Rodney were both friends with the discreetly lesbian Ngaio Marsh, who spent her time between Christchurch and London. Marsh is another New Zealander whose lesbianism is often denied, though it was well known in the theatre circles in which she socialised.

^{xvi} Interview with Toss Woollaston by Sherrah Frances, 6 July 1977, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.

^{xvii} However among most Maori, people in rural areas, and the urban working classes unexpected visitors were usually made welcome (personal knowledge).

^{xviii} Interview with James Mack, by Marian Evans, 2001.

^{xix} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, Sept 14, 1936 (original emphasis).

^{xx} This is the 1938 charcoal drawing of Ursula Bethell, by Toss Woollaston, reproduced in Somerset et al. 1948, p.288.

^{xxi} Interview with Toss Woollaston by Sherrah Frances, 6 July 1977, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.

^{xxii} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, October 28, 1936.

^{xxiii} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, September 14, 1936.

^{xxiv} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, October 26, 1937 (original emphasis).

^{xxv} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, November 22, 1937.

^{xxvi} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy December 28, 1936 (original emphasis).

^{xxvii} *Ibid.*

^{xxviii} Ursula was 21 when Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years imprisonment.

^{xxix} Bethell's reference here to Sappho and Cresswell may have been a coded way of telling Kennedy that Cresswell was unaware of her lesbian relationships.

^{xxx} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, February 3, 1937.

^{xxxi} Radclyffe Hall's classic scene of sending Mary away with Martin is a famous example of this view (*TWOL*).

^{xxxii} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, 6 August, 1936.

^{xxxiii} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, Sept 26, 1936.

^{xxxiv} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, October 16, 1936.

^{xxxv} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, March 2, 1939.

^{xxxvi} Interview with Faye Hill by Alison Laurie, May 2001, OHC, Alexander Turnbull Library.

^{xxxvii} Interview with James Mack, by Marian Evans, 2001, private collection. He describes some of the lively parties and kamp circles around Rodney Kennedy in the 1950s and 1960s.

^{xxxviii} Ursula Bethell to Kathleen Taylor, January 8, 1942, Davies Papers, MacMillan Brown Library.
^{xxxix} Ursula Bethell to Kathleen Taylor, January 3, 1944, Davies Papers, MacMillan Brown Library
(original emphasis).
^{xl} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, January 14, 1944.

Chapter 12

An expatriate, her lovers and her wife

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)

Introduction and background

Kathleen Beauchamp, who as Katherine Mansfield (referred to as KM), became one of New Zealand's most prominent writers, is an example of a woman exiled as an expatriate because of lesbian relationships. Her wealthy, upper-class family sent her away from New Zealand, to become a remittance woman in England, her mother later arranging "water treatment" for her in Germany as a treatment for sexual perversion. Though her exile enabled KM to live an independent and in some senses a lesbian life overseas, hiding her long-term relationship with Ida Baker within a heterosexual marriage, she felt conflict, ambivalence and guilt over her lesbianism.

Kathleen Beauchamp was born on 28 October 1888, in Wellington, to Australian Harold Beauchamp and Annie Burnell Dyer, later Sir Harold and Lady Beauchamp. She had three sisters, Vera, Charlotte and Jeanne, and one brother Leslie. The family lived in several houses, as the ambitious Harold Beauchamp improved their fortunes and class position, and they became an influential Wellington family. The children attended local public schools but, as the family became wealthier, later they were sent to private schools. In June 1900, when KM was twelve, the Beauchamp girls transferred from Wellington Girls' High School to Miss Swainson's School (now Samuel Marsden Collegiate School for Girls), where KM first met Maata Mahupuku (probably her first lover).

The Beauchamps, like other wealthy New Zealanders, completed their children's education abroad. In January 1903 the family sailed for London, where the three older girls attended Queen's College their maternal aunt Belle Dyer remaining as chaperone. Here, KM met Ida Constance Baker, also known as Lesley Moore or LM. KM asked her to use this pseudonym when she visited during her trial reconciliation with her first husband George Bowden in 1910 (Baker 1971, p.54). KM called LM her "wife", and

their enduring and important lesbian relationship lasted from 1903 until KM's death in 1923. Ida Baker was born on 19 January 1888 in Suffolk, and had one sister and a younger brother. The family lived in Burma, returning to England when she was seven, and from 1897 she and her sister attended Queen's College, becoming boarders when their mother died in 1903, the year KM arrived (Baker 1971, pp. 21-25). They were separated between 1906 and 1908 when KM returned to Wellington, were together from 1908 to 1912, when KM became involved with John Middleton Murry (referred to as JMM), apart during 1914 -1916 while LM was in Rhodesia with her sister, and then together from 1916 until KM's death in 1923.

After Queen's College, KM returned to New Zealand, continuing her relationship with Maata and also becoming involved with Edith Kathleen Bendall (referred to as EKB). She returned to England permanently in 1908, married George Bowden in 1909, leaving him immediately, and met and lived with JMM from December 1911, with periods apart, marrying him in 1918. She contracted tuberculosis and died of a lung hemorrhage in January 1923 at the Gurdjieff Institute in Fontainebleau, France, where she is buried in the local cemetery. Her gravestone identifies her as "Wife of John Middleton Murry".

Stories about KM

There are several biographies on KM, and edited collections of her letters and journals. John Middleton Murry suppressed from his 1927 version of her *Journal* entries describing her lesbian relationships with Edith Kathleen Bendall and Maata Mahupuku. Early KM biographers Ruth Mantz and John Middleton Murry (1933), Pat Lawlor (1946), and Anthony Alpers (1953) mentioned her relationships with women without identifying them as lesbian. Later biographers acknowledged them as lesbian, regarding KM as "bisexual" and providing no lesbian context. Cherry Hankin (1983) examined her stories for "confessional" aspects, while Alpers (1980) included the information missing from his previous biography on her lesbian relationships, but with a negative tone and no lesbian context. Claire Tomalin (1987), Gillian Boddy (1988) and Joanna Woods (2001) are more sympathetic but again these accounts lack lesbian context, and her relationships with women assume secondary importance to those with men, especially JMM. Margaret Scott specifically denies KM's lesbianism, asserting her relationships with women were all just teenage "crushes" (Scott 2001, p.110). She claims KM's twenty-year relationship with LM was not lesbian,ⁱ basing this on LM's televised denial (see below) and on meetings with the elderly LM. Karl Stead (1987)

thought KM's failing health “restrained” her relationships with men, apparently unaware that her systemic gonorrhea and tuberculosis would affect her lesbian relationships. He insisted that once her “sexual orientation” was “established” there was not “a single deviation”, thus dismissing LM's continuing twenty-year presence. However, LM's own memoirs (Baker 1971) usefully reveal her relationship as KM's “wife” without explicitly labelling it lesbian.

KM's relationships with Maata Mahupuku (1890-1952) and Edith Kathleen Bendall (1879-1986)

Maata Mahupuku, from Wanganui, also known as Martha Grace and sometimes as Princess Martha, was the daughter of Kahungunu chief Dick Mahupukuⁱⁱ and Emily Sexton, who married Nathaniel Grace after Mahupuku's death (Tomalin 1987, pp.15-16, Lawlor 1946, Angus 1991). Lawlor comments that KM and Maata's early relationship gave “no little concern” to their teachers, and Sir Harold and Lady Beauchamp “did not favour the friendship” (Lawlor 1946, p.33). Mantz and Murry (1933) suggest that by thirteen, KM was “developing emotionally with almost terrifying rapidity” and the friendship with Maata began “her awakening.” The girls were parted when KM left for school in England. In 1906 KM and Maata, who was at finishing school in Paris and accompanied by her own chaperone Miss Turton, met again (Angus 1991). Their sexual relationship either began or was resumed, and the Beauchamp family disapproval of Maata may date from this time, as KM allowed Maata to purchase clothing and leave the bill for Harold Beauchamp to settle (Tomalin 1987, p.29). Referring to Maata as Carlotta, in February 1908 KM recalled their romantic London days

O Carlotta, have you remembered? We were floating down Regent Street in a hansom, on either side of us the blossoms of golden light, and ahead a little half hoop of a moon (Mansfield 1954, p.35-36)..

The relationship continued after the Beauchamp sisters returned to Wellington in November 1906, and Maata to her home in Wanganui. Sir Harold appears to have suspected KM's lesbian inclinations, as she wrote on the voyage “I cannot be alone or in the company of women for half a minute – he is there, eyes fearful, attempting to appear unconcerned” (ibid.p.7). In June 1907 she confessed,

I want Maata. I want her as I have had her—terribly. This is unclean I know but true. What an extraordinary thing—I feel savagely crude—and almost powerfully enamoured of the child. I had thought that a thing of the Past. HeighHo!!!!!!!!!! My mind is like a Russian novel (Mansfield 1997a, pp.103-104) ⁱⁱⁱ.

In April 1907 Maata wrote in her own diary (which she gave to KM):

Dearest K. writes 'ducky letters'. I like this bit "What do you mean by being so superlatively beautiful as you went away? You witch: you are beauty incarnate" (Alpers 1980, p.47)

Lawlor interviewed Maata, reporting that she revealed “unpublished incidents” in KM’s life, who had left New Zealand because of a “flirtation”. Sir Harold “locked his daughter in her room as punishment”, and to console her friend, Maata “climbed up to her room”. Maata revealed other “sensational aspects of her alleged knowledge of KM”, which Lawlor did not publish (Lawlor 1946, p.17). Perhaps Maata told him about their lesbian relationship, and that climbing the fire escape at Fitzherbert Terrace was not just for consolation. Maata visited Wellington frequently, attending the Beauchamps’ housewarming party in May 1907, and again for Charlotte Beauchamp’s birthday ball in July, when Martha Grace of Wanganui was “paying a visit to friends in town”^{iv}. She was probably not a Beauchamp house-guest, given Sir Harold’s disapproval, and is likely to have stayed at the nearby Thistle Inn, in Mulgrave Street, the setting for KM’s story “Leves Amores”,^v written that December. KM asked her father’s secretary Matty Putnam to type the story, telling her, “I’m afraid you won’t like ‘Leves Amores’...it’s partly a sort of dream” (Mansfield 1994a, p.35). Putnam was shocked, and showed the story to Sir Harold, who probably read it as confirmation of KM’s lesbian relationship with a Maori woman. His cousin Fred had married a Maori woman, had several children and lived in the Ureweras (Alpers 1980, p.58) and Sir Harold was apparently ashamed of this connection, fearing it would hinder his social ambitions, already compromised by the Beauchamp family’s origins on the Australian goldfields (Tomalin 1987, p.9).^{vi} He must have regarded KM’s relationship with Maata - and writing about it - as scandalous. The woman in the story affirms

I can never forget the Thistle Hotel. I can never forget that strange winter night...My room was opposite hers. She said...could I lace up her evening bodice, it was hooks at the back. Very well.

The story ends

She told me as we walked along the corridor to her room that she was glad the night had come. I did not ask why. I was glad, too. It seemed a secret between us. So I went with her into her room to undo those troublesome hooks...Like a sleepy child she slipped out of her frock and then, suddenly, turned to me and flung her arms around my neck. ...And Youth was not dead (Tomalin 1987, pp.259-260).

“Leves Amores” was eventually published from a copy KM sent her school friend Vere Bartrick-Baker (Mimi). In January 1922, KM wrote she had received a “frightening” letter from Mimi, which

brought back the inexplicable past. It flashed into my mind too that she must have a large number of letters of mine which don't bear thinking about. In some way I fear her (Mansfield 1954, p.285).

This suggests that KM sent Mimi similar stories or letters, regarding her as a safe confidante. Mimi had introduced KM to the 1891 unexpurgated version of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* at school (Alpers 1980, p.35), where the two were “suspected of immorality of a kind unspecified” (Tomalin 1987, p.25).

During her two years in Wellington, KM corresponded with LM, these letters later being destroyed on KM's instructions (Baker 1971, p.127). Alpers describes LM's report of an “adventure” at a ball, when KM “sat out one of the dances with a sailor”, and then wrote about the episode. Lady Beauchamp read the account, and “a terrible enquiry followed”. Alpers wonders whether the sailor was “an invention” for LM, if it was “with a man or with Maata”, and whether the Beauchamps were concerned about KM's “chastity” or had the word “pervert” in mind (Alpers 1980, pp.60-61).

The passage Lady Beauchamp read may not have been about Maata, but of KM's other Wellington lover, Edith Kathleen Bendall, or EKB. She was a Wellington artist nine years older than KM, recently returned from art school in Sydney (Alpers 1980, p.47). A student of Frances Hodgkins in 1904-1905, EKB knew Dorothy Kate Richmond and other Wellington women artists (see Chapter 10). In June 1907, KM wrote about an episode with EKB at the Beauchamps' holiday cottage in Days Bay

I feel more powerfully all those so-termed sexual impulses with her than I have with any men...I feel that to lie with my head on her breast is to feel what life can hold....pillowed against her, clinging to her hands, her face against mine, I am a child, a woman, and more than half man...We lay down together still silently, she every now & then pressing me to her, kissing me, my head on her breasts, her hands round my body, stroking me lovingly....What an experience, & when we returned to town, small wonder that I could not sleep, but tossed to & fro, & yearned, & realized - a thousand things which had been obscure - - - O Oscar! Am I peculiarly susceptible to sexual impulse? I must be I suppose, but I rejoice. Now, each time I see her I want her to put her arms round me & hold me against her. I think she wants to too, but she is afraid, & Custom hedges her in, I feel. We shall go away again (Mansfield 1997a, pp.99-101)..

KM's anxieties about her sexuality apparently date from her parents' discovery of such episodes. Also, Maata had become engaged to George McGregor, a Maori farmer in November 1907, and married in January 1908 (Angus 1991, p.401)^{vii} – perhaps because of KM's relationship with EKB, or perhaps because of her own family's reaction to her relationship with KM. KM reacted to Maata's marriage with despair. Between February and May 1908 she wrote

I shall end—of course—by killing myself...I purchase my brilliance with my life—it were better that I were dead really ...I am unlike others because I have experienced all there is to experience. But there is no-one to help me. Of course Oscar—Dorian Gray has brought this s.s.^{viii} to pass...I am now much worse than ever. Madness must lie this way. Pull yourself up! (Mansfield 1954, p.36).

KM was familiar with the work of Oscar Wilde, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter and Walt Whitman. She read books at the General Assembly Library, arranged through her father's connections (Alpers 1980, p.50), mentioning Carpenter in a 1908 letter to Vera, and recording "I find a resemblance in myself to John Addington Symonds" (Mansfield 1954, p.15). Scott claims KM would not have known of Symonds' homosexuality as Brown's 1895 biography suppressed it (Mansfield 1997, p.102). However, Symonds privately published pamphlets on homosexuality in 1883 and 1891, and initiated his collaboration with Havelock Ellis in 1890. When Symonds died suddenly in 1893, Ellis published *Sexual Inversion* in 1896 in Germany and in 1897 in England. Brown and the Symonds family were alarmed at the "scandal an English edition might cause" and unsuccessfully attempted to buy up this entire edition. Despite this attempt, many British and German homosexuals knew of Symonds' homosexuality and his connection with Ellis (Grosskurth 1984, p.21). Her journal entry certainly suggests the knowledgeable KM had heard the gossip. Symonds thought Whitman was homosexual and that his poetry suggested the "impassioned love of man for man" (ibid. p.20) and KM, who knew Whitman's work, may have agreed, as Ian Gordon interestingly suggests she found "in the [Urewera] landscape parallels in her reading of...Walt Whitman" (Mansfield 1978, p.20). She undertook the Urewera trip in December 1907, following Maata's marriage, and it may have been a way to reconnect with her lost lover. However, Maata continued to visit KM in Wellington until her departure (Angus 1991, p.401), so perhaps there were further "unclean" episodes at the Thistle Hotel (Mansfield 1997a, pp.103-104)

Alpers suggests the Beauchamps' reading of KM's account was the reason for delaying her previously announced return to London. However, I think it more likely that this and

similar incidents are why KM was in fact made to leave New Zealand. KM had earlier told a friend in London that she would return by making herself “so objectionable...that they’ll have to send me away” (Palliser cited in Alpers 1980, p.39). Perhaps she flaunted her lesbianism to achieve this result. It seems improbable that upper-class parents allowed their 20-year-old daughter to voyage alone and live unchaperoned in London. Two years earlier, they provided a chaperone for their three daughters travelling together, even though Vera and Charlotte were then of similar age to KM in 1908. Maata, too, had been well chaperoned during her stay in Paris and the voyage home. Originally all three sisters were to travel back to London, but Vera and Charlotte decided to stay in New Zealand. There was then a delay, probably while the parents considered how they could send KM away alone without provoking a scandal. She was sent away in July 1908, with a remittance of two pounds a week.^{ix} After her fame and her death, Sir Harold claimed he did this to assist her career as a writer as “there could be no question of standing in her light” (Beauchamp 1937). However, various sources suggest that the Beauchamps did not appear to like their third daughter, and that Lady Beauchamp “had no affection” for KM (Alpers 1980, p.13, Tomalin 1987, p.13). Mantz reported that during the 1930s in Wellington, KM was regarded as “a pain in the neck”, and few people thought she was a significant writer (Mantz 1972, p.118). A pressing reason to get rid of her would have been Harold’s directorship of the Bank of New Zealand that was announced in 1907,^x and his subsequent knighthood. KM seems to have become a remittance woman, forced into exile as an “expatriate”, to protect the family aspirations. Her sister Jeanne said their mother never spoke of KM after she left, except to say “My poor child” (Tomalin 1987, p.13).

Both Maata and EKB remained in New Zealand,^{xi} Maata corresponding with KM for many years, and KM writing several stories inspired by their relationship.^{xii} Ruth Mantz thought Maata, “had lived mainly an unhappy life” (Mantz in Angus 1991, p.402), and perhaps this was because the women had allowed circumstances to end their relationship. Writing in 1916, KM compared Maata to Dostoevsky’s *Nataysha*, suggesting these women know “how things are done...it seems to be a kind of instinct”, and “Maata...simply knew these things from nowhere” (Mansfield 1954 p.110). This suggests Maata understood not only the physical pleasures possible between two women, but also the need for discretion, including perhaps the wisdom of hiding a lesbian relationship inside marriage, as KM later did during her marriage with JMM.

EKB did not correspond with KM after she left New Zealand at all, even though they had written regularly in Wellington. She explained,

I was devoted to her at one stage. But I had some pride. I wasn't like that other poor fool of a woman, [LM] to be tossed here and there. She wanted me to go to England with her, but of course my people couldn't afford such a thing. She always seemed to want somebody with her. She used to beckon me like that too, but although I went, because I knew she was unhappy, I always had some pride.^{xiii}

Later, aged one hundred and six years, EKB simply affirmed of her relationship with KM, "I loved her and she loved me".^{xiv}

KM - expatriate

KM was met by LM, and stayed with her family, before moving to a hostel (Baker 1971, p.38). She became involved with New Zealand musician Garnet Trowell, moving in with his family as a paying guest and returning to the hostel some months later when their relationship ended (ibid. pp.42-45). She appears to have been attempting to do what "Nature" intended, writing to Trowell that she felt "as tho' Nature said to me— Now that you have found your true self—now that you are at peace with the world accepting instead of doubting—now that you love—you can see" (Mansfield in Alpers 1980, p.70). Margaret Wishart, another lodger, described Trowell as "slender, dreamy, cultured", Alpers commenting that he was not "markedly masculine" (Alpers 1980, p.68). KM's interest in the Trowell twins had begun in New Zealand. She wrote that Arnold Trowell

must always be everything to me...because he poured into my virgin soul the Life essence of Music...And here is the kernel of the whole matter – the Oscar-like thread (Mansfield 1997a, p.103).

During Easter 1906, before returning to New Zealand, the Beauchamp sisters and chaperone visited the Trowells in Brussels, where KM met their homosexual friend Rudolf. Shortly afterwards Rudolf shot himself, Alpers commenting, "the circumstances, which belonged to the world of Oscar Wilde and the love that dares not speak its name, were very disturbing to Kathleen. Did that sort of thing lead to *suicide*?" (Alpers 1980, p.37, original emphasis). Perhaps the Trowells and Rudolph were homosexual at the time – "the Oscar-like thread" - or, just as significantly, KM believed they were.

KM wanted to marry Garnet Trowell, but his parents intervened and the relationship ended. Suddenly, on 2 March 1909, she married George Bowden, a singing teacher she had met only a fortnight before. Bowden, aged thirty-one, lived with a male friend. Lamont Shand (Alpers 1980, pp. 87-88). Again, perhaps they were homosexual, or KM believed they were. She was constantly seeking “my people”, perhaps a reference to homosexuality as well as to like-mindedness. Tomalin suggests she married Bowden because she was pregnant to Arnold (Tomalin 1987, p.64). Even if this were the case, she may still have preferred to marry a homosexual man.

Bowden recalled that when they first met, KM looked like Oscar Wilde, so perhaps she attempted to signal her sexuality through dress (Alpers 1980, p.87). For their wedding she dressed in black, and afterwards they went to a hotel, where KM immediately left Bowden, a “fussy little man”, and fled to LM. She returned to the hostel, while LM found her a flat, later wondering why she had not taken KM “to my family”, supposing her father was “too prejudiced to have allowed it” (Baker 1971, pp.46-47). As KM had stayed there previously, was this because LM’s father would have found KM’s desertion of her husband unacceptable – or was he too aware of their lesbian relationship?

KM tried briefly and unsuccessfully to reconcile with Bowden in 1910 on her return from “treatment” in Germany (Baker 1971, p.54). They remained married for ten years, Bowden eventually asking for a divorce in order to re-marry, writing to his prospective father-in-law that KM

though of excellent and well-to-do people, and herself of some literary reputation, was sexually unbalanced...While her people in New Zealand were aware of this, her guardian in London was not, and as we married after a short acquaintance, it was only then conditions became known to me.

Bowden had “taken no steps towards divorce on the grounds of this perversion” (Alpers 1980, p.94). Stead (1987) argues KM gave Bowden the impression she was lesbian in order to escape from him, but Bowden’s letter does not suggest she had previously told him anything about her “perversion”. She left a letter in his flat marked “Never to be read, on your honour as my friend, while I am still alive”. Biographers explain this variously, mainly suggesting it was intended for LM (O’Sullivan and Scott 1984, pp.89-90; Woods 2001, p.66). This seems improbable – why leave a letter for LM in Bowden’s flat, when she was leaving there to immediately meet her? Tomalin thinks the letter “does not ring quite true”, and suggests it was intended to “mislead” Bowden,

but if so, would she have instructed him not to open it before her death? It seems more likely she wrote the letter so Bowden would later understand why she had left him. She asks

Did you ever read the life of Oscar Wilde—not only read it but think of Wilde—picture his exact decadence? And wherein lay his extraordinary weakness and failure? In New Zealand Wilde acted so strongly and terribly upon me that I was constantly subject to exactly the same fits of madness as those which caused his ruin and his mental decay. When I am miserable now—these recur...and I am quite powerless to prevent it—This is my secret from the world and from you—Another shares it with me...she, too, is afflicted with the same terror. We used to talk of it knowing that it wd eventually kill us, render us insane or paralytic...It's funny that you and I have never shared this—and I know you will understand why. Nobody can help—it has been going on now since I was 18 and it was the reason for Rudolf's death...I think my mind is morally unhinged and that is the reason—I know it is a degradation so unspeakable that—one perceives the dignity in pistols (Mansfield 1984, pp.89-90).

This letter demonstrates the negative context within which KM now saw lesbianism, differently from her earlier response to Rudolf's suicide in an unpublished story. In the story Juliet (KM) and Pearl (Mimi), have several adventures, meeting Rudolf and David. Rudolf tells Juliet, from his piano stool

Live this life, Juliet. Did Chopin fear to satisfy the cravings of his nature, his natural desires?... Why do you push away just that which you need – because of convention? Why do you dwarf your nature, spoil your life? (Mansfield 1997a, p.61).

This story may express KM's hope of having a relationship with a homosexual man, which she could have believed would allow her to continue lesbian relationships (after all, Oscar Wilde had been married). The story conveys her defiant attitude towards sexual conventions, and her recent defiance had unforeseen consequences. When the Beauchamps heard of KM's hasty marriage and immediate desertion, Lady Beauchamp sailed to England, leaving on 8 April 1909, and arriving in London seven weeks later on 27 May. She stayed at a private hotel for only two weeks before leaving for New Zealand on 10 June for another seven-week voyage. LM reports that she “wanted to separate us”, as she “felt our friendship was not quite wise”, meeting with George Bowden and with LM's father, who consequently sent his daughter away to the Canary Islands with her sister (Baker 1971, pp.48-49). Lady Beauchamp then took KM to Germany, leaving her at the Bavarian spa resort Bad Worishofen for Dr Kneipp's water treatment, thought useful for “nervous” and mental problems (see Kneipp 1896 and Chapter 8). On returning to New Zealand, Lady Beauchamp cut KM out of her will, and

deleted her name from the title of a family property. News of the scandal reached Wellington and Vera Beauchamp's fiancé was warned against marrying the sister of someone like KM (Alpers 1980, p.95). Contemporary theories of biological determinism would have encouraged the belief that lesbianism was hereditary (see Chapter 4).

KM stayed in Germany until the end of 1909, possibly miscarried a pregnancy, and probably had an affair with Floryan Sobieniowski, who infected her with gonorrhea, subsequently making her vulnerable to the tuberculosis infection from which she died (Tomalin 1987, pp.73-78). Perhaps KM thought a heterosexual affair could cure her inversion, or Sobieniowski may have suggested it would. In January 1910 she returned to London and to LM, and though the reconciliation with Bowden was unsuccessful, he provided literary connections to A. R. Orage, of the *New Age*, and Beatrice Hastings (Baker 1971 pp.53-55). KM appears to have destroyed her diaries for these years (Mansfield 1954, p.ix), writing that she wanted to “leave no sign”, to “tell no living soul”, and to “keep silence as Mother kept silence” (Mansfield in Mantz 1972, p.122), perhaps referring to Lady Beauchamp’s silence about her daughter’s lesbianism.

KM performed at *The Cave of the Golden Calf*, a nightclub patronised by lesbians, run by Freda Strindberg, lesbian and former wife of Swedish playwright August Strindberg (Brittain 1968). She was familiar with the Bloomsbury circle and Lady Ottoline Morrell's group at Garsington, though felt ambivalent about Bloomsbury, or “Bloomsbuggery” (Rose 1986, p.79), where discussions on “the loves of buggers”, sodomy and sapphism were common (ibid. p.5). She was close to Virginia Woolf from 1916, their connection probably expressed in this passage:

Again there came that silence that was a question – but this time she did not hesitate. She moved forward, very softly & gently...She put her arm around her friend...A long tender embrace. Yes, that was it – of course that was what was wanting (Mansfield 1997b, p.139).

Woods suggests that though Woolf was “fascinated by Katherine” she had “no experience of erotic love”, while KM was “probably well aware of the disquieting emotions that lurked beneath the surface of her friendship with Virginia” (Woods 2001, p.168). Given Bloomsbury discussions, it is doubtful Woolf was innocent of the implications of long tender embraces.

KM was familiar with the demi-monde of Colette's Paris. In December 1913, Francis Carco took her round the cafes, theatres and circuses of Montmartre and Montparnasse, and she returned there alone for several visits in 1915, staying in his empty flat^{xv} (Baker 1971, p.93). Ottoline Morrell wanted KM to “take her to Paris, to see all the small interesting cafes and other haunts – ‘quite private and inconspicuous, just us two.’ ” (ibid. p.133). KM wrote to JMM in December 1915

I should like to be at a large circus tonight, in a box—very luxurious...very gay with a smell of sawdust & elephants. A superb clown called Pistachio—white poneys, little blue monkeys drinking tea out of Chinese cups—I should like to be dressed ...beautifully, down [to] the last fragment of my chemise, and I should like Colette Willy to be dressed just exactly like me and to be in the same box. And during the entr'actes while the orchestra blared Pot Pourri from The Toreador we would eat tiny little jujubes out of a much too big bag and tell each other all about our childhood (Mansfield 1984, pp.212-213).

This letter suggests the story, circulated by Willy, Colette's first husband, that the actress Polaire and Colette were lovers. Willy made them dress identically and “paraded them in Paris salon society”, inventing a story that they had been lovers since girlhood (Benstock 1987, p.84)^{xvi}. KM's reference to “childhood” is significant, as not only does it refer to Polaire's supposed girlhood relationship with Colette, but to KM's own youthful relationships. The imagery suggests the demi-monde described by Colette (1968), of a circus and carnival world where lesbians from the theatre, the brothel and the cafe intermingled (see Chapter 8). Benstock suggests this world was “defined less by its depravity than by its enforced secrecy, the need to play doubled roles” (Benstock 1987, pp.5-6), as KM did.

If KM wanted to make contact with upper-class lesbian culture in Paris during her 1915 visits she would have needed introductions to Natalie Barney or Gertrude Stein (see Chapter 8).^{xvii} However, at this time many lesbians had left Paris because of the war. She knew the circles, as she wrote to LM in 1922, “I do not want to hear about Miss Beach” (Baker 1981, p.216). Sylvia Beach was Adrienne Monnier's lover, and ran the English language bookshop Shakespeare and Co.

KM was aware of the Maud Allen case (see Chapter 4), writing in June 1918 “What about this Billingsgate trial? I feel a great sympathy for Maud Allen”(Mansfield 1994, p.210) and that it was a “Nice lookout for Art when Billing is pelted with flowers and Lord A.D. our conquering Hero” (ibid. p.222), the case undoubtedly reminding her that Lord Alfred Douglas brought down Wilde. She read widely, including the novels she

reviewed for the *Athenaeum* during 1919-1920, which included work by Bryher, Clemence Dane, Jane Mander, Vita Sackville-West, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Forster, who wrote on lesbian or homosexual themes or were themselves lesbian or homosexual (Mansfield 1930). These and her other reading suggest she was familiar with most contemporary material on lesbianism.

KM and John Middleton Murry (1889-1957)

KM met JMM in December 1911. What impressed him was that “she was not, somehow, primarily a woman” (Tomalin 1987, p.100). He became a “lodger in her flat and, after some weeks, her lover” (Murry in Mansfield 1954, p.48); they married in 1918 after her divorce from Bowden. KM told JMM “we are both abnormal: I have too much vitality—and you not enough” (Mansfield 1951 p.532), and wrote in her 1919 *Journal* that

I had been the man and he had been the woman...we'd always acted (more or less) like men-friends. Then this illness—getting worse and worse, and turning me into a woman (Mansfield 1954, p.183).

Others also perceived them as “men friends”, a Bandol Frenchman recalling

Monsieur with his cigarette and his stick, and Madame with her cigarette and her stick, it was impossible to tell which was which, they were so alike (Mansfield 1987, p.10).

When KM became seriously ill, JMM provided little practical support. After her death, he edited her papers, deleting passages and producing an image of KM as a delicate and romantic genius.^{xviii} Tomalin suggests KM and JMM

settled to a dream-version of the other. Murry...was entirely content to live with a woman whose history he ignored and whose inner life he denied; and she, with her desperate desire for secrecy, was in some degree satisfied by this, even though in the long run, it left her isolated and frightened in her perfectly protected privacy (Tomalin 1987, p.242).

KM and her wife, LM

LM later recalled that when KM became involved with JMM in 1912, she assisted with the arrangements, despite feeling “disappointment at the happiness I had lost”. To reassure her, KM wrote:

The Secret

In the profoundest Ocean

There is a rainbow shell,

*It is always there, shining most stillly
 Under the great storm waves
 And under the happy little waves
 That the old Greeks called 'ripples of laughter'.
 And you listen, the rainbow shell
 Sings - in the profoundest ocean.
 It is always there, singing most silently.*
 (Baker 1971, p.69).

This suggests the existence of a secret KM self, special to LM, which cannot be destroyed even by “storm waves”. The reference to the “old Greeks” suggests a society which accepted love between women, though such love now must sing “silently”, and be hidden within a heterosexual relationship.

Alpers claims that only LM was a “real” lesbian, depicting her as a devoted friend in a one-way relationship, with KM as her “cruel companion”. In this “nitric friendship” LM was a “tabula rasa” awaiting “imprinting”, needing a friendship allowing her to “share vicariously the ambitions and achievements of another” (Alpers 1980, pp.27-29). However, six months before she died, KM wrote to LM: “I feel I cannot live without you” (Baker 1971, p.201). Soon after, she wrote “Try and believe and keep on believing without signs from me that I do love you and want you for my wife” (ibid. p.203).

Earlier she had written

I think quite seriously that LM and I are so extraordinarily interesting. It is not while the thing is happening that I think that, but the significance is near enough...Have I ruined her happy life? Am I to blame?

What was “the thing” and when did it happen? Was it sexual? LM recalled an incident when she felt “deeply conscious of a great happiness and peace and knew quite clearly at that moment that I should never be so completely, peacefully happy again: a strange experience that I have never forgotten” (Baker 1971, p.64). Though this suggests an erotic encounter, it is unlikely LM used the term lesbian at this time. Writing about KM's marriage, she asserted

*I did not know **then** that George Bowden thought I was KM's lesbian friend, and the cause of her leaving him in the first place. Indeed, I did not know **then** what a lesbian friend meant* (Baker 1971, p.54) (my emphasis)

LM repeated this denial on a 1974 television interview, probably the literal truth, as she may not have known or used the term lesbian at that time. Avoiding a direct denial, she did not reveal what relationship they did have or how they described it. LM knew what

a lesbian friend was by 1964, when in her seventies she attended London meetings of the Minorities Research Group (see Chapter 8), with a woman friend, also from Woodgren near the New Forest.^{xix}

KM was a difficult woman, needing space and time to write, she was from New Zealand's upper-middle-class and used to comfort and attention, with few practical skills, terminally ill, and ambivalent about her lesbianism. This explains the negative comments KM made about LM, though some of her letters to JMM also seem intended to encourage him to accept her living with them in a triangular relationship. Her relationship with LM was KM's most important and conflicted, as a last letter to LM indicates

I had better end this quickly for the old feeling is coming back—an ache—a longing, a feeling that I can't be satisfied unless I know you are near. Not on my account, not because I need you—but because in my horrid, odious intolerable way I love you and am yours ever (Baker 1971, p.197).

Three months before she died, KM entered the communal Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, at Fontainebleau-Avon, to study under Russian mystic George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. In September 1922 she wrote in her *Journal*,

Let me take the case of KM. She has led, ever since she can remember, a very typically false life. Yet...there have been moments...when she has felt the possibility of something quite other (Mansfield 1954, p.330).

In October she explained, “One of the KMs is so sorry. But of course she is. She has to die. *Dont* feed her” (ibid.p.331, original emphasis). Which KM did she intend to kill? Her earlier fascination with the idea of a “false self” in, for example, *The Aloe* (Hankin 1983, pp.133-135) and in a 1919 letter to Murry that, “I am two selves - one my true self - the other she [LM] creates in me to destroy my true self” (Mansfield 1951, p.360), where she seems to be blaming LM for making her lesbian, might mean she was hoping for a “cure”. Or, she may have decided that the continued construction of a sham heterosexual self could not continue, as a *Journal* entry in October 1922 suggests,

Risk! Risk anything! Care no more for the opinions of other, for those voices. Do the hardest thing on earth for you. Act for yourself. Face the truth (Mansfield 1954, p.333).

Had KM lived another year, she would have met the Gurdjieff lesbian circle, and perhaps been supported in her desire to “tell the truth”, and been able to accept her lesbianism. This circle included Janet Flanner and Solita Solano, who left the US in 1921 for Paris to “begin anew.” Flanner wanted “freedom from the...restrictions of an

America that was inimical, if not openly hostile, to her relationship with Solita” (Wineapple 1989, pp.55-56). Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, editors of the *Little Review*, together with Georgette Leblanc, moved to Paris in 1923. There, these American lesbians became involved with Gurdjieff, and in 1924, a year after KM’s death, Anderson, Heap and Leblanc moved into the Fontainebleau Institute, Anderson later reporting that Gurdjieff’s teaching was “the basis of our lives since 1924” (Anderson 1969, p.181). Heap founded a Gurdjieff group in London (ibid. p.10), and Leblanc was Gurdjieff’s secretary until his death in 1949 (Wineapple 1989, p.120). This lesbian interest in Gurdjieff’s teachings is significant, as there is no indication they wanted to “cure” their sexuality, and all were life-long lesbians. Their presence at the heart of the Gurdjieff movement indicates that Gurdjieff took a positive attitude to lesbianism reinforcing the possibility of KM seeking his assistance to accept her sexuality.

KM’s class position provided her with the education and income to live independently, but due to her family’s attitudes to her early lesbian relationships, forced her to live in exile as an expatriate. She tried to conform to a heterosexual norm, hiding her lesbian relationship with LM within her marriage and leading a secret lesbian life.

ⁱ Margaret Scott is the daughter of Dr F.O.Bennett, who testified for the defence together with Dr Medlicott in the Parker and Hulme case, asserting that lesbianism was pathological (Chapter 6). Her husband Harry Scott probably had a homosexual relationship with Charles Brasch, and though she admits Brasch was homosexual, she believes he was not actively so until after Harry’s death (ibid. pp.114-120). It is unsurprising that she would deny KM’s lesbianism.

ⁱⁱ Dick Mahupuku was the son of Wiremu Mahupuku, wealthy sheep-farmer and a chief of the Ngati Parera and Ngati Hikawera hapu, of the iwi Ngati Kahungunu. When her great-uncle tribal chief Tamahau Mahupuku died childless, Maata inherited the Mahupuku estate. When Nathaniel Grace died, Emily married J. L. Laurenson from Carterton (Angus 1991).

ⁱⁱⁱ Scott notes that JMM wrote in the top margin of this page “I omitted this – deliberately” (Mansfield 1997a pp.103-104).

^{iv} *Evening Post*, 17 July 1907.

^v Tr. “Casual loves”.

^{vi} KM did not know of their existence, despite her 1907 journey through the area and her interest in Maori culture (Alpers 1980, p.58, n).

^{vii} Maata and George McGregor divorced in October 1914, after having three children. Maata remarried Tom Asher, had two children, and divorced in 1924. She did not marry again (Angus 1991, p.401).

^{viii} Virginia Woolf diary entry for 31 August 1928 “we...talked of sodomy and sapphism” (Woolf 1972, Vol.2). Could KM’s “s.s.” mean this?

^{ix} This was raised to three pounds a week in 1916. In 1919 Beauchamp settled two hundred pounds per annum on Vera, Jeanne and Chaddie and three hundred on KM (Gordon 1978, p.101, n.40).

^x “Mr Harold Beauchamp, the popular head of the go-ahead firm of W.M.Bannatyne & Co., has been cheerfully elected chairman of the board of the Bank of New Zealand” (*Free Lance*, April 1907, in Alpers 1980, p.47).

^{xi} Maata died on 15 January 1952 and is buried at Kehemane, near Martinborough, in the private burial ground of the Mahupuku family (Angus 1991, p.402). EKB married George Robison, and died in 1986 at the age of 107 years.

^{xii} For example, “Kezia and Tui” (1916).

^{xiii} Interview Mrs Edith Robison, 1963 by Alison Laurie, written notes.

^{xiv} Interview Mrs Edith Robison, 1985 by Alison Laurie, OHC, ATL.

^{xv} Francis Carco was in the army at the Front. During her 1915 visit to Paris, KM was able to visit him, described in her story *An Indiscreet Journey*.

^{xvi} When Colette did become a lesbian for a time, Willy was furious (Colette 1968).

^{xvii} JMM had a later connection, as he published Barney's work in *The Athenaeum* and attempted to publish the work of her friend Paul Valery (Barney 1992, pp.106-107), and contributed to an article on Marcel Proust in 1923 (ibid. p.215, n32.)

^{xviii} See Gordon (1959) for a detailed analysis of JMM's treatment of KM's papers.

^{xix} Personal knowledge.

Chapter 13

Feminist activists and their loves: Elsie Euphemia Andrews (1888-1948) and Muriel Kirton (1893-1980)

Introduction and background

Elsie Andrews and her life-partner Muriel Kirton lived in New Plymouth, where Andrews, a feminist and pacifist activist, took leading roles in organisations including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the National Council of Women, the Women Teachers' Association, the NZ Educational Institute and the Pan-Pacific Women's Association, and was a founder of the Taranaki Women's Club and the New Plymouth Girls' High School Old Girls' Association. Like other couples of the period, including Bethell and Pollen, Andrews and Kirton appear to have presented themselves publicly as women above reproach, including Andrews' opposition to the moral dangers of alcohol and her work with the WCTU. Andrews, and probably Kirton, read widely and were familiar with the work of feminist writers Virginia Woolf, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain. They appear to have been part of a lesbian friendship network, centred on New Plymouth with New Zealand-wide links, and also to have had overseas lesbian connections through participation in international organisations and conferences. Andrews' passionate attractions to women other than Kirton are apparent in her conference diaries and unpublished poetry.

Born 23 December 1888, the same year as Katherine Mansfield, Elsie Andrews was the youngest of ten surviving children of farmers John and Emily Andrews, of Huirangi, in Taranaki, a rural province. She attended Huirangi Primary School from 1893-1900, then winning a Junior National Scholarship and attending New Plymouth Girls' High School from 1901 to 1906. Failing to gain admission to university or teachers' training college, she became a pupil teacher at Waitara School for two years from 1906-1908, and then taught at various schools in the area until she was appointed to Fitzroy School in 1912, remaining there until her retirement in 1935, at the age of 47. She was prominent in many women's organisations, stood unsuccessfully for Parliament as an Independent candidate in the 1935 elections and was awarded the MBE in 1938.ⁱ Andrews' work as a political organiser and speaker gave her many opportunities to express her views. Her

style was challenging, humorous and original. For example, she pointed out in a 1937 speech that though “childbearing” was the “whole end of women” in the minds of some people, “hence the term ‘superfluous women’ ”, she, like Vera Brittain, was “one of them” and, like her, did not “in the least mind being considered superfluous”, because

*If childbearing is the end of woman, the inference is that women bear children to grow up and bear children to grow up; and bear children to grow up and bear children ad infinitum, like the old argument about hammering hammers to hammer hammers, or learning Latin to teach Latin.*ⁱⁱ

In another comment she remarked

*Alcohol, mercury and lead are the only three race poisons because they make a beeline for the reproductive organs - not that it matters personally. I might as well have been absorbing large draughts of all three from my youth up.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Andrews saw no need to pretend heterosexual interests, and did not want to be forced into male companionship. In a 1937 comment on the seating arrangements in a ship’s dining room she called herself

a surly brute without the slightest desire to prattle to strange men and the sight of a new strange man every day almost unmanned me (if that is the correct term)^{iv}

Andrews lived with Muriel Kirton, also a teacher at Fitzroy School, for over twenty-eight years. Born 10 August 1893 at Christchurch, Muriel Kirton was the daughter of Robert, Chief Postmaster, and Frances Kirton, with one brother, Henry.^v Andrews died of liver cancer, aged sixty, on 26 August 1948, having become ill with what was thought to be “jaundice” only a month before, and was buried at Huirangi Cemetery among the Andrews’ family graves. The house was left to Kirton, who lived there until her death from heart disease, aged eighty-seven, on 14 December 1980. She was cremated and her ashes scattered in the New Plymouth Garden of Remembrance.^{vi} Though her grief at the rapid and premature death of Andrews may be assumed to have been as devastating as that of Bethell when Pollen died, we have no record of Kirton’s life after Andrews died.

Stories about Andrews and Kirton

There are no biographies of Andrews or Kirton. There are several published obituaries, and articles about Andrews’ various achievements published during her lifetime, but none of these sources mention her lesbian relationship with Kirton. There is a biographic entry on Andrews in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* by Raewyn Dalzeil (1998) who describes Kirton as “her lifelong friend and from 1922 her

household companion”. Dalzeil comments on Andrews’ conference trips that she was “overwhelmed by the occasion and the women she met”, and that she “revelled in the organisational meetings and behind-the-scenes activity”. Andrews herself published articles and a collection of poetry, and left an unpublished autobiography and other papers including diaries from the 1930, 1934 and 1937 Pan Pacific Women's Association Conferences she attended, letters, copies of speeches, unpublished poetry and other records.

Andrews’ relationships

Andrews and Kirton purchased their home at 14 Kowhai Street, Fitzroy, New Plymouth as “tenants in common” on 8 October 1920^{vii} and lived there together for over 28 years. They obtained a private mortgage and, as it was difficult for unmarried women to obtain mortgages (see Chapter 7), may have paid a substantial deposit. It is likely they received family assistance, probably from the Kirtons, which would account for the apparent lack of acrimony when Andrews left her estate to Kirton. There was, however, a dispute over Andrews’ papers, which Kirton retained. She later relinquished them to Andrews’ sister Ivy, who eventually bequeathed them to the Taranaki Museum.^{viii} This bequest appears to contain the only surviving materials, suggesting that Kirton (or her heirs) may have destroyed other records.

Andrews and Kirton shared a bed and bedroom, though there were two bedrooms in their house. The other bedroom was used as the guestroom for their many guests.^{ix} The couple were open about living together, and in her unpublished autobiography, Andrews describes a pupil who visited and asked her

‘Miss Andrews, what for you living here all single and alone?’ I could not deny the charge of being unmarried but I was able to point out that I did not live alone, and this seemed to satisfy her.^x

Their home was the centre of their domestic relationship, and records show they discharged the mortgage in 1934, before Andrews’ retirement in 1935, the year she unsuccessfully stood for Parliament. Andrews wrote a poem on the importance of their “title-deeds”, and the home that was “ours alone”.

*In days to come, who will live here?
This roof-tree dear
Has brought such happiness to us;*

*No other tenants has it known;
 The house, the land, they both are ours,
 The trees, the flowers,
 The title-deeds are ours alone,
 and all the household goods to boot,
 Each table, picture, sofa, chair,
 Has been with care
 Exactly placed our need to suit.
 Here have our relatives and friends,
 Found welcome and a meal, a bed [...]
 Thus we have lived each happy day,
 But life must come to end, and we
 With all that be,
 Return to earth our transient clay.
 When that day dawns, and others dwell
 Where we have lived, may this house hold
 The peace untold
 Which we have known, for them as well.
 May joy be theirs in ample store;
 To all the happiness we share
 may they fall heir,
 A gift from us who are no more.*
 (“In Days to Come” in Andrews 1947)

The women established their home with devotion, probably saving for the items they chose “with care ...to suit” their needs. Friends visited, probably from the friendship network of female couples that the diaries suggest they knew in other New Zealand cities, particularly Wellington and Hamilton.

Andrews and Kirton were also part of a network of women in Taranaki, including a circle around the Taranaki Women’s Club that Andrews and her friends helped found. This circle included Andrews’ friend the benefactor Monica Brewster (1886-1973). Born Monica Romaine Govett, in 1920 aged thirty-four she married Dr Rex Carrington Brewster, a ship’s doctor, in a childless marriage. Rex died in 1952, and Monica set up a trust in 1962 to establish the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth (Mare, undated). Her will provided legacies to fourteen close women friends^{xi}. She was related

to and friends with Dorothy Richmond (see Chapter 10) through the Atkinsons, connecting her to Wellington art networks and perhaps to the Eastbourne circle. Andrews was close to Brewster and her friend Edith Bruce (Brucey) a New Plymouth Girls' High School teacher, previously the companion of another teacher, Georgina McMullin.^{xii}

Another couple was Ida Anthony, also a teacher, and known as “Bunch”, Andrews’ oldest friend, who often visited the Andrews’ family, with her partner Belle Allen.^{xiii} Then there were Sister Clara Elizabeth Hawkins (1888-1975), known as Hawkie, and her companion Helen J. Noble (1900-1987), known as Nell. Hawkins, a nurse, served in WW1^{xiv}, worked at Thames Hospital, and at Cassel Hospital, Hamilton, from 1922 - 1951, before retiring to Auckland, where she died in 1975 aged eighty-six.^{xv} Noble, a teacher at Hamilton Technical College, became a divisional commissioner in the Girl Guide Association in Morrinsville and Thames.^{xvi} A “staunch member of the Presbyterian Church”, she was matron of St Kentigern College Boarding House, Auckland from 1961-1966, before her retirement.^{xvii}

Others in Andrews’ circle included Jessie Livingston Home and Kathleen Halley, Marjorie Burrows and Kathleen Isabel Philpott, teachers Tyne Bradbury and Florence O'Brien (Floss), and hairdresser Doris Webb.^{xviii} Saphira (1997), in a biography about her father’s homosexual relationship in Taranaki, identifies this circle as lesbian. She suggests there were lesbian as well as male homosexual networks around the New Plymouth Little Theatre, and a lesbian circle at the Taranaki Women’s Club.

An important international network was the Pan Pacific Women's Association (PPWA) for which Andrews was secretary of the New Zealand national committee, attending conferences as the representative for the Women Teachers Association. The PPWA was set up to promote friendship and understanding among the peoples of the Pacific. Members included various US women Faderman regards as living in lesbian relationships, notably Jane Addams, of Hull-House, who was the International Chairman of the First PPWA Conference and Mary E. Woolley, of Mt Holyoke College.^{xix} (Faderman 1999, pp.18–132, pp.222–232).

Though Andrews lived in a committed domestic relationship with Kirton, entries in her conference diaries confirm she was often strongly attracted to other women. She found Monica Brewster very attractive, writing in her 1930 PPWA Conference diary,

We went to church...I experienced my most thrilling moment since leaving home - just across the aisle - her profile, earrings, expression, I saw a woman whom for an instant I thought to be Mrs Brewster. If it had been! I could hardly keep my eyes off her - it seemed so heavenly to look at somebody who even merely resembled her.^{xx}

Her friends “Hawkie and Miss Noble” were mentioned at length in Andrews’ 1937 PPWA Conference diary, and though she mostly referred to women by title (Miss, Mrs, Dr), including Miss Noble, Hawkins was known by nickname. According to Andrews, Hawkins and Noble accompanied her on the trip, though they were listed independently as delegates in the conference proceedings. The diaries give glimpses of their friendship and activities, and show Andrews as resistant to excessive decoration of her garments

Hawkie and Miss Noble forced me to wear a spray of roses on my blue evening gown which I did with a very bad grace...in fact I told Hawkie to wear her blasted roses herself but she was adamant.^{xxi}

Andrews usually dressed plainly in the black regarded as “masculine” (McKergow 2000, p.178), reporting that at the 1934 PPWA Conference, Mrs Victoria Amohau Bennett^{xxii}

took me to task for always wearing black! I told her of Muriel's question - 'which dress are you going to wear, your black, or your black, or your black?'^{xxiii}

When Andrews wore a green dress, the perceptive Bennett told Andrews that she was

quite thrilled the night I appeared in green - she said to Mrs. Hammond 'here's a new love!'...she is sure it was my green dress which captivated Dr Kneeland!!!.^{xxiv}

At a 1930 conference held at the Oamaru Boys' High School, which Kirton did not attend, Andrews was infatuated by “Miss Lovell-Smith”, and at the 1930 PPWA Conference, which Kirton did attend, by “Miss Sims”, Mary Eleanor Sims, a Christchurch Girls’ High School teacher.^{xxv} Her 1930 diary included a note that was written for her friend Ina Jackson to read, concluding

I'm afraid to me the great thing has been making friends with Miss Hull [Helena Hull of the Kindergarten Association]^{xxvi} and Miss Sims [who] has just walked right into my heart and taken up a greater space there than I imagined was "For rent" at this stage of my life.^{xxvii}

She actually gave the diary to Miss Sims to read, explaining before giving it to her that it was

really written for Ina's (and no other) eyes....she said this morning 'Your friend will wonder who this Sims woman is' but I pointed out that one of my chief pleasures will be to tell my friends about her and I hope she will come to New Plymouth as soon as possible so that they can meet her.^{xxviii}

The 1934 diary described “Mona” as the intended reader, probably Mona Osborne, Auckland^{xxix}, and reported in some detail her most significant conference romance, with American pacifist “Dr. Kneeland” – Dr. Hildegard Kneeland (b.1889- d.?), Washington, USA, Chair of Labour and Standards of Living Roundtable at the Conference, and the Third Vice President of the PPWA.^{xxx} Andrews wrote:

Dr Kneeland and I had a talk last night - we are both prepared to die as conscientious objectors in the next war if one should come. At the dinner...the other night we discovered we were kindred spirits.^{xxxi}

Andrews and Dr Kneeland met frequently to devise political strategies for the conference, requiring them to meet secretly, often late at night (not an uncommon method of getting to know someone). Andrews wrote

Dr Kneeland (USA) and I celebrated the international alliance which has sprung up between us by sitting up...talking till nearly midnight. We were completely surrounded by mosquitoes and were bitten from head to foot but it was worth it.^{xxxii}

Andrews slipped away from the YWCA dinner she was meant to attend with the other delegates because

Dr Kneeland and I had plotted ...we were to have a further talk ... We agreed as to the suggestions we should make...Dr Kneeland then launched a list of topics which she and I had drawn up in readiness.^{xxxiii}

She revealed that next evening at dinner,

I had Mrs. Bennett on one side and Dr Kneeland on the other so I enjoyed meself [sic]. Dr Kneeland and I feel that after making no effort to meet during the day we could safely sit together and under cover of the dinner plot a little further. Which we done [sic]. Sometime today we will foregather again.^{xxxiv}

Andrews told Dr Kneeland about Kirton and showed her photographs of their cats Mutt and Jeff

We threshed things out for two hours...She told me a lot about her private affairs, and I showed her Mutt-an-Jeff...I can't write down what she said, my dear, because it is the sort of thing that one says nothing about but keeps in one's heart^{xxxv}

What were the “private affairs” Dr Kneeland told Andrews about? And what would she keep in her heart? She recorded

Dr Kneeland and I stayed talking...till after midnight earnestly...cementing our international alliances. She asked me to write to her which I said was quite easy as I think I am one of the world's best correspondents!

She adds flirtatiously to the absent Mona, “you could give me a testimonial perhaps?” before recording that she has not forgotten her New Plymouth loves, revealing, “I dreamt about Mrs. Brewster so that finished off a satisfactory evening”.^{xxxvi} Later, writing on the ship “Niagara”, Andrews described her last encounters with Dr Kneeland before the delegation sailed home to New Zealand:

I rang up a florist and ordered a lei for Dr Kneeland as a farewell gift. She and I have become very close in this last ten days...We wanted to sit together, but the NZ delegation had suggested sitting en masse so that was that. Fate intervened however, and I found myself presently on the president-elect's right hand with Dr Kneeland on my right - and we both purred like Mutt and Jeff with a saucer of cream.^{xxxvii}

She continued

To my embarrassment and surprise and joy she told me that to her I had been the spirit of the Conference - 'a clear fire that nothing could quench.' Mona, if you ever breathe a word of this to a living soul, I shall flay you alive...We planned the basis of our future correspondence - much on the lines of yours and mine. She hates writing and has very little time, but she is big enough, as you have been, to realize that it is a happiness to me to write and that I don't expect constant replies^{xxxviii}

When the time came for farewells

Dr Kneeland bought me two (leis). We parted cheerfully, having agreed that distance should not worry us. She hung the first lei round my neck- "This is because it is the custom", and then the second - "This is because you will always be in my thoughts". She kissed me and said "Bless you" and I stood staring at her, dumb and completely inarticulate...as soon as we were clear of the harbour I divested myself thankfully of all my flower leis except Dr Kneeland's second one...the others left me in peace. I lay stretched out...and burned into my memories all the incidents of our send-off^{xxxix}

The 1934 PPWA Conference was remarkable for the speeches given by Mrs Bennett and Andrews: Mrs Bennett gave hers in English and Andrews hers in Maori, coached by Mrs Bennett. As a close friend, Mrs Bennett was aware of the romance with Dr Kneeland, and told Andrews she was

to be envied more than anyone else in Honolulu because Dr Kneeland had singled me out for her special favours. We...had a long talk about her and Mrs. Bennett could tell me a whole lot about her clothes which I had never noticed (not having got beyond her fice[sic]) Mrs. Bennett described her as "Good to look at and good to listen to", which pleased me^{xl}

Andrews returned home and apparently did not hear from Dr Kneeland again. Perhaps Dr Kneeland did not reciprocate her feelings, or perhaps was in a relationship and thought the romance with Andrews best ended. Whatever her reasons, these unpublished verses indicate that Kneeland did not write to Andrews:

*'Silence is golden' the Quakers have taught...
'Silence is golden' and also MORE STRONG
IS EXAMPLE THAN PRECEPT!! But surely t'were wrong
To imagine the States' Dr Kneeland
Would use means so subtle to drive home a blow
At a grayheaded schoolmarm away down below
In the beautiful isles of New Zealand.^{xli}*

In her diary for the 1937 PPWA Conference, three years later (inscribed as intended for her friend "Barnes" to read), Andrews hopefully wrote as the ship sailed towards the conference location

At the back of my head all the time is a feeling of pleasureable anticipation at the thought of meeting Dr Kneeland again. It has its ludicrous side when you think of the blank wall which has surrounded her since 1934. Miss Satterthwaite^{xlii} has never heard from her either. I know quite well she must often have thought of me; and I bet she is wondering now if I am in the New Zealand delegation and will be very pleased when she finds I am.^{xliii}

Her friend Hawkins, who together with Noble accompanied Andrews on this trip, disapproved of Andrews' infatuation.

Hawkie is inclined to adopt the attitude that Dr Kneeland should have written and because she didn't she is not worth bothering about. But she really is very well worth bothering about, as everyone who was at the last conference would agree and I expect Hawkie will find it out too as we progress.^{xliv}

She (and perhaps Hawkie) were to be disappointed. Arriving at the conference, Andrews wrote despondently, "Dr Kneeland is not here at all and I could kill Miss Satterthwaite for raising my hopes".^{xlv} Dr Kneeland seemed to drop out of the PPWA, as later proceedings do not mention her, or give reports from her Roundtable group. A

poem written ten years later, suggests Andrews had either remained interested in Dr Kneeland, or had found another overseas love

*Dear Sparkling Eyes as I pursue
The round of tasks which hold me here
my ranging thoughts fly off to you,
so far away - and yet so near.*

*I may not see your broad, rich land,
Your kith and kin I may not meet;
I may not always understand
The goal of your swift moving feet
But I have held your hand in mine,
And we have spoken heart to heart;
(of friendship's faith the seal and sign
Though we must live long leagues apart)
So when you work and while you rest
'Neath golden sun or starlit skies
From day to day you walk caressed
By loving thoughts, dear Sparkling Eyes.^{xlvi}*

Though referring to someone in a "broad rich land", such as the USA, the poem may well refer to another love, as it was written on the same day as another, dedicated to an unidentified "ELH"

*We tread our separate pathways
And far apart they lie,
How long we may be sundered
we know not, you and I...
Oh heavy is my spirit
And sad, and sad, my heart,
To miss your happy presence...
And yet so keen is memory
I hold you ever real,
I close my eyes and see you...
Your warmth of love that won mine
In fair exchange, my dear.^{xlvii}*

What of Andrews' life partnership with Kirton? While away on trips, she did not neglect Kirton, sending her letters and presents.^{xlviii} Kirton accompanied Andrews on speaking engagements within New Zealand, visiting friends, and they attended some conferences together, including the 1930 PPWA Conference. Whatever she felt for others, a poem written two years before her death suggests that their partnership remained while "fierce passion" died,

*Powerful feelings frame and burn
Emotions wax and wane,
Ecstasy, dismay and grief,
Tumultuous joy and pain.

Friendships' bonds endure unstrained,
And when fierce passion dies,
Stauncher, steadier, still remain
Its everlasting ties^{xlix}*

As a woman living a lesbian life in New Plymouth, in a long-term lesbian relationship, and part of a lesbian network, who discussed attractions to women with (apparently) heterosexual and lesbian friends, how aware was Andrews of the literature on lesbianism? Andrews was familiar with the work of Virginia Woolf, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain. After Holtby's death in 1935, Andrews wrote the following poem, suggesting she found Holtby an inspiration:

*Your eyes gaze into mine....
They call to me. They urge me to the strain
Of flinty paths sharp-climbing from the plain,
They stir my blood to bear with proud disdain
The stress of life, its burden and its pain,
My talisman your fortitude.
[...]*

*Your message lives. Your fame the ages keep
And round the seven seas its echoes sweep
("W.H. (Portrait)" in Andrews 1947)*

She wrote of Woolf, who died in 1941, that

I shall keep faith with thee

*I shall not prostitute
The smallest gift in me
For gold or fame. Though mute,
Thy voice still charms my ear
With counsel wise and clear.*

In the next verse, she echoes Woolf's "five hundred pounds a year" –

*I have a competence
To meet my wants each day:
Sufficient shillings, pence,
To keep the wolf away.*
("To V.W.", in Andrews 1947).

With this, and her reference in the earlier poem to their "title deeds", Andrews made it clear how she and her circle of friends were able to lead lesbian lives in Taranaki at the mid-century.

ⁱ Unless otherwise stated, this information is from records and documents held at the Taranaki Museum.

ⁱⁱ Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "Means and Ends", unpublished speech 1937.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary, 1934, 11 August, p.110.

^{iv} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary 1937, 18 June, p.10.

^v Birth certificate Muriel Kirton, August 10, 1893.

^{vi} Death certificate Muriel Kirton, 14 December 1980. The house was left to her brother Henry Kirton and passed from him to her unmarried missionary niece Jean Kirton in 1984. Title, 14 Kowhai Street, Fitzroy, New Plymouth.

^{vii} Title, 14 Kowhai Street, Fitzroy, New Plymouth

^{viii} Judy Maiden, oral history interview by Alison Laurie, 1998.

^{ix} *ibid.*

^x Elsie Andrews "My life", undated manuscript.

^{xi} Monica Brewster's Will, 1973, Taranaki Museum.

^{xii} Personal communication to AJL from Taranaki informant .

^{xiii} Judy Maiden, oral history interview by Alison Laurie, 1998, Taranaki Museum.

^{xiv} Military records: NZANSC, Clara Elizabeth Hawkins, Reg. no. 22/134.

^{xv} Death notice, *Evening Post*, December 18, 1975.

^{xvi} Delegates list, 1937 4th PPWA Conference proceedings, p.15.

^{xvii} Obituary, Helen Noble, in *Howick and Pakuranga Times*, 26 September 1987.

^{xviii} Judy Maiden, oral history interview by Alison Laurie, 1998, Taranaki Museum.

^{xix} Addams and Woolley sent greetings to the 1930 2nd Conference as they were unable to attend (1930 Second PPWA Conference proceedings).

^{xx} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary 1930, p.135.

^{xxi} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary 1937, p.104.

^{xxii} Mrs Victoria Amohau Bennett, OBE. She was the first president of Ngati Poneke, on the YWCA executive, married to H.D. Bennett, chairman of the works committee, Wellington City Council and brother of the first Maori Bishop of Aotearoa, Bishop Frederick Bennett. Obituary, *Evening Post*, 22 September 1975, and delegates list, 1952 6th PPWA Conference proceedings, p.12.

^{xxiii} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary 1934, 2 September, p.77.

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} Mary Eleanor Sims graduated from Otago, and taught geography at Christchurch Girls' High School 1913-1935. She was president of the NZ Federation of University Women (Obituary, *Christchurch Press*, 17 October 1962).

^{xxvi} Delegates list, 1930 2nd PPWA Conference proceedings.

^{xxvii} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary 1930, 28 August.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.* 25 August 1930.

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- ^{xxix} Delegates list, 1930 2nd PPWA Conference proceedings.
- ^{xxx} Delegates list, 1937 4th Pan PPWA Conference proceedings. Dr Kneeland was Secretary of the Committee, Bureau of Home Economics; publications authored or co-authored by her include: "Consumer Expenditures In The United States; Estimates For 1935-36", National Resources Committee, 1939 and "Family Expenditures In The United States: Statistical Tables And Appendixes", The National Resources Planning Board, 1941.
- ^{xxxi} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary, 1934, 11 August, p.109.
- ^{xxxii} Ibid. 15 August 1934, p.126.
- ^{xxxiii} Ibid. pp.128-129.
- ^{xxxiv} Ibid. 6 August p.131.
- ^{xxxv} Ibid. p.137.
- ^{xxxvi} Ibid. 21 August, p.153.
- ^{xxxvii} Ibid. 22 August, pp.156-157.
- ^{xxxviii} Ibid. 22 August, p.162.
- ^{xxxix} Ibid.
- ^{xl} Ibid. 31 August.
- ^{xli} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "Silence is Golden", undated poem.
- ^{xlii} Miss Ann Y. Satterthwaite, Hawaii (Delegates list, 1930 2nd PPWA Conference proceedings).
- ^{xliii} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary, 1937, p.46.
- ^{xliv} Ibid. pp.46-47.
- ^{xl v} Ibid. 13 July, p.82.
- ^{xlvi} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "To Sparkling Eyes 18/3/47" unpublished poem.
- ^{xl vii} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "Memories ELH 18/3/47", unpublished poem.
- ^{xl viii} For example entries on writing letters and purchasing gifts for Muriel, in Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, diary, 1934, 11 August, p.107, and diary 1937 23 June, p.28 and 10 August.
- ^{xl ix} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "Friendship- Fitzroy 9/1/46" unpublished poem.

Chapter 14

Peter, a lesbian

Elizabeth Pudsey Dawson (1894 -1986)

Introduction and background

Elizabeth Pudsey Dawson (1894 -1986), known as EPD or as Peter, is the only woman in Part 3 for whom records exist confirming that she called herself a lesbian. Born in England, Dawson came to New Zealand to live more freely away from her family, and lived here for over thirty years, supporting herself from a small inherited income, and from her work as a physiotherapist. Dawson had lesbian and male homosexual friends, including Frank Sargeson, one of the many New Zealand writers she assisted financially, including Janet Frame. She supported Frame, who was the eventual beneficiary of her estate, over a long period.

Dawson was born in England on 5 September 1894. Her father was a clergyman at the private Roedean Girls' School, which she and her three sisters attended as part of the conditions of his employment. Roedean appears to have had a lively lesbian culture. One autobiographical account written in 1936 by R. K. Davies about her schooldays at Roedean at the end of the nineteenth century, describes an unsuccessful attempt by a teacher to curb the girls' tradition of crushes and passionate relationships between the "gonees" and their "gonages" (Oram and Turnbull 2001, pp.146-148). The writer and lesbian Nancy Spain had fond memories of her schooldays at Roedean, using it as the model for a school she called "Radcliff Hall", in her 1949 spoof detective novel *Poison for Teacher* (Auchmuty 2000, p.122). Vera, a Brighton narrator, described seeking out Roedean on her walks, just because Spain went there, explaining that "you felt a connection, you see, because you knew she was gay" (Brighton Ourstory Project 1992, p.60).

After leaving Roedean, Dawson studied physiotherapy at the Royal Holloway College, London (Frame 1985, King 2000). She came to New Zealand with one of her sisters in 1925, at the age of thirty-one, and by the late 1930s was living in Pelorus Sound (King 1995, p.174). She moved to Wellington, then Auckland, and eventually to Mount

Manganui, and returned to England in 1962, aged 67, living alone in Norfolk until her death in May 1986.

Stories about Peter

There are no biographies of Dawson, but she is mentioned in Frame's autobiographies, and in biographies about Sargeson and Glover. She herself wrote stories and articles that may be read as autobiographical.

Michael King, in his biography on Sargeson, describes Dawson as "a lesbian physiotherapist with private means" (King 1995, p.174). In his biography of Frame, King calls Dawson an "upper-class English woman who had moved to New Zealand in 1925 to escape her family and what she saw as the expectations of her class", adding that she was "well-educated...left-wing and lesbian" (King 2000, p.140). By the late 1930s she was living in Pelorus Sound, "keen to publish articles on her two great interests, pacifism and healthy nutrition...[and] also trying to write fiction" (King 1995, p.174). Gordon Ogilvie, in a biography of the poet Denis Glover, calls Dawson "an English-born lesbian physiotherapist and would-be playwright with private means", describing her as a "long distance correspondent and benefactor" (Ogilvie 1999, p.117) for her assistance to Glover. Glover was only one of the many New Zealand writers Dawson assisted, most repaying her generosity with condescending and anti-lesbian remarks.

A lesbian life

Dawson did not meet homosexual writer Frank Sargeson until 1942, though she corresponded with him from the late 1930s in "an exchange that was to last for over 40 years". She asked for critical comments on her writing, and sent him money from her modest inherited income (King 1995, pp.174-175), covering the publication costs for *A Man and His Wife* in 1940, and giving Sargeson a further forty-five pounds to write his next novel (ibid. p.194). Despite this generosity, Sargeson wrote disparagingly of her to Glover, "once E.P.D. starts pestering you she'll never let you alone. A most curious little person...she has several curious little plays which I have copies of at the moment which she may get you to publish" (Sargeson in Ogilvie 1999, p.117). Later, Sargeson patronisingly suggested Dawson was, "probably undone by her high-minded YWCA vegetarian sincerity" (ibid.).

Sargeson persuaded Dawson to give money to other New Zealand writers, including the poet A.R.D. Fairburn, encouraging her by explaining “I am more fortunate than he is”, as the “storywriter still has some sort of place even in NZ”, while “the poet, scarcely any at all”. He added that, “with Fairburn’s great abilities, wide range, impeccable taste etc it is a major tragedy” (King 1995, p.194). Dawson was persuaded by this, and for some time she supported “the habitually impoverished Fairburn...with parcels of clothing, tobacco and gifts of money from her inheritance” (Ogilvie 1999, p.117). In another begging letter to Dawson on Fairburn’s behalf Sargeson wrote

This week his wife has left him...taking the four children with her...I don’t blame her, it must have got to the point where human endurance could no longer stand the strain...I [asked] what his reactions would be if someone sent him 100 pounds (Sargeson 1940 in King 1995, p.195).

Dawson sent Fairburn the money, which he used to publish his *Poems 1929-41* in 1943, dedicated to her in recognition of this support (ibid. p.195, note). Her support of Fairburn is ironic given his misogynist and homophobic views, particularly as expressed in his essay “The Woman Problem” which, though it was not published until 1967, may be regarded as representing his views on both women and homosexuals.

It is only the abnormal woman, the blue-stockings or male impersonator... who (under masculine influence of some sort) can interest herself in the things of the spirit (Fairburn 1967, p.20)...There are, in all the big cities of the world, coteries of homosexuals who have a strong influence on the arts...During the period between the Wars the homosexuals...formed a sort of army of occupation [of literature and the arts] (ibid. p.24) ...The influence of homosexual artists is very strong...half the...novels, plays and films have a homosexual inspiration...the feminist world of ‘equal’ men and women is closely analogous to a homosexual world ...any stable relationship between a normal man and a normal woman must be based on the psychological domination of the woman by her mate. It is upon this natural pattern that homosexual-feminist propaganda makes its main attack (ibid. p.26).

These extracts are interesting for several reasons. They confirm there were influential homosexuals, both men and women, in New Zealand literary and art circles. However, just who were these “feminist-homosexual people”? Fairburn had met Frances Hodgkins in London through Lucy Wertheim in 1931 and admired her paintings. (Fairburn 1967, pp.186-188), but may not have realized she had lesbian relationships. He would have known the work of Katherine Mansfield and Ursula Bethell and his comments may have been directed against them, despite the secrecy surrounding their lesbianism.

These extracts are also interesting given the assistance he was receiving from Dawson, who he would certainly have known was lesbian. Perhaps Fairburn's views on "feminist-homosexuals" influenced and promoted negative attitudes towards Dawson's writing and contributed to the difficulties she experienced in getting her own work published.

At the beginning of WW2 Dawson moved from Pelorus Sound to Wellington, where she was involved in anti-war activities as a member of War Resisters International and the New Zealand Peace Union (King 1995, p.189). She published pacifist articles in *Tomorrow* which was shut down by the government in 1940. The War Resisters' International extended into sixty-eight countries and was "pledged to absolute pacifism – the renunciation of war" (Dawson 1939c, p.820). In another article "Straws in the Wind", Dawson urged non-violence commenting "It takes nations today to wage war, but it takes humanity, today and tomorrow, to wage peace" (Dawson 1940, p.415). Dawson's pacifist connections suggest links with Andrews' networks.

In 1944 she suggested establishing an "arcadian community", proposing buying a homestead and grounds near Tauranga to house writers and artists and to be self-sufficient. Sargeson wrote Dawson what King calls an "immensely practical" letter (King 1995, p.256), but which was certain to dampen her enthusiasm for a cooperative scheme. Not surprisingly, she did not proceed, which King then explains as her "dithering" (ibid. p.257). Instead, she purchased a house in Mount Maunganui, where she lived alone.

In December 1950 Dawson moved into Sargeson's army hut at the back of his house at Takapuna, Auckland, for a two-month stay, to write and to visit Auckland friends. During her stay Sargeson wrote to homosexual writer Maurice Duggan

Dawson is...NZ's number 1 neurotic and neurasthenic¹; just at the moment she's away at Kumeu with her two ex-nurse friends...Dawson realizes they've worked things out better than she has, the same as she supposes I have – and can't stop herself from sucking us all dry in her desperate endeavour to discover the secret she supposes us to have (King 1995, p.308)

Dawson's "two ex-nurse friends", who seem to have lived in a long-term lesbian relationship which Dawson admired, may have been part of a network linking them with networks of lesbians in nursing. Sargeson's comment about his own life suggests

that Dawson knew about his thirty-five-year relationship with Harry Doyle (King 1995, pp.131-141).

Apparently contradicting Sargeson's claim that Dawson was "neurotic and neurasthenic" are her articles on health and nutrition. In "The Responsibility of Health" she asserted that "secret of our Health and its Security lies in the wisdom with which we as individuals mix our fuel and regulate our own combustion in relation to Nature's requirements". The "New Health Era", she explained, would be achieved through better diet and exercise (Dawson 1939a, pp.141-142). In "An Age of Revolutions" she answered criticisms of this article, explaining

When this Marxist "class-conscious" proletariat...has levelled itself up until one classless society owns the entire means of production, the State disappears – there is no need for it. When the victims of disease have assimilated, learnt, and are able to apply the simply acquired knowledge of the laws of health, the Medical System will disappear – there will be no need for anything of the sort beyond an accident corps (Dawson 1939b, p.381).

This quotation indicates that Dawson's views on health could have linked her to Herbert Sutcliffe's *School of Radiant Living* and the Havelock Work. However, her Marxist ideas suggest stronger connections with socialist and pacifist networks. Her writing suggests she was familiar with overseas ideas, and that she subscribed to overseas publications.

Dawson wrote fiction, and Sargeson included her story "Maria" in his 1945 anthology, as she had again paid the publication costs.ⁱⁱ Maria is "thin, bleak and sexless, like the 'little maid that hath no breasts'. Only by a margin, and that of personality rather than flesh, did she escape being angular". She is "merely a waitress, but by serving she ruled" (Dawson 1945, p.103) The narrator is "held" by Maria, though does not "envy...her actual work, since mine offered me far more scope than she could ever know in hers". She wants to "discover what it was this girl had that I seemed to lack". The narrator has "only recently come to New Zealand...Chance had brought me to this small hospital" (Dawson 1945, p.105). She welcomes "signs of approval" from Maria, and tries to "draw her out, but with little success". The day before the narrator leaves, she is invited into Maria's bedroom. On the walls are watercolours, "rough sketches of the New Zealand bush...emphasising what is fearful and sinister in it". Maria paints, "but not for people to see. You can't do two things properly". The narrator looks at the paintings and realises "Maria had subdued to order greater worries than mine in those

unusual paintings: they relieved for her some dark oppression and freed her to serve us as she did” (Dawson 1945, p.106). This story is probably autobiographical, reflecting Dawson’s arrival in New Zealand and her hospital work as physiotherapist. Perhaps she had been attracted to “Maria”, who used art to relieve and free herself as Dawson hoped to do.

Though Sargeson was scathing about Dawson’s writing, Janet Frame liked this story and was “most affected” by it (King 2000, p.80).

Peter Dawson and Janet Frame

In 1956 Sargeson “persuaded” Janet Frame to accept an invitation from Dawson to stay with her in Mount Maunganui as he now needed assistance with the “burden” of providing “care and shelter” for Frame (King 2000, p.140). Frame described “Paula Lincoln” (Dawson) as “a small grey-haired woman with a voice full of tears as she talked of how her body had ‘changed’ and of how she had been deprived of her share of peace” (Frame 1985, p.171). Sargeson explained to Frame how Dawson “readily became interested in causes”, and how “a small inheritance gave her a private income with freedom to write”, though she had written only a few stories. Frame reported Sargeson telling her that Dawson had “helped him with money for the building of his bach and the publishing of his first book”, revealing that she was lesbian, of which Frame writes she was “unaware of the meaning and implication” before his explanation (Frame 1985, p.172). Frame visited Tauranga and stayed in Dawson’s “small whitewashed beach cottage” likening it to Haworth Parsonage

Only the gravel road and the sandhills lay between the cottage and the wintry ocean. The front of the section was an expanse of sand, where a few plants grey-leaved, stunted in growth, leaned away from the wind towards the cottage... Once inside [Dawson] showed me to a book-lined room with a big sagging bed in the middle and a wooden sandstrewn floor. It was cold, stark. The rusted window catch would not work. The casement window felt frozen (Frame 1985, p.175).

Dawson was sixty-two years old and retired at this time, and this living situation does not suggest wealth sufficient to support several New Zealand writers, but frugality and simplicity. However, to New Zealand’s impoverished writing community, Dawson’s few resources and small regular income represented wealth, and all seem to have been willing to accept her financial assistance.

Frame wanted Dawson and herself to “click”, a word she suggests came from Dawson’s own vocabulary, which “held a number of words used in school stories” (Frame 1985, p.174). She was pleased that though Dawson was the same age as her mother, they talked “as two persons” (Frame 1985, p.178). King, in a comment reminiscent of the assertions about Bethell in Chapter 11, suggests the women’s friendship was a maternal bond because Frame’s mother had recently died (King 2000, p.141). However, Dawson, in what was surely an erotic rather than a maternal move, asked Frame if she had read *The Well of Loneliness*, which she happened to have “on the bookshelf”, and told Frame she was a lesbian. Frame read the book that evening (in one sitting?) and next day Dawson described her “lifelong passion for a schoolgirl at her former public school” and spoke of her friend Lily as if she were “there in front of her and the passion was still alive”. Frame recollected that “tears came to her eyes...Lily had been her lasting, only love. Although there had been friends since who ‘clicked’ there had been no love as with men and women” (Frame 1985, p.177). Frame decided she liked Dawson as one of the “misunderstood misfits of the world”, though claimed she was “repelled by the idea of both male and female homosexuality”. She understood Dawson was distressed by her past experiences, as she had described

her longing for what had been and what had not been, and I knew that like all outcasts she would need to struggle doubly hard to survive the daily raids on her sensitivity (Frame 1985, pp.178-179).

During the Tauranga visit, Dawson introduced Frame to Michael Hodgkins,ⁱⁱⁱ Frances Hodgkins’ nephew who lived nearby (Frame 1985, p.178). Frame describes Dawson wearing

Grey flannel slacks, white cotton blouse like a school blouse, grey cardigan, and gabardine raincoat. Her shoes were black lace-up “sensible” winter shoes. She was eager and nervous, speaking in the English accent which we used to call “Oxford”...which therefore gave it an association with authority (Frame 1985, p.173).

Wearing “slacks” in public was not generally accepted in 1956, so Dawson was daring in her dress (see Chapter 8). Frame noted that Dawson, like Sargeson, disliked “frills and fripperies” (Frame 1985, p.180). When Frame received a grant from the Literary Fund for travel to England, Dawson gave her a pair of her own grey flannel trousers, but Frame felt unable to tell her she did not like wearing slacks^{iv} (Frame 1985, p.181). Both Dawson and homosexual poet and publisher Charles Brasch (see Chapter 11) were persuaded by Sargeson to contribute to Frame’s travel expenses, and Dawson continued

her support with regular contributions through the years (see, for example, King 2000, p.225, p.400).

The following year, 1957, Sargeson considered “renting out his house for the summer months and moving in with Dawson; or selling the Esmonde Road bach and either building on to her Mount Manganui bach or shifting his house there” (King 1995, p.342). His mother’s death in December 1957 and subsequent legacy of four hundred and five pounds (ibid. p.348) must have enabled him to write *Memoirs of a Peon* without seeking this financial support from Dawson (though King does not make the connection).

Five years later, in 1962, Dawson now aged 67 returned to England, apparently wanting to make a home for Frame, which King suggests she discussed with Sargeson, though not with Frame herself (King 2000, p.545, n.64). Most New Zealand friends except Sargeson had died, and Dawson had three sisters and a brother alive in England (ibid. p.226). She purchased “Flint Cottage” in Norfolk, and asked Frame to live with her there, but Frame stayed only for a few weeks. King noted “the two women got on well together, rekindling the relationship they had established at Mount Maunganui with its mother-daughter overtones”, and that Frame thought they did not need to “explain” themselves to each other (King 2000, pp.233-236). She told Dawson that it was “wonderful to have someone in this country whom I really know” (ibid. p.246). A few months later, she decided she would live with Dawson but, after a visit, suggested staying in “a caravan...in your back garden...we could have the advantages of aloneness and of company”. Frame bought the caravan, delivered in June 1963, while she packed her belongings in London in preparation for the move (ibid. pp.246-249). However, Frame’s father died unexpectedly in August, while Dawson and her sister Rachel were staying at Frame’s London flat (ibid. pp.252-253). In her autobiography, Frame describes “Paula Lincoln” coming to London with her sister Rachel “to see the cricket”. These sisters were

Overwhelming, eager, enthusiastic, moving abruptly in what seemed like a physical attack on the space around them...their voices were high-pitched with excitement and their Oxford accents, sharply edged, sliced through the apartment, furniture, fittings, air and my ears (Frame 1986, p.150).

Frame received a letter from her sister about their father’s unexpected death, and told “Paula and Rachel” her sad news. However, they do not console her but only “reminisce” about their own father, “a distant man” who “visited them occasionally in

their nursery” and whom they called “Father”. Their “Mother” rarely came to the nursery either, so it was to “their elder sister...they looked for guidance and help”. They used “words and phrases that were of the nineteen twenties and before”, that Frame knew only from books, like “rotters”, “cads” and “tophole” (Frame 1986, p.150). If this account is accurate, she did not find Dawson’s response comforting, and then had to return to New Zealand to attend to family business because of her father’s death. Returning to England, Frame decided not to move to Norfolk, and she felt Dawson was reluctant about storing her belongings because of this decision (King 2000, p.253). However, Dawson then wrote to Frame asking her to be the executor and chief beneficiary of her will, and to inherit her house and estate. King (2000) believes Dawson made these arrangements assuming Frame would return to England, with “an implication that inheritance of the estate would be compensation for Frame’s living alongside Dawson in the latter’s old age”, though he adds that Dawson understood that “joint occupation was now less likely” and assured her that “Frame was to inherit the estate no matter where she lived”. Frame accepted the offer, writing “The idea of living in Flint Cottage... makes me want to weep...[of course it] may be too sad to face if you are not living” (King 2000, pp.269-270).

Frame often stayed with Dawson through the years, and in 1979 helped her with “a final talk over affairs as beneficiary of her estate” (ibid. p.428). Dawson died in May 1986, and Frame then inherited the estate, selling Flint Cottage for thirty thousand pounds (ibid. p.481). This helped Frame to purchase property in New Zealand.^v King reports that when Frame was presented to the Queen, she wore a brooch she had inherited from Dawson (ibid. p.494), a story that perhaps captures some of Frame’s regard for Dawson.

Dawson was a loyal and generous friend to both Sargeson and Frame, enabling them to make major contributions to New Zealand literature. Dawson’s generous assistance to many other writers over a thirty-year period in New Zealand was perhaps an attempt to buy acceptance, despite the fact that many who benefitted from her generosity have never acknowledged her support.

Dawson was a contemporary of several others in Part 3, and her life also overlaps with all the narrators in Part 4. which follows.

ⁱ C.K.Stead includes a character called Fardro, apparently based on Sargeson, who has “endless complaints about corns, piles, tinea, peptic ulcers, migraine” (Stead 1984, p.1), suggesting that Sargeson displaced his own “neurasthenia” onto Dawson.

2.King claims “Maria” was “heavily edited” by Sargeson to “make it publishable” as a quid pro quo for paying the publishing costs for this anthology of New Zealand fiction, *Speaking For Ourselves* (King 2000, p.80).

3.Sargeson writes his memoir “Up onto the Roof and Down Again”, about a journey to Mount Maunganui and a description of a pipi meal he made for “K”- Dawson (King 1995, p.309; Frame 1984, p.175), and also of his meeting with Michael Hodgkins (Sargeson 1981, p.25).

^{iv} 4.Frame gratefully wore Dawson’s grey trousers during a storm on Ibiza later that year (King 2000, p.161).

^v Frame used her inheritance from Dawson to purchase an old farmhouse in Shannon, near Palmerston North, for \$56,000 in March 1988 (King 2000, p.485), selling it in mid 1990 to purchase a house in Dahlia Street, Palmerston North. (ibid. p.496). Frame made the Shannon house available for writers at a low rental; lesbian author Frances Cherry completed her novel *The Widowhood of Jackie Bates* there in 1989. (Personal knowledge).

Chapter 15

Overview and Summary of Part Three

Introduction

The previous chapters have presented and discussed stories derived from written sources about the selected women. The present chapter overviews commonalities, and compares these experiences with those of overseas contemporaries, from written sources. The period of the stories extends from the 1850s when Mary Taylor lived in New Zealand, to 1970, by when Peter Dawson had returned to England, with the main focus on the earlier twentieth century. It is significant that Taylor and Dawson came from and returned to England and that several of the other women lived there for periods. Until 1949 New Zealanders held British citizenship and working and residing in Britain required few formalities. British influences and ideas on lesbianism predominated, as they did on other aspects of life. The chapter considers available information, connections to circles overseas and within New Zealand, the language used to describe lesbianism, the possibilities of economic independence, and the importance of privacy and discretion as organising principles. This overview is drawn from fragmentary glimpses based on what remains in writing. Written records are sparse, with all the problems of “censorship, definitions and labeling” (Cook in Schwartz 1979, p.8).

Information on lesbianism

Depending on their age and period, interests and circumstances, a significant number of these women or the people around them would have been influenced by ideas on female sexuality derived from the stories surveyed in Chapter 5 and 6. Many grew up in the shadow of the Oscar Wilde trials, were adults when the British Parliament attempted to criminalise lesbianism and during the “short winter’s day” of the 1920s (Bell 1976, p.59), when lesbian chic was fashionable in Greenwich Village, and there were lesbian meeting places in Berlin, Paris and London (Chapter 8). All lived in a post-sexology period and some, for example KM, accepted the medical theories of lesbianism. Dawson, only six years younger than KM or Andrews, lived until 1986 and revealed to others she was lesbian.

The women’s views were not static and those who lived longest, and had most access to education, information and travel, had more opportunities to develop their ideas on

lesbianism. KM died in her early thirties, two years before her friend Virginia Woolf became involved with Vita Sackville-Westⁱ and five years before Woolf wrote *Orlando*, or *Hall TWOL*. Born the same year as KM, Andrews lived until she was sixty and probably read these, as well as being inspired by the work of Woolf, Brittain and Holtby, as her writing indicates. At least Andrews and Kirton, Pollen who died in 1934, and Bethell who lived until 1945, subscribed to *Time and Tide* and would have read Brittain's 1928 account of the *TWOL* obscenity trial, probably encouraging readers to obtain the book, perhaps through importers like Maud England's Wellington bookshop. Bethell's library was substantial, and it is likely she owned books about lesbianism.

Andrews died in 1948 but, had she lived into her eighties, could have welcomed post-1970 lesbian-feminism (see Faderman 1981, p.20).ⁱⁱ Hodgkins lived until 1947, changing her views on art, as her membership of the Seven and Five Group indicates, and may have further developed her ideas on lesbianism during the 1920s and 1930s.

Dorothy Richmond was an adult of 38 when she returned to England in 1899, two years after the disgraced Wilde was released from prison. Hodgkins was thirty-two when she arrived in 1901, the year after Wilde's death. KM was only 13 in 1900 when she was already reading Wilde's work at Queen's College. Returning to New Zealand from 1906–1908, KM's path crossed that of the 20-year older Hodgkins, returning to Britain having spent 1903–1906 in Wellington with Richmond. In Wellington, KM read Wilde and borrowed books by Carpenter from the Parliamentary Library. She was forced to leave Wellington in 1908 after her family discovered her sexual involvements with women. In London, after attempting a brief marriage, she described homosexuality as “ruin and mental decay”, which would drive her insane or kill her.

KM, Hodgkins, Bethell, Pollen and Spencer were in England during the Maud Allen case. Bethell and Pollen returned to Christchurch in 1919 and may have been unaware of the proposed 1921 Macquisten Amendment, not widely reported here, though these women read British newspapers.ⁱⁱⁱ Some may have read about the 1906–1907 Rotciv cases or the 1909 Bock trial (Chapters 6 and 9). Bethell and Pollen knew D'Arcy Cresswell and must have been aware of his role in the 1920 Mackay case (Chapter 6). Some may have read the 1925 Report on Mental Defectives and Sexual Offenders and noted its reference to “confirmed homosexuals...not confined to the male sex” (Chapter 4). All were probably aware of religious proscriptions against same-sexual

behaviours. However, as Bray suggests in his study of homosexuality in Elizabethan England, perhaps they did not connect their own sexual activities with the proscriptions against lesbianism, rather edging their “own sexual behaviour out of what constituted sin” (Bray 1982, p.66). Re-positioning their lesbian relationship appears to be how Pollen and Bethell responded to negative ecclesiastical discourse. They and others may have been influenced, like other contemporaries, by “romantic evangelicalism”, understanding all love as desirable (Sahli 1979, p.26). The Richmonds were influenced by unitarian ideas, as was their contemporary Ellen Starr^{iv}, intimate partner of Jane Addams (Faderman 1999, p.124). Jerome Spencer and Hutchinson, like Hall and Troubridge were attracted to spiritualism and esoteric thought. Their interpretations of same-sex love may have ranged from ideas of combining masculine and feminine principles in their trio, to reincarnation.^v They knew the ideas of Annie Besant (and founded theosophy here), Besant suggesting meditation would “enable “the pairs of opposites” to be “transcended”, and asserting that “nothing can exist in God’s world save by God himself” (Besant 1913, p.26, p.99), echoing Stephen’s plea for God to “[a]cknowledge us...before the whole world” (Hall 1968, p.510). They would also have known the ideas of William Morris and Edward Carpenter, through their interest in nature, handcrafts and self-sufficiency, promoted here through the Havelock Work. Hodgkins, too, could have known Carpenter’s ideas through her Manchester friends.

Alla Richmond's 1901 use of “lady-husband”^{vi}, and her comment “if one of you three were to change into a man”, about the triangular relationship between Shaen, Astley and Dorothy^{vii} indicates familiarity with discourses from Iphis to female husbands (Chapter 5). Alla supposed there was “no hope” of a man coming “onto the scene”, perhaps a reference to congenital inversion, unless she thought the women unable to attract men, though it seems more likely she knew they were not interested in men. Alla appealed to Dorothy that a relationship with “Miss Hodgkins” was “healthier, saner, more manly.”^{viii} Perhaps the sisters discussed Krafft-Ebing or Ellis’ “masculine” female inverts and Dorothy sought the virtues of “manliness”, or possibly she meant fully and nobly “human”, though this older use seems unlikely by 1901, as even thirty years earlier “manly” and “womanly” were used to refer to masculine and feminine sex attributes (see Fowler 1870, p.571, p.602).

In 1878 Mary Richmond wondered if she was “too hard on this new development and behind the century”, regarding the “young lady lovers” of Newnham Hall (Porter and

Macdonald 1996). Perhaps she thought lesbianism was increasing. Many writers regarded women's colleges as "responsible for promoting homosexuality" (Faderman 1991, p.311, n.5). One 1870s writer called them "fearfully unsafe", as they promoted "diseases [and] vices of body and imagination...as weeds are forced in hot beds" (cited in Faderman 1991, p.14). Mary herself had passionate friendships with women. Though Krafft-Ebing did not publish before 1886, Mary could have been familiar with the 1870 sexology discourses of Westphal or earlier discourses on the "man-woman", as the Richmonds visited Dresden and knew German. Or, she may have regarded the public spectacle of women in love as shockingly indiscreet. Why did she believe that the young ladies in love with Margaret would produce "sentiment whose only outcome is tears"? Mary saw Miss Prideau as foolish, perhaps because Margaret did not reciprocate her feelings and, thus, there was no future. Or perhaps she thought that Margaret was unable to sustain a long-term career and would therefore need to marry (unlike herself, as an "old maid"). Margaret did later marry, choosing Dr Fell, a "sweet little creature", and felt like "his mother".

Bethell studied painting in Geneva and music in Dresden during the early 1890s. Fluent in French and German, she could have read contemporary German sexology, or novels by George Sand (which Taylor thought it worth learning French to read). Many women in Part 3, through their middle-class education and connections, were likely to have read or at least heard of contemporary ideas on lesbianism, with the possible exception of the illiterate Eugenia Falleni.

Lesbian communities and connections

Andrews and Kirton did not live overseas, though travelled and attended conferences for the Pan Pacific Women's Association (PPWA). Love between women seems to have been discussed openly among the New Zealand delegates, for example, Mrs Bennett's comment to Mrs Hammond about Andrews' choice of clothing, "here's a new love". Perhaps there was an acknowledged lesbian circle in this organisation. Jane Addams, President of the PPWA, was in a lesbian relationship with Mary Rozet Smith (Faderman 1999, pp.115–135). Mary E. Wooley, president of Mount Holyoke College and literature professor Jeanette Marks, who lived together for half a century (Faderman 1999, p.155), were prominent PPWA members. Faderman suggests the leadership of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) founded by Addams in 1919 was "from the start largely comprised [of] women who would be described in

contemporary terms as lesbian or bisexual” (ibid.). Did Andrews and Kirton know Addams and the others? Was the PPWA also a hotbed of pacifists involved in lesbian relationships?

Other women in Part 3 also attended overseas conferences. Margaret and Ada Magill supported anti-armament and anti-nationalism, Margaret attending education and Red Cross conferences to represent these views. These women may have had links to Andrews’ network, and all the may have read Dawson’s pacifist articles in *Tomorrow* or had links with her peace circles.

Some women lived overseas for long periods as expatriates. Hodgkins, Richmond, KM, Bethell, Pollen and Spencer lived in England or Europe, where it was easier to live anonymously, or to socialise in lesbian circles. Hodgkins, KM and Collier spent time in Paris, though apparently did not meet the well-established American expatriate lesbian circles around Stein or Barney. Collier had connections into lesbian art circles in Paris, and Hodgkins socialized in homosexual and lesbian art circles.

New opportunities for women to meet one another became available during WW1. In England, the Women's Ambulance Corps,^{ix} or the Women Police Service, founded by lesbians Damer Dawson and Allen, enabled lesbian circles to develop. Jerome Spencer became part of a police patrol and had connections in these circles. Other British circles included Bloomsbury and Garsington, where KM socialised. However, Woolf described “Bloomsbury parties” as composed of “40 young men...and three girls”, telling Ethel Smyth “When I go to what we call a Buggery Poke party, I feel as if I had strayed into the male urinal; a wet, smelly, trivial kind of place” (Woolf 1978, pp 199-200). Moreover, some Bloomsbury men disliked lesbians, Woolf reporting that “Morgan [E. M. Forster] was here...we got drunk and talked of sodomy and sapphism...He said he thought Sapphism disgusting, partly from convention, partly because he disliked that women should be independent of men” (Woolf 1980, p.193). As well as these unsatisfactory associations, KM was familiar with the lesbian demi-monde of Colette’s bohemian Paris.

Marjorie Hannah studied drama with “Edy and the boys”, probably meeting Woolf, Sackville-West, Hall and Troubridge through this association. Her bold declaration that she would “take any road I please” suggests she may have been involved in lesbian

relationships herself. Several women visited Dresden, including Richmond and Bethell, perhaps encountering German lesbian circles. Their contemporary Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982) was reputedly “cautious in Christchurch, but let her hair down in London”^x, as did Charles Brasch^{xi}, another friend of Bethell’s. Despite Marsh’s caution, “everyone knew she was a lesbian” (McLeod 2001, p.52). These connections suggest links between New Zealand and overseas lesbian circles, as does Blanche’s German “lady husband”; Saunders’ German lady doctor indicates lesbian connections between England and Germany.

Any two randomly selected people may be linked by no more than two intermediaries or degrees of separation (Paulos 1990, pp.38–39), especially true within sparsely populated New Zealand. Hodgkins and Richmond taught Edith Kathleen Bendall, KM’s lover. Dorothy Richmond was related to Monica Brewster and they may have socialised in the same circles, including Andrews and Kirton’s network of teacher and nurse couples. Dawson’s lesbian friends were nurses, and she knew Hodgkins’ nephew, and possibly Hodgkins. The Eastbourne circle included artists who knew Richmond. It is likely there were connections among women leading lesbian lives, through private networks and friendship circles meeting in one another’s houses, and through women’s clubs and organisations, church and activity groups.

Jerome Spencer and Hutchinson set up the Country Women’s Institute and, later, the Townswomen’s Guilds, enabling women to meet. Hamer suggests women leading lesbian lives were prominently involved in these organisations in England during the pre-WW2 period (for example, Alice Franklin, secretary of the National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds until 1948) as they were “overtly feminist and provided considerable lesbian space” (Hamer 1996, pp.79-90).

Andrews, Kirton and their circle founded the New Plymouth Women’s Club and Magill and Wood founded the East Harbour Women’s Club, and it seems significant that several women in Parts 3 and 4 were members of the Wellington Pioneer Club. In the US, women’s clubs were influenced by Addams and the issues she addressed through women’s settlement houses like Hull-House (Faderman 1999, p.123). Addams’ ideas may have influenced clubwomen here, for example, inspiring Andrews, Kirton and their circle to found and develop the Taranaki Women’s Club.

Lesbian identity and terms

Virginia Woolf wrote to Ethel Smyth

Where people mistake...is in perpetually narrowing and naming these immensely composite and wide-flung passions...But how do you define "Perversity"? What is the line between friendship and perversion? (Woolf 1978, pp.199-200).

Like Woolf, many New Zealand women of this period may have preferred not to name their relationships. Howard for example had “little time for labels” (Wilson 1990, p.309). They may have thought as their contemporary Djuna Barnes, who insisted she was “never a lesbian” but only “loved Thelma Wood” (Herring 1995, p.255). However, others labelled themselves or others in ways suggesting lesbian identities. Alla Richmond’s reference to Blanche’s “lady-husband” suggests a “lady” rather than a “female husband” or “man-woman”, perhaps a middle-class woman who was a suitable companion for a woman of similar background. Possibly each woman was a lady-husband for the other. Lady-husbands may have regarded themselves as having distinct sexual identities, or perhaps the identity was created by the relationship, ending if it did. KM called LM her “wife”, and her contemporaries Stein and Hall referred to Toklas and Troubridge, respectively, as their wives. Andrews and Bethell used “companion” for Kirton and Pollen, and Bethell also used “consort”. Mary Richmond used “old maid”, Maud England “bluestocking” and Hodgkins “theatrical”. These terms may refer to lost categories of same-sex love between women which Faderman suggests were known to earlier generations (Faderman 1994, p.viii, 1999, p.73).

The term “expatriate” seems to be McCormick’s code-name for exiled lesbians or homosexual men. KM used the abbreviation “S.S.” (Mansfield 1954, p.36). perhaps referring to “sapphism and sodomy”, as used by Woolf. (Woolf 1980, p.193). KM probably knew these terms from Queens College, but could have learned them in Wellington, as the 1907 use of “Sapphic” in the news media of the time indicates popular familiarity with the term.^{xii} Woolf called Sackville-West a “pronounced Sapphist” (Woolf 1978, p.235), though Sackville-West herself referred to “my proclivities” (Sackville-West 1984). Hall used “invert”, apparently regarding her lovers as heterosexual, commenting on Mickey Jacob’s retinue of apparently heterosexual women “It does seem that it is enough in itself to be an invert these days to get all the women as crazy as bitches in season” (Glasgow 1997, p.166). Mr X may have regarded herself either as an “invert” or, perhaps, as a man trapped in a woman’s body with whom non-inverted women might fall in love, especially after Hall’s 1928 publication of *TWOL* and the wider dissemination of these theories. Bethell’s fear of appearing

“masculine” in the portrait by Woollaston suggests her awareness of these ideas, as does her depiction of her love for Pollen and Taylor as linked to the more acceptable “maternal constituent” as an explanation for physical expressions of love between women. Though others described Dawson’s relationship with Frame as “maternal” (King 2000, p.141), this does not seem to be how Dawson herself portrayed the relationship. KM’s earliest role seems to have been that of artist, bohemian and female Oscar Wilde living outside the restraints placed on women, like Bryn Mawr college president M. Carey Thomas in her youth, who, Helen Horowitz suggests, was influenced by nineteenth-century European aesthete and decadent writers, fabricating “a new self” identified with the “passionate sensibility” of bohemians and artists she called “nous autres” (Horowitz in Faderman 1999, p.207).

Early officialdom used “homosexualist” or homosexual for both sexes. Only Dawson seems to have specifically identified as lesbian. Perhaps the others disliked the associations with sexology, pornography or the literary category of “exotic and evil lesbians” (Faderman 1995, p.xiii).

Photographs suggest the women dressed conservatively and appropriately, presenting images of respectability and gender conformity. They appear to have been cautious about wearing “masculine” clothing and, except for Dawson, no-one wore slacks publicly, though Bethell and Pollen wore them at home when gardening.

Some may have regarded love between women not as pathology or restricted to particular sexual identities, but as a possibility for any woman, making approaches using ordinary “friendship scripts” (Rose et al. 1993), like Andrews at conferences. This suggests identities of practice.

Lesbian relationships

Were the women’s relationships lesbian? Their writing and circumstances indicate that they experienced romantic and passionate emotions for other women. However, did they have genital sex? Lesbian sex is difficult to define (Frye 1990, p.110) and, as genital sex is not a necessary part of defining heterosexual relationships (Jeffreys 1985, pp.109-111), I do not regard it as an essential definition for the discussion of lesbianism in this study. However, I think it likely that many did have genital sex, at least during “that feverish dream called youth” (Lister in Whitbread 1988, p.210). Perhaps older or

bereaved women, like Bethell, abandoned sexual relations (Rothblum and Brehony 1993) enabling them to later deny that their relationships had ever been lesbian.

Once sexuality moved from “the context of reproduction to the realm of romantic love and physical passion” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988, p.84), some women acted on the romantic passions they felt for other women which “shook the soul” (Flanner in Colette 1968, p.6). Mary Richmond wrote to Connie, “what am I to do without you” (Richmond in Porter and Macdonald 1996, p.199), while Hodgkins had “grown so fond of” Dorothy Richmond that she wrote “I don’t know how I am ever going to let her go” (Hodgkins 1993, p.94). Dorothy was in love with Astley, who wrote of Dorothy’s presence in her cabin that they “retired to bed in a much more complete manner”, Dorothy preferring “the floor...to a downy couch if shared with C.C.A.[herself]”.^{xiii} Alla realized Astley’s love for Dorothy was “more that of a lover than her equally strong but less exciting love for [Margaret Shaen]”, but that “Margaret feels more of a lover’s love for Connie and that makes it a pain to her to see her give out to you what she does not give to her.” Hodgkins wrote to Dorothy that she “would rather nurse one of her [Miss Astley’s] empty envelopes than read the outpourings of my innermost soul”, later asking her to “let everything go to the winds only come without a moments delay” (Hodgkins 1993, pp. 156–157). Hodgkins herself appears to have been involved with several women, remarking that by sixty she was now free from “emotional relationships and the difficulties of making them work”.^{xiv} KM was attracted to various women, sometimes simultaneously. In New Zealand, she wrote about Maata, “I want her as I have had her—terribly” (Alpers 1980, p.49), and of EKB, “I feel more powerfully all those so-called sexual impulses with her than I have with any man...pillowed against her...I am a child, a woman, and more than half man” (Mansfield 1954, pp.12–13). Maata’s marriage may have been precipitated by the discovery of their lesbian relationship and she may have believed there would be more freedom to hide such a relationship within marriage. Her “mainly unhappy life” (Angus 1991, p.402) could result from losing KM, and it is possible Maata was KM’s continuing secret passion. However, she remained committed to LM throughout, telling her years later, “I feel I cannot live without you...I do love you and want you for my wife” (Baker 1971, pp.201–203) and “I can’t be satisfied unless I know you are near...I love you and am yours ever (Baker 1971, p.197).

Jerome Spencer seems to have loved only Amy Hutchinson, telling her “you don't know how badly I want you in everything I think and plan”. Andrews was passionately attracted to several women, especially Dr. Kneeland, during her lifetime partnership with Kirton and, though she may not have expressed these attractions sexually, perhaps the couple embraced ideals of open relationships, as did some contemporaries, for example, Flanner. Changing domestic partnerships in her circle indicate that not everyone remained in lifetime relationships. Andrews and Kirton's partnership was robust enough to include Andrews' other recorded passions. Willard, founder of the WCTU for which Andrews lectured, perhaps lived “not always monogamously”, in her relationship with Anna Gordon, her “loved and last” (Faderman 1999, p.35). By contrast, Bethell's whole emotional focus was on Pollen, her letters and poetry reflecting her strong, grieving passion after Pollen's death, though she did fall in love again, with Kathleen Taylor.

The women's writing indicates that they began lesbian relationships because they fell in love and were motivated by romance. Like Lister, women may have experienced a “fearful rousing” from romantic stories (Lister in Whitbread 1988, p.146), as indicated by nineteenth-century medical warnings against the reading of novels because of their harmful effects (Fowler 1870, p.987). The ideology of romantic love gained momentum in the twentieth century through romantic Hollywood films, as lesbians went to the movies for romance and adventure (Weiss 1992, pp.28-29).

The development of the companionate marriage assisted lesbian relationships. Once exposed to the cultural scripts of romantic love, women might reject the idea of marriage as a property relationship, seeking personal fulfillment through idealised romances and “free love” rather than mercenary marriage. Romantic passion might inspire women to live in lesbian relationships despite the risks and consequences of familial and social disapproval, and, indeed, Wolff believed lesbians “yearn for romantic love more than most people” (Wolff 1973, p.86). However, she also thought the lesbian existed

between the magical make-believe of romantic love in her private life, and the nervous strain of constant play-acting in her official life...a precarious existence...it is no wonder that many lesbians are demoralized by it (ibid. pp.88–89) (see below).

Work, family and independence

Dominant Victorian patriarchal ideologies suggested to women their proper role was the “angel in the house”. Taylor argued that instead, “the first duty” of women was

economic independence (Taylor 1972). Unless women were economically independent, they could not live as lesbians (Ferguson 1981, Hyman 1994). Most women in Part 3 had private means, or sufficient education to earn an independent living despite limited pre-1970 employment opportunities, and could avoid marriage. For many pre-1970 women, marriage was desirable, as few could earn an adequate and independent living. The status of spinsters was low (Hamilton 1989), and some unmarried women, like Collier, became unpaid daughters caring for other family members, with painting relegated to hobby work (Woolf 1928; Greer 1979; Gerrish Nunn 1987). Hodgkins escaped expectations to care for her widowed mother by living overseas, though the unmarried Dorothy Richmond managed a career as a teacher and an artist in New Zealand despite caring for various family members.

By the late nineteenth century unmarried middle-class women could acceptably support themselves through teaching or nursing careers. Jerome Spencer began life in an affluent household but, after her father lost his capital, needed to earn a living. Teaching at the newly established girls' schools was an opportunity for qualified women, and she took an extramural degree. She was later employed by the Havelock Work and supported by Amy and Frank Hutchinson. Andrews and Kirton supported themselves as primary school teachers. KM received a remittance from her family, besides earning a small income from writing and book reviews. The Beauchamps' negative attitude to her lesbianism explains her departure from Wellington, an otherwise unlikely story of an upper-class family allowing their 20-year-old daughter to travel unchaperoned to live in London alone, when previously they had provided a chaperone for their three daughters travelling together. Hodgkins' family may have wanted her to return overseas after her 1903 trip with Richmond, during which she became engaged briefly, perhaps to distract attention from their relationship. Her letters home expressing her love for Richmond may have alerted the family to unacceptable intimacies that could provoke scandal in the provincial closeness of Wellington. Despite her close relationship with her mother, the family may have thought it best she live elsewhere. Many families wanted lesbian daughters to live overseas and were prepared to pay them to stay away. For example, Natalie Barney became an expatriate after her lesbian relationships in Bar Harbor disturbed her wealthy family. Barney's mother thought homosexuals "more shunned than if they had killed someone for that is an impulse perhaps - and it has not the horror that this has", Jay suggesting that Victorians regarded sexual acts as more premeditated than murder (Jay 1988, p.4).

Hodgkins' lesbian and homosexual companions overseas made her creative life possible by providing her with money, material comforts and emotional support. For Bethell, her father's early death meant economic independence, and Dr Pollen provided support for Effie. Dawson received a small fixed income in addition to her earnings as a physiotherapist, becoming a remittance woman in New Zealand, while KM, Hodgkins, Bethell and Pollen all lived as expatriates in England at various times.

Employment options for working-class women were limited and poorly paid, for example, domestic service or factory work (see Chapter 7). Falleni and Mr. X. cross-dressed to obtain work as men and earn male wages, enabling them to set up households. Bock and Rotciv survived through crime and occasional paid work, eventually marrying men for financial support, and there were certainly some lesbians among New Zealand prostitutes of this period. Anna Rueling told the German women's movement "20 percent of all prostitutes are homosexual...[a]dverse domestic and economic conditions had driven these girls into the street" (Rueling 1904 in Blasius and Phelan 1997, p.149).

Being able to live in a lesbian relationship was not the only reason why women established careers. Some women may have seen romantic passion as hindering their work and lived alone, devoting themselves to careers in what was also resistance to compulsory heterosexuality. Hodgkins' remark (above) suggests she was pleased that freedom from emotional relationships now allowed her to focus on her painting. In a book dedicated to Ethel Smyth and Cicely Hamilton, Holtby, herself in a relationship with Brittain (and read by Andrews), suggested career women who were "Teachers, doctors, political organizers, artists and explorers...contributed something to the world", so it became "a matter of secondary importance whether they have also experienced the...relief of being loved: the exquisite intimacy of physical contact"; surprisingly suggesting that unemployed "elegant ladies" might even find "Lesbianism as dull as maternity" (Holtby 1978, pp.128–130). Certainly many of these women saw their work not just a means to support a relationship, but as a career, a calling, a mission, and the purpose of life. High achievement could protect women, as they could be seen as beyond reproach, like Jerome Spencer or Andrews. Several women in Part 3, including Andrews, received public honours for their achievements.

Medical treatment and punishments

Examples of women subjected to medical treatment, including KM's German water cure arranged by her mother, are discussed in Chapter 4. Other women in Part 3 may also have consulted doctors, or received treatment.

The absence of laws specifically prohibiting lesbian sex did not mean women were not subjected to a range of punishments including forced medical treatment, criminal convictions, loss of employment, and social ostracism. Mr X and her wife were arrested when their marriage was discovered, signalling to others the consequences of discovery. Rotciv and others were arrested for gender transgressions, also signaling what could happen to defiant. Mr X and her wife, though described as excellent workers, lost their jobs. Working-class women were more at risk of discovery and punishment through their greater visibility in the public sphere, but middle and upper-class women risked banishment, like KM who became an expatriate. Women of all classes risked rejection by family and friends.

A roof of one's own

Any lesbian life required access to an independent "room of one's own" and lesbian relationships required space for courtship, lovemaking, and eventual domesticity. Access to independent housing was class-related, with most working-class courtship taking place in the street (Giles 1995), while KM was able to take women to her family's weekend cottage for private lovemaking.

Difficulties finding private spaces meant lesbian meeting-places became important (Kennedy and Davis 1993, pp. 4–5, Faderman 1991, p.79), but this study has not found any publicly visible specifically lesbian meeting places in New Zealand before the late 1950s, or lesbian clubs before the 1970s. However, women's clubs and organisations, church, cultural and sports groups allowed women of different classes and age-groups to meet and socialise. Lesbian friendship circles met in private houses. Women needed spaces to meet and, having met, rooms to develop friendships, or establish domestic relationships.^{xv}

Working-class women Mr X and partner rented a flat in Parnell, Auckland, by presenting themselves as a heterosexual couple. KM both rented and purchased flats and houses in Britain and Europe. Family money enabled Bethell to purchase Rise

Cottage for Pollen and herself, and Dawson to buy a cottage as well as assist Sargeson to buy his back. Andrews and Kirton purchased their house, where “the title deeds are ours alone”. Hodgkins, despite her nomadic life, was assisted by homosexual and lesbian friends, who accommodated her in their homes, helped her find paid employment so she could rent rooms and studios, and ensured there was always a room for her. Margaret Shaen provided Dorothy Richmond with a cottage of her own.

Nurses, hotel workers and some others could live to some extent independently in nurses’ homes, hostels, or boarding houses, which were an alternative to heterosexual marriage, though these cannot have provided much privacy.

Once established under their own roof, women could develop friendship circles and networks and meet in private, safe spaces. Without rooms of their own, women could not make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives.

Private life, discretion and deception

Being a Victorian...I can never understand how people part with their privacy so readily (Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, 1936).

You didn’t belong if you were the blabbermouth type (Mary in Faderman 1991, p.109)

With the exception of a few wealthy women like Radclyffe Hall or Natalie Barney, most women regarded lesbianism as a private matter. The British Lords wanted lesbianism suppressed and not brought to public attention, and the authorities that banned *TWOL* intended to silence public discussion of female “love that dare not speak its name”. Women in lesbian relationships conformed to social expectations of discretion and silence, warned by the extensive and submerged discourses on lesbianism in British culture.

Reinstein’s “private lesbianism” made discretion the “organising principle”. Her family supported “the life she wanted” by helping keep lesbianism “in the private realm”. The need for secrecy attracted some women, who explained “the secret” was part of the “excitement of being lesbian” (Kennedy 1996, p.35, p.199, n.6). Keeping the secret may also be seen as a mechanism of resistance within the “expanding production of discourses on sex” (Foucault 1990a, p.98).

Some New Zealand women may have felt similarly to Stein and Toklas, who avoided friendships with other lesbians because they were unwilling to “participate in...a more public display of their attraction to women” (Benstock 1987, p.175). Only Barney made a “public issue of her lesbianism”, the contrast between this and her role as “patron of the arts” showing the “disjunction between private life and public convention” for lesbians (ibid. p.10). Flanner led a “life of concealment”, was “circumspect” and, in later years, “reluctant to associate herself too closely with Natalie or the salon” (Wineapple 1989, p.86). She was not “sympathetic to any flamboyant display of sexuality...heterosexual or homosexual” and, by 1966, was shocked by the “overt homosexuality in New York” which she thought showed a “lack of propriety and class” (ibid. p.279).

Bethell wondered why people would “rush before the curtain”.^{xvi} Outside art circles, homosexuality was seen as “an appalling perversion”, preventing Hodgkins’ friends Lett Haines and Morris from making “‘public’ their ‘private’ lives” (Cooper 1986, p.155). For Dorothy and Alla family letters were divided into “private” and “general” categories to ensure discretion. KM wrote *The Secret* for LM, using the image of a “rainbow shell” sang silently and discreetly, and could never become a public symbol of the “old Greeks” and their sexual preferences. When discussing the publication of her *Selected Poems*, Bethell agreed, “My own name must appear this time ‘the grave’s a fine and private place’ ”^{xvii} She previously published as Evelyn Hayes, a pseudonym using Pollen’s initials. The use of this quotation suggests she realized perfect privacy to have been accomplished in Pollen’s death and that it was not worth protecting in life. As she became involved with Taylor, she again drew a veil over lesbian relationships. She did not publish the memorial poems during her lifetime, though did circulate them privately, as another aspect of a public/private divide. Dickinson wrote “How public - like a frog /To tell one’s name” (Barnstone and Barnstone 1980, p.460). This has been interpreted as “female self-effacement”, related to publishing (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, p.554), but it may also be read as referring to a secret, like KM’s poem, where telling one’s name, is making a public admission, rather than singing silently.

Discretion sometimes involved active deception. KM presented herself to different people through a complexity of multiple identities and some letters may be read as theatrical attempts to disguise and conceal a secret and marginal self, by constructing a public heterosexual self engaged in romantic relationships with men. The conflicts and

contradictions of her relationships with women and her family are best explained within a lesbian framework, the triangular relationships in her life matching similar themes in her writing. Such triangularity provided KM with a public façade within which lesbianism could be privately hidden inside heterosexual marriage, like the relationship between the married Woolf and Sackville-West, who were both married, or Jerome Spencer and Amy and Frank Hutchinson.

Hodgkins' engagement to an absent fiancé may be seen as a deliberate deception to distract Wellington attention from her relationship with Dorothy Richmond. As well as public performances of heterosexuality, some women tried to present their lesbian relationships more acceptably, for example, as “maternal”, like Bethell, or as heterosexual marriage, like Mr X and her partner. Others presented themselves as above reproach. For example, Andrews' opposition to alcohol, and her reference to “sexual perverts” in a 1935 speech project an image of respectability and morality.^{xviii}

Despite strategies of discretion and deception, some women were surprisingly public. Andrews' poems announced that she and Kirton jointly owned their home, while Bethell described Pollen as her “consort” in her poetry. This may indicate a wish for greater honesty, as their near contemporary Margaret Mead expressed in a letter drafted for friends to read after her death

It has not been by my choice of concealment that anyone of you have been left in ignorance of some part of my life.... Nor has it been from lack of trust... but only from the exigencies of the mid-twentieth century when each one of us...seems fated for a life which is no longer sharable (Bateson 1985, pp 137-138).

The desire to make their lives “sharable” by leaving records of an otherwise concealed relationship is suggested by the coded writing of Stein, who made style “serve as a mask for her lesbianism” (Benstock 1986, p.188).^{xix} Sackville-West left a manuscript describing her lesbianism, to be read after her death, and, in letters she preserved, used “bs” as a code for homosexuality, apparently an abbreviation for “backstairs” (Nicolson 1974, p.220 and n.).^{xx} There may be references in the New Zealand women's writing that, as Bateson suggests regarding Mead's writing, “are only a concealment to the reader who prefers to repose in a conventional mode of interpretation” (Bateson 1985, p.150).

Though some women may have wanted to speak the truth, privacy, discretion and deception enabled them to protect their relationships from ridicule and prurience, and was key for keeping lesbianism in the private realm (Kennedy 1996, p.35). A century

earlier, Lister kept “the secret” from Miss Peckham, a woman “like herself”, deceiving her so as to protect Marianne’s reputation (Whitbread 1988). Even in the late twentieth century, Sedgwick argues that “there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit...in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence” (Sedgwick 1990, p.68). Discretion was essential to obtain and maintain employment and housing, and to keep family and other social relationships intact. For example, discretion enabled Maud England and Mary Richmond’s relationship to be “recognized and not recognized, in the same breath”, so others in a society based on compulsory heterosexuality and gender prescriptions did not need to acknowledge lesbianism.

Foucault argues

there is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault 1990a, p.27).

Rich suggests “Lying is done with words and also with silence”, (Rich 1980, p.186), pointing out that phrases that “help us not to admit we are lying” include statements like “my privacy”, and “nobody’s business but my own”. She argues

women’s love for women has been represented almost entirely through lies. The institution of heterosexuality has forced the lesbian to dissemble, or to be labeled a pervert, a criminal, a sick or dangerous woman (ibid. p.190).

Summary

The women in Part 3 lived when substantial information on lesbianism was available and all were affected by these discourses. Several subscribed to overseas feminist magazines that published articles on sexuality and some owned or borrowed books on lesbianism. Apparently warned by these discourses, the women used privacy and discretion as strategies for being able to lead lesbian lives, and to protect their relationships. Some may have deliberately presented their relationships as not-lesbian, though much of their writing, especially poetry, suggests they would like to have been more open.

Many travelled and had connections with overseas or local lesbian friendship circles. All had some means of financial support, from family and friends or through paid work, and all obtained “rooms of their own”, through rental, purchase or the generosity of friends. These rooms and private lesbian spaces were essential for courtship, lovemaking, domesticity and the development of their lesbian friendship circles and networks.

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- ⁱ Virginia Woolf, became lovers with Vita Sackville-West, probably her only genitally sexual lover, in 1925 (see Woolf 1977, pp.223- 230).
- ⁱⁱ With her extroverted personality, Andrews may have been like Australian Erica Puncheon, who publicly admitted she was lesbian at the age of 105 years at World Expo 88 (*NZ Truth* 19 January 1988).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Though British news was telegraphed here and other British events were reported usually within one week, New Zealand newspapers for 1918 and 1921 do not appear to have included reports of the Maud Allen case or the proposed Macquisten amendment.
- ^{iv} Starr later became a high-church Episcopalian, and later a Catholic, joining a convent in 1930. Faderman suggests these events were connected to the end of her relationship with Addams, who became involved with Mary Rozet Smith (Faderman 1999, pp.124-125).
- ^v See for example Hall's story "Miss Ogilvie Finds Herself".
- ^{vi} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09 No. XXIII July 1, 1901 p.4.
- ^{vii} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09 13 March 1902.
- ^{viii} Atkinson Papers MS Papers 4863-09 26 November 1901.
- ^{ix} The WAC was founded by lesbian Toupie Lowther. Hall (1928) created a fictionalised portrait of the corps basing a character upon Lowther (Cline 1998).
- ^x Private communication from Gregory Kane.
- ^{xi} Interview with James Mack by Marian Evans.
- ^{xii} *NZ Times* 5/1/1907 p.5.
- ^{xiii} (Astley transcript p.239).
- ^{xiv} (Opie 1969, p.56).
- ^{xv} This would have been important even for women maintaining separate establishments.
- ^{xvi} Ursula Bethell to Rodney Kennedy, 14 Sept 1936.
- ^{xvii} Letter to Lawrence Baigent 2 June 1944. The quotation is from Andrew Marvell "To his coy mistress", cited in O'Sullivan 1997, p.xiii.
- ^{xviii} Elsie Andrews Papers Taranaki Museum MS-312, "The Causes of War", unpublished speech 1935.
- ^{xix} For example Stein's poem "As a Wife Has a Cow. A Love Story", is thought to be about orgasm (Faderman 1995, p.454) or perhaps defecation (Turner 1999, p.27).
- ^{xx} The derivation is probably for private activities, where one enters by the back stairs, as well as a pun on anal sex.

PART FOUR

TELLING THE SPOKEN STORIES

Chapter 16

Glimpses in sound – gossip, rumour and reports

Introduction

The stories in Part 4 are based on recorded oral histories, and short unrecorded interviews, with narrators who lived as lesbians pre-1970. Some stories share overlapping decades with stories in Part 3. Though all narrators were born in the twentieth century, some were adults at the same time as Frances Hodgkins, Dorothy Richmond, Ursula Bethell, Effie Pollen, Elsie Andrews and Muriel Kirton. Freda Stark (Chapter 17) was born in 1910, and Betty Armstrong and Bea Arthur, (Chapter 18) in 1909 and 1915, respectively, while Peter Dawson (Chapter 14) and Mabel Howard (Chapter 9) were born in 1894, and KM and Maata (Chapter 12) and Elsie Andrews (Chapter 13) in 1888. This places the older narrators only a generation or less apart from many women in Part 3. It is interesting to note that some were still alive as a “grandmother” generation, when post-WW2 narrators Frances Kinney (Chapter 21), Bubs Hetet (Chapter 22), Tighe Instone (Chapter 23) and Morrigan Severs (Chapter 24) were young adults, for example, Jerome Spencer (d.1955), Maud England (d.1956), Ella Plimmer (d.1958), Margaret Magill (d.1962), Edith Collier (d.1964), Mabel Howard (d.1972), Mimie Wood (d.1973), Ada Magill (d.1976), Muriel Kirton (d.1980), Helen Stewart (d.1983), and Daisy Isaacs, Edith Bendall Robison and Peter Dawson (all d.1986). Despite living in such different periods of the twentieth century, these women are in a sense contemporary, as they were informed by similar social attitudes and processes in pre-1970 New Zealand.

Oral history has been used to construct histories of lesbian communities, for example, by the Lesbian Oral History Group (1989), the Brighton Ourstory Project (1992), Newton (1993) and Kennedy and Davis (1993). The Lesbian Oral History Group explains that lesbian oral history “aims to deal with all that is ambiguous, troublesome, chaotic” (Lesbian Oral History Group 1989, p.1). The Brighton Ourstory Group remark that our present life is “shaped by the courage” of those who lived through a time when “freedom was not something we were given”, but “something we had to steal” (Brighton Ourstory Group 1992, p.10). Kennedy points out that because lesbians were not raised within a public lesbian and gay culture, each lesbian “has constructed...her life in oppressive contexts, a process that oral history is uniquely suited to reveal” as, “being based in memory, oral history explores subjectivity” and “an individual’s interpretation of the past” (Kennedy 2000, p.560). In Chapter 25, the overview of Part 4, I address the question of truth and memory in oral history, and how the subjective and retrospective accounts of the narrators allow insights as much into the strengths that enabled them to survive the pre-1970 period as lesbians, as do the episodes they describe.

I have not included the narrators’ post-1970 experiences, instead addressing their understanding of the pre-1970 period rather than the dramatic changes that happened later.

I have used real names, with permission, for all except one narrator. I have changed the names of living persons mentioned by narrators, naming only people now deceased.

The following sections of this chapter combine comment, gossip and insider knowledge with short, unrecorded interviews, providing glimpses of mostly post-WW2 pre-1970 lesbian life, illustrating how women could lead lesbian lives, and how some understood and organised their circumstances.

Gossip and rumour

The stories lesbians told one another, some that I heard many times during the pre-1970 period as a participant-observer, fall into the category of gossip, rumour and the grapevine (see Chapter 5). There were both cautionary tales, of what might happen to lesbians who were indiscreet, and inspirational tales, of how lesbians surmounted obstacles and survived. Many were comic tales. Perhaps some were urban legends, but others were stories lesbians told, often against themselves, perhaps embellishing and changing details and circumstances

in ways similar to the constructions Portelli (1988) calls “uchronic dreams” the telling of what might have been. In this respect, the question of truth and these New Zealand lesbian tales is less interesting than the reasons the tales were told, especially when against the individual relating the story. Tonkin wonders what we are to make of stories that “apparently mis-recall to the teller’s *disadvantage*” (original emphasis), concluding that a group of aboriginal Australians who erased from their accounts any reference to European attempts to exterminate them, were thus enabled to “accommodate the dominant white Australian’s ideology” (Tonkin 1992, pp.115-116). New Zealand lesbians’ comic stories about being thrown out by their parents after the discovery of their lesbianism may have worked similarly, enabling them to accommodate their families, maintain relationships and eventually reconcile, through the mechanism of turning the episode into a joke. In an early paper on humour among members of lesbian speech communities Dorothy Painter argues “talk which is heard as humourous...is interpreted as lesbian humour because of the use of lesbian devices” (Painter 1980, p.134). Among these devices are “dumb things straights say” (ibid. p.139). She gives as an example a story where a mother discovers her daughter is lesbian and “started yelling and screaming...Then my dad comes in, puts his arm around my mother and says, ‘It’ll be all right honey. Just pretend like she’s dead’. I didn’t know what to do so I...came back to Columbus...Now they want to come and see me...I guess they’re coming to view the body”. Painter suggests that the laughter from her lesbian listeners that followed this story “allows the lesbian to hear her father’s utterance as belonging to the ‘dumb’ device”, and that “in this way, the telling of the account and the members’ laughter work to normalise the member’s sense of social reality” (ibid. pp.142-143).

The pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian communities seem to have in one sense functioned as a forum for stories. One comic story similar to Painter’s example of lesbian humour used as a normalising device and told by pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians to other lesbians, was the tale of the anti-lesbian mother, who visited dairies and other outlets that stocked a food product made by her daughter’s business. She would enquire if they sold the product and, if they did, would call out loudly “Then I’ll never shop here again! That’s made by my daughter, and she’s a lesbian, and you know what they do with their fingers!” This story allowed lesbian listeners to perceive the mother as irrational and spiteful, and lesbians as hard-working businesswomen, while also providing a warning about the consequences of

“coming out” to families. Typical of the stories pre-1970 lesbians appreciated, it conveyed both the horror and humour of such situations.

Other comic stories of family reactions included tales of lesbians being thrown out of home, particularly by religious parents, of undetected lovers hiding in wardrobes or under beds, or especially after the Parker Hume murder, of parents trying to make daughters seek medical cures for lesbianism.

Other types of story functioned as cautionary tales. One story described a discreet and wealthy lesbian businesswoman who married a homosexual man she had recently met as a cover. After the registry office wedding, they moved into her home. When her new husband, who was drunk, came into her bedroom, saying he wanted “his marriage rights”, she thought he was joking, but he beat and then raped her. She forced him to leave, but had difficulty getting a divorce, as rape in marriage was not a crime before 1986 (see Chapter 7), and had to make him a financial settlement rather than risk exposure. This tale warned against the possible consequences of “white” marriages of convenience with men lesbians did not know well.

Another warning story told of two married women, each with a child, who fell in love. They told their husbands and both marriages ended, with the women forced to give up their children. They thought it pointless to seek custody, as this was the pre-Domestic Purposes Benefit period (see Chapter 7), and they did not think they could support their sons alone with no assistance from their hostile husbands and, if the cases had come to court, as lesbians they would be regarded as “unfit mothers”. One woman’s husband allowed her to maintain contact with their son, but the other husband refused to allow any contact. When she tried to establish contact with her son as a young adult, he would not see her, as he had been told she abandoned him. This story warned of the possible consequences for married women who told their husbands. The fear of losing access to children was a constant theme for New Zealand lesbian mothers (see for example Saphira 1984).

New Zealand lesbians who travelled to Australia in search of larger communities brought back warning stories. Sylvia told of arriving in Sydney in 1962, aged twenty-two, and meeting a group of cross-dressed “butch” women at the Rex Hotel in Kings Cross. They

introduced her to a girlfriend, who worked as a prostitute, and helped her to buy men's clothing, explaining how she could live as a "hoon"ⁱ. Sylvia soon felt afraid, and after a few days ran away from the group and returned to New Zealand. "You've got to watch yourself there!" she said, telling this story to New Zealand lesbians travelling to Australia. Though frightening, such stories could also be read against the grain, because they confirmed the existence of other lesbians and larger groups overseas.

Other travel stories depicted New Zealand lesbians as smarter than the straight people they met, rather than as innocents abroad. For example, in one story, a group of New Zealand lesbians visited Adelaide in 1960 and went to the Royal Admiral Hotel in Hindley Street, having heard that it was a kamp meeting place. They were unaware that lesbians had been recently banned from this pub. At the bar, the woman proprietor told them "we don't serve lesbians here!", to which one of the group responded "Oh, but we're not Latvians, we're New Zealanders!" adding, "and anyway why won't you serve Latvians?" It seems the proprietor had no response to this and they were permitted to remain. Stories about this kind of smart, disingenuous retort were typical, showing how quick thinking and pretended innocence could deflect hostility. Both tellers and listeners enjoyed these stories, depicting lesbians in control and thwarting heterosexuals. As Portelli notes, "narrators everywhere relish narratives of 'standing up to the big man', theatrical anecdotes of personal confrontations with figures of institutional authority...in complex representations of personal courage...or political resistance" (Portelli 1997, p.7).

Sound bites

The following are comments about pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian life. Pseudonyms are used for women who are alive, except where stories are in the public domain through published auto/biography, or where the women are deceased.

Margi and Pete lived in a long-term relationship during the pre-1970 period. Pete, who identified as kamp, explained that she had been in previous relationships with women identifying as "normal", and Margi said that she had never been involved with a woman before meeting Pete. Though Pete said she did not think of herself as a man, she was interested only in "real" women who did not identify as kamp. She expected her lovers

would become involved with men if relationships ended, while hoping for a lifetime relationship.

Johnny, a pakeha woman born in the 1940s, identified as kamp, and socialised in mixed groups. She said that she did not use the term lesbian, and disliked it, as her relationships were all with “normal” women. Johnny may have thought of herself as a man in a woman’s body and when lesbian feminism began in the 1970s she was mystified. In contrast to herself, she said these women were “fairies getting off together”.

Pat Nelson, born 1910, danced in the Folies Bergere in Paris during the 1930s, knew Marlene Dietrich, and retired to Christchurch where she ran the Blue Room Restaurant after her dancing career ended due to injury in 1939ⁱⁱ (see Chapter 19). In the late 1950s Pat moved to Waiwera, north of Auckland. She did not disclose her lesbianism to people there, so appreciated visits where “I can be myself”. Pat wanted her lovers to be lesbians, and also to be sexually “submissive”, describing one woman as “butch in the kitchen, butch in the garden, butch everywhere, but oh, so very delightfully bitch in bed”.

Janet (born 1940) believed roles were not part of the early kamp scenes, as “We were all just kamp together, there were no butches and femmes then.” Barbara (born 1943), who lived in Palmerston North during the 1960s, wanted women “who were already kamp because then you could be sure – if you went with normal women who would go back to men, it meant constant heartbreak”. Valerie (born 1941), from Auckland, liked the Queens’ Ferry Hotel because “you could find women who were definitely kamp and wouldn’t leave you for men.” Angela (born 1940) said the most important thing for her before 1970 was “having friends who understood...so that I didn’t have to pretend and live a lie. I couldn’t have survived without my lesbian friends as I was in the closet at work, with my family, and with my heterosexual friends”. Pauline (born 1940) said a lesbian community meant “a critical mass and safety in numbers- you can begin to be out because there are so many that you won’t get noticed or singled out”.

Like the majority of women, many lesbians married during the 1950s (see Chapter 7). Some were unaware of their lesbian feelings before marriage (Katie’s story, Chapter 20), others married because they found the kamp scene too difficult, and some married

homosexual men for camouflage and mutual support. In contrast to the warning tale above, Rodney and Caroline, homosexual friends in Wellington married in 1955, in their late twenties, Rodney to protect his position at work and allay suspicions about his sexuality, and Caroline because she had no formal qualifications and was tired of poorly paid dead-end jobs. Her father did not believe in educating girls, as they would “only get married”, and she left school at fifteen to become a shop assistant “until she married.” Rodney was happy to support Caroline, and achieve promotions at work that he believed were partly due to his status as a married man. Both their families were pleased by the marriage, and the couple explained they were “trying” unsuccessfully for children. Though some of Rodney and Caroline’s same-sex lovers felt shut out by their marriage, others, themselves married, found the situation convenient. Sometimes they all socialised together as married couples at gatherings where others present were not aware of the relationships existing between Rodney and a married man, or Caroline and a married women.

For women who did not marry, it was still difficult to avoid having boyfriends during the 1950s and 1960s, as women on their own were considered unattractive, social failures (Hall 1958). Ailsa (born 1942), reported that in Auckland

The best way to attract girls at church socials and Bible Class camps was to be popular with boys. If girls thought you couldn’t get a boyfriend, they thought you unattractive...I got one girlfriend because I captured the boy she wanted, so she saw me as attractive and a success. I went out with him every Saturday night for ages, not because he interested me, but because he was good-looking and girls were impressed with me, when they saw him. Fortunately in those days you didn’t have to have sex, everyone was expected to be a virgin until you got married, but you had to kiss them and let them slobber all over you and rasp you with their shaved faces.

The question of dress (see Chapter 8) was important, and is mentioned by narrators in the following chapters. It was not only a matter of dress on the job, but also appearance at other times. While private employers may simply have sacked employees, the armed forces called women in for interview if the clothing they wore off-duty was too “masculine”. In January 1966 Jocelyn, an Air force driver, was called in and asked about her “dress off duty”. She had been wearing slacks and a shirt, with no make-up and a short hairstyle. Her file noted that she was told to be “more selective in her choice of civilian dress and thus be able to set an example to her subordinates”. Her “semi-belligerent attitude to this advice” was also noted and Jocelyn was not re-enlisted.ⁱⁱⁱ Though visitors to the country brought in

the latest fashions, including ivy-league trousers (see Chapter 23), it was hard for lesbians to find women's clothing that was not stereotypically frilly and feminine during the 1950s and 1960s. However, many lesbians at this time, like other New Zealand women, made their own clothing. One lesbian reported that "anything I couldn't buy, I just made", ambitiously making herself a leather jacket and vest.

The desire for this kind of clothing was often inspired by images from films. One group of older lesbians explained how important *Rebel Without a Cause* was during the late 1950s and early 1960s, as James Dean provided a masculine image women could imitate, unlike the drab tie and suit outfits worn by New Zealand men during this period. The "DA" or "ducks-arse" hair-style worn by Dean and popular among British teddy-boys and rock and roll stars, could also be copied by lesbians, and were more attractive than the short back and sides haircuts of New Zealand men during the post-WW2 period.

Few public venues welcomed identifiable lesbians or homosexual men. Wellington coffee-bar owner Mary Seddon, for example, refused service to obvious lesbians in the early 1960s at *Chez Marie*, her coffee bar, to stop it becoming "a homosexual hangout". Jennifer reported being able to go there as she was discreet and not "obvious", though felt like "a wolf in sheep's clothing", because Seddon would have "barred" her had she "found out".

Rewa and Tariana, both born in the 1930s, adopted children from within their whanau^{iv}, providing a home, time and resources for their support, health and education. They believed this contributed to their acceptance as a family within their small rural community and, though their relationship was not discussed as "kamp", they thought others did realise "who we were".

Some families feared scandal if their daughter's lesbianism became known. Like Katherine Mansfield's family, they wanted their daughters to leave town or even the country. Mary, from Nelson, reported being told by her father "if you want to live like this, go away and don't stay here and disgrace your family". She moved to Australia, and settled permanently in Sydney.

Though some lesbians left to become expatriates, others came to New Zealand, influencing lesbian cultures here. Hank and Billy, cross-dressing lesbians from Melbourne, Australia, visited in 1962. Both were working-class women originally from England, who had immigrated to Australia, Billy independently and Hank with her family. They and several other lesbians worked in Australian circuses and carnivals, spaces that Hank found accepted women who were different. Billy performed on her motorcycle in a circus act called “the wall of death”, while Hank, under five feet in height, performed as a small clown.^v Later, both became known in kamp circles in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, where they lived on the periphery of prostitution and crime.

In New Zealand, Hank became involved with Charleen (Chapter 9) and did not return to Australia with Billy. Aged twenty-four, she was soon arrested in Wellington for being idle and disorderly, and charged with “wearing without lawful excuse an article of disguise”, namely men’s clothing. *Truth* reported that the police arrested the “diminutive” Hank, who was only five feet tall, as a “youth”, only to find that “he was a woman”.^{vi} After time in prison, Hank was deported back to Australia. The presence of Hank and Billy in New Zealand is another example of lesbian travel between the two countries, following on from Amy Bock, Eugenia Falleni and Bert Rotciv fifty years earlier (see Chapter 9).

Aucklander Anna Hoffman (b.1937) stowed away to Sydney aged fifteen, helped by ship-queen “Boadicea”, and had a lesbian relationship with the occult Sydney artist Rosaline Norton. Arrested for vagrancy, Anna was deported back to New Zealand, an event widely reported by the New Zealand media. Back in Auckland, she became involved with lesbian artist and dancer Vera Risdale who painted under the pseudonym “She” and performed as “The White Flame”^{vii} at the Grey Dove nightclub, in Grey’s Avenue, accompanied by homosexual pianist Billie Farnell. Anna frequented the Queen’s Ferry Hotel, and became a sensation during the 1960s, as mentioned by Frankie (Chapter 21) and Bubs (Chapter 22). She was involved in drugs and prostitution, and had several kamp relationships, though did not identify as lesbian (Hoffman 1998, 2000). In 1959, after socialising at the British Hotel, Lyttelton, she and friends boarded the train back to Christchurch. It was held at the station until the police arrived to remove them to the police station. They risked being charged with prostitution (see Chapter 5), but Anna escaped and the others were charged with underage

drinking.^{viii} This illustrates how police could harass pre-1970 women challenging the prescribed norms by frequenting public kamp venues (Hoffman 1999, Laurie 1990).

A significant number of lesbians were “bad girls”, drinking in public bars, smoking, becoming ship-girls, having sex with men and women, babies out of wedlock, and presenting as “hard” or “fast” as one informant expressed it. There were groups in the main cities supporting themselves through prostitution like “The Plunket Rooms” group in Hataitai, Wellington, where Norrelle, “Stay-on”, “Tink” and other kamp ladies lived. Several informants described attending kamp parties at their house during the six o’clock closing era.

However, the majority of pre-1970 lesbians were cautious, avoiding public scrutiny by discreetly socialising in private spaces. Those who were publicly visible or conspicuous risked a range of social consequences including arrest if they attracted police attention, even if they were not cross-dressing, drunk, or suspected of prostitution or possession of drugs. Lesbians with convictions found it difficult to obtain employment, and some became trapped in lives of prostitution or crime^{ix}.

The glimpses in this chapter illustrate how some pre-1970 women lived lesbian lives, and organised lesbian relationships. The following chapters provide more detailed stories, from lesbian narrators.

ⁱ Australian term for “pimp”, a person living off the earnings of someone else’s prostitution, who may also procure clients.

ⁱⁱ *N.Z. Pictorial*, October 18, 1956, p.18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pseudonym and confidential communication from records in informant’s own possession.

^{iv} Extended family.

^v Personal communication from Hank, 2002.

^{vi} “Unanswerable Riddle”, in *The NZ Truth*, 21 August 1962.

^{vii} Taken from the name of a brand of kerosene (Hoffman 1998).

^{viii} Personal communication from Anna Hoffman.

^{ix} Confidential informant, personal communication.

Chapter 17

Freda's story – “it suited me, that life”

Freda Stark (1910–1999)

Introduction and background

This chapter, unlike the others in this section, is not based only on the oral history, and her story is supplemented with written accounts where relevant, especially for the trial.

I interviewed Freda Stark in her Ponsonby flat, filled with memorabilia of her stage career, including a portrait of her former lover Thelma Clarice (Trott) Mareo (1906–1935), and with a “few gin and bubbles” to help the interview. Freda later moved to rest homes in Ponsonby, and Henderson. She died on 19 March 1999, and was buried at the Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland, with her former lover Thelma Trott Mareo. Her headstone readsⁱ:

FREDA STARK 'L'ETOILE D'OR'

Thelma's headstone reads

*In Loving Memory of our beloved daughter and sister Thelma Clarice Trott
died 15th April 1935 aged 29 years, At Rest.
Waiting Till We Meet Again - Freda.*

Freda said Thelma's family from Queensland arranged the burial and agreed to this inscription, which does not use Thelma's legal and married name “Mareo”.

Journalist Dianne Haworth (2000) and Diane Miller, Freda's niece, have written Freda's biography. One reviewer commented, “Freda emerges as less than the 'extraordinary' character we are promised” (Tolerton 2000, pp.21–22). I agree with this view, and think the book's shortcomings are due to its failure to present her life in a lesbian context.

Charles Ferrall and Rebecca Ellis (2002) have examined the trials of Eric Mareo, suggesting Thelma's death may have been accidental or suicide rather than murder.

They suggest the jury did not believe Freda Stark and Thelma Mareo were lesbian as neither “resembled an ‘invert’”, citing Faderman (1981) on romantic friendship as evidence, and interpreting the *NZ Truth* accounts as representing their relationship as “romantic rather than medical” (Ferrall and Ellis 2002, pp.86–92). They ask, “How could the juries have found Mareo guilty if they had believed that his wife was a ‘lesbian’ and therefore according to prevailing ‘wisdom’ a person with every reason to kill herself?” (ibid. p.76). In Chapter 25 I discuss the implications of their arguments in relation to Freda’s story.

Freda’s life illustrates how women led lesbian lives in the theatre world where, though homosexuality was tolerated, there were still difficulties. Freda, the eldest of three children with a younger brother and sister, was born on 27 March 1910, to Isabella Matilda (Tilly) Bramley and James (Jimmy) Stark. They lived in Opotiki where Jimmy, a talented tap dancer, kept a shoe shop. Her theatrical career began here, as her mother “dressed her up”, and she was “chosen for things”. When Freda was nine, the family moved to 5 Princes Street, Auckland where she attended Epsom Girls' Grammar School and was sent to dancing lessons with Daphne Knight. After leaving school, Freda trained as a shorthand typist at Brains Business College. She was able to find employment as a professional dancer, and met Thelma Trott, an Australian, who was performing in the same show. Thelma married music conductor Eric Mareo in 1933. According to Freda, Thelma married because she could not support herself after the show collapsed.

In 1936 Eric Mareo was found guilty of murdering Thelma in April 1935, by administering an overdose of veronal. Newspapers published sensational accounts of the case, including details of the relationship between Thelma and Freda. Thelma was described as a “sexual pervert” who “shared the same bed” with Freda, a witness for the prosecution.ⁱⁱ Freda became publicly known as a lesbian because of this case. She had many subsequent lesbian relationships, but regarded Thelma as the love of her life. Freda became lead dancer at Auckland’s Civic Theatre during WW2, famous for her dance in gold body paint as “L’Etoile d’Or”, the golden star. She danced for some years, supplemented by office work, finally working at the Auckland University library until her retirement. Freda married Harold Robinson, a gay dancer, for companionship, and later divorced. Freda received recognition and admiration from the lesbian and gay communities during her lifetime. She appeared in the 1989 television documentary *The*

Mighty Civic by Peter Wells, and in 1993 Amanda Rees performed a one-woman dance, *Stark*, based on Freda's life. Wells comments

For an entire generation of lesbians and gay men Freda became an 'ancestor'...As gay men and women we have to recreate our own families, including chosen ancestors (Wells in Haworth and Miller 2000, p.145).

Freda's story

Freda thought that she had “always” been attracted to women, and was “born that way”. When she was nine years of age, her mother read to her from an illustrated edition of Shakespeare, and there was “one favourite page I'd look at every time...and just perv on this lovely woman with beautiful breasts”. At Epsom Girls' Freda developed a “passion” for a teacher, “a gorgeous butch thing, Miss Battersby...I used to absolutely dote on her”.

Haworth and Miller claim Freda became pregnant at nineteen by an older relation, travelled to Australia for an abortion, and that this “cathartic experience...was to change her attitude to men for life” (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.20). She did not mention a pregnancy in the interview, but said that she had no affairs with women until “I got myself together” by having an affair with her male dentist. Though she “fancied girls” all this time, she had not “got to meet” anyone.

Then my mother had a girlfriend, she wasn't kamp at all, I mean she wouldn't even know what kamp meant, but she was a lovely woman...she was a Sister out at the Greenlane Hospital and...I used to go to bed with her at night...we shared a bed. She was my first lover.

Freda explained that she “absolutely adored” this woman but, because she was young

I fell in love with lots of women and they loved me because I used to cuddle up into bed with them. Half the time I didn't even know what I was about, what kind of world they belonged to...I was just being me.... [doing] what comes naturally...I just thought I could get into bed with my mother's friends and...I didn't think anything was taboo, it was all natural to me.

Freda suspected other affairs among the women, but this was not talked about “nobody does...you just feel your way”, and she did not know of any lesbian networks

Bit of gossip here and there and somebody would say "you know who's having it off with somebody" something like that...We were really out on our own... there wasn't anything. That's why...it was marvelous to get into theatre because everybody understood.

Even in the theatre world, she did not hear the word “lesbian.”

I was quite old when I knew what a lesbian was...I was a lesbian for years before I even knew...I was reading a book, and I thought that's a lovely name, a beautiful name 'lesbian'. Ignorance is bliss...I honestly didn't know that lesbians were not...acceptable people...I had no qualms, I didn't think it was wrong to go to bed with a woman...I was a natural, I just loved going to bed, used to fall in love with beautiful breasts...my aunt had a wonderful woman...she used to dress beautifully and had lovely ankles ...I used to always make sure when I went to stay with Aunt Evelyn I would stay and sleep with Nell, she was so beautiful...and she adored me. I was one of her most special loves...they got away with it, women who were married...I went to bed with several of them.

Freda just “got into bed and cuddled up”, and that was “the finish”.

Somebody would say “you'll have to sleep with Nell” and I slept with her. And how! I don't think they were terribly clued up...Not that I knew very much. It was a secret...Dying to get to bed the next time...not like it is now, way out in the open. I had some wonderful love affairs with beautiful women who were married and used to love me to come and spend weekends...but it was never talked about. It's amazing what we got away with.

Freda continued her ballet studies with Madame Valerie Valeska, and then with Regina-Ray Redfern who began a school in Swanson Street in 1930ⁱⁱⁱ. Though there were few shows during the Depression, Freda said she was often “lucky” and hired for acrobatic dancing. Her earnings rose from five shillings a week at the end of the 1920s, to five pounds by the mid-1930s (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.26), a good wage for women at this time. Freda met Thelma Trott in 1933, on the visiting Ernest Rolls Revue Company show, when she was hired because their acrobatic dancer had broken her ankle. Thelma, born in 1906 in Gympie, Queensland, was the youngest daughter of Ann and Henry Trott, and university educated, with a BA from Queensland University. Talented, she had begun theatre work in Australia, eventually joining Eric Mareo’s touring show.

That's how I met Thelma. And I shared a dressing room with her. So, it's fate isn't it?...I was lucky I got into it. And met Thelma. Isn't fate marvelous? Love of my life...If some teacup reader had told me all this I wouldn't have believed it...Pretty, pretty little thing she was. She wasn't very tall. 5 feet three...and I was only four foot eleven...and I finished up in the dressing room with her.

The show collapsed financially and was disbanded, leaving many dancers “stranded here”, including Thelma, who hastily married Eric Mareo, the musical director, on 18 October 1933. Freda believed Eric married Thelma just to “get his hands on” her savings of five hundred pounds, and that she married him for future security and support as he had a job conducting the orchestra at the St James’ Theatre and she could see no other future for herself. Freda said Thelma “realised she had done the wrong thing”, but that “things were so bad...people did anything to keep going in show business and that's

what happened to her". Freda and Thelma, aged twenty-three and twenty-seven respectively, soon fell passionately in love.

Thelma and Eric rented a house at Buckland's Beach, and then at Mt Eden. Eric used Thelma's money to bring Betty, his stepdaughter aged twenty, and Graham, his son aged fourteen, to live with them from Sydney, both from previous marriages. By this time Eric was "on the bones of his bum", and Thelma was drinking heavily.

She was influenced by the grog, the bottle had her. That's all she worried about ...I'd go over to see her in the morning and she'd be still in bed and she'd be drunk in the afternoon...he was dosing Thelma with alcohol all the time and half the time she was in an alcoholic haze.

Haworth and Miller cite a recorded interview^{iv} contradicting this, that quotes Freda as claiming

Thelma was never the hard drinker that Eric Mareo made her out to be. That was nonsense. Of course we did some drinking at parties but not to excess...Mareo, himself, however, did drink a great deal (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.168).

Their sexual relationship took place while Mareo was at work, and Freda thought that when he lost his job "we were all doomed, all falling apart". However, at least she had "a mother and father and a lovely home" and was "safe as could be". She emphasized that Thelma was "stranded here" and had no chance of returning to Queensland. She thought Mareo might have been from Sydney, though he "had a very English accent".^v Though he could "charm the birds out of the tree he was as crook as could be", she said, and soon spent Thelma's five hundred pounds - "he went through it in a few months. He was a rotten sod." At first Eric was not jealous of their lesbian relationship. However, this changed.

One awful night he came home and said, because he knew I was having an affair with her..."Get out in the street where you belong!" and we put on our clothes and came back to my home...went upstairs to my bedroom and we stayed there. She was safe. She was frightened, terrified, because he was quite a madman...My mother and father didn't ask any questions.

Haworth and Miller cite what may be the same incident. Thelma and Freda were in bed together after leaving a party at the Dixieland Cabaret because of Mareo's "womanising", and when Mareo found them, he drunkenly shouted

You bitch. You've insulted me in public. Here I was looking for my wife and making a bloody fool of myself...Get out! ...Look at you, you dirty drunken whore...Get out on the streets where you belong (Haworth and Miller 2000, pp.40–41).

They date his romantic interest in Eleanor Brownlee from the end of 1934, quoting an incident where Eric told Thelma to leave, as “Eleanor will look after me”. They claim Thelma returned the following day, having changed her mind, insisting she would “stay and talk things over with Mareo” (ibid. p.43). Freda thought Thelma only “settled for” Eric, because there was no other possible work for her during the Depression. Freda, a qualified stenographer, could “turn her hands” to anything but as women were not eligible for the dole (see Chapter 7), Thelma was “trapped”.

That's all it was. She had no future. And she wasn't a great big star. There were hundreds of sopranos around... he was a cover up...they were forced to marry.

Freda “adored” Thelma who loved her and let Eric know “she loved me very much...she wasn't careful of what she said...and I don't think she cared anyhow.” Eric was also “keen on” Freda, which was “awful”.

Rotten old Mareo...knew everything, being in show business. I used to sleep with Thelma to keep her company while he was playing...he was jealous because he would come into bed and he would want to make love to me and he'd just say to Thelma "I don't know what it is you've got, you seem to attract the girls"...he got so angry with Thelma being so nice to me, putting her arms around me and letting him know how much she loved me...because he was trying to bed me down...I was in love with Thelma. I wasn't interested in him at all...It's awful when they fancy you these old men, [she] couldn't get away from him...he would come into my bedroom and I wouldn't let him make love to me.

Freda thought many people knew about their lesbian relationship.

Everybody knew I loved her. We used to go walking down Queen Street together hand in hand...and show people, we were photographed together.

One day Freda arrived at the house to find Thelma deeply and inexplicably asleep, with Eric looking after her.

I knew something was wrong when he brought her the cup of warm milk. She'd just come out of sleep and she'd been sleeping all day and she woke up...she couldn't eat anything because she was very dozy...he brought in a cup of hot milk...I put my arm around her and held her...she couldn't even hold a cup...her little teeth clamped on the cup, she was almost asleep drinking milk...I didn't even know what it was all about. I'd never come across anything like...Veranol.

Reluctantly, Freda went home that night and found Thelma still asleep when she returned the next day. She insisted a doctor be called, who hospitalised Thelma, but she did not regain consciousness and died later that day, 15 April 1935. Freda thought Eric “got rid” of Thelma because she was “a hindrance” to him, and reported that he warned her not to “say too much or you'll have a noose around my neck.”

Eric Mareo was charged with murder and stood trial at the Auckland Supreme Court in February 1936. Thirty-four witnesses were called, including Betty Mareo, who testified that Thelma and Freda were often in bed together during the day, and Thelma kept a nude photograph of Freda in her bedroom. Detective Meiklejohn produced letters to Thelma, which he said referred to her “abnormal relationships and non-Christian practices”. A letter signed “Billy”, from a Frenchwoman living in Sydney, was read out.

I showed some of your translations [of Pierre Louys’ Les Chansons de Bilitis] to two intelligent and self-sufficient...girlfriends of mine. As they practice the gentle art of lesbos in a modern setting, they were quite enthusiastic about them.^{vi}

This and other evidence suggest Thelma had been lesbian for some time, not without anxiety. A legal expert’s later comment on the case^{vii}, noted that when Thelma and Eric Mareo married in 1933

it was agreed that neither would have sexual intercourse with the other and the evidence indicated that this rather unusual basis for a marriage was faithfully kept. It is not clear when Thelma Mareo's lesbian tendencies became active but this further abnormal facet of her character was revealed in...her keeping photos of Freda Stark in a state of undress, frequently sharing a bed with [her]... in the daytime and nighttime, and the letters exhibited at the trial...of a lesbian flavour.

Because “this aspect” of her life “obviously worried” Thelma, she consulted “several doctors...about her nervous and worried condition”, confiding to one of them, a Dr. Walton, that “her chief worry at the time was a charge made against her of perverted sexual practices”, using the words “lesbian love”. He also cited evidence alleging that while Thelma was performing in Adelaide and Melbourne theatres from 1928–1931, she was “depressed and worried” and “the world always seemed to her to be a sort of conspiracy” (Williams 1971 in Haworth and Miller 2000, pp.155–156).

The newspapers of the time reported the case sensationally, headlining the phrase “abnormal girl”. Freda found “when the newspapers were at their worst with big headlines” she could not go into Queen Street, as people would “recognise me because of the pictures in the paper”. They called out “There she is!” following her, and when she went into a shop “there'd be one waiting outside for me to come out”. Freda thought that though “they couldn't say I was involved with the murder because she was my girlfriend”, as the principal Crown witness “I got all the flack”. One commentator has wondered why there was “so much interest in the case”, suggesting it was “because of the lesbianism” as “nobody here had heard of lesbians at that time” (Henry in Haworth

and Miller 2000, p.55). Freda herself thought that though “the papers just lapped it up”, not many people “knew what a lesbian was”, and her case “made them aware what a lesbian was”. However, given the available information outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, it is more likely that it was precisely because these people had heard of lesbians that they wanted to see Freda, as perhaps they did not think that they had seen one before. It is also likely that some interested spectators were other lesbians.

After deliberating for just two hours, the jury found Mareo guilty of murder on 26 February and he was sentenced to death. After several appeals, his sentence was eventually reduced to life imprisonment^{viii} Freda was left to grieve, explaining

Nobody ever took her place. I don't know why, I don't put it down to her dying...I just loved her. She filled my whole life and when she died I didn't think I'd ever survive. But I did. Life has to go on.

She went to nightclubs to try to forget Thelma and had “one or two little affairs” but no one was able to “take her place”.

If you've been in love with somebody who's so special...You don't always give of yourself completely...I think I was past getting hurt. She built up an armour around me and nobody could ever hurt me. She was so special. And I knew it was...a magical moment when I was so in love I was frightened, I was scared and I even said "Oh God, don't let anything happen”.

I do believe there is only one love in a person's life...I still love her best. Even if I met [someone]...absolutely marvellous and swept me off my feet, she's still number one...I'm going to be beside her. Got the grave all specially worked out...I think people are very lucky to experience a special love...It couldn't have gone wrong, it was absolutely perfection and she's gone and...left me trapped for the rest of my life...I always go back to her...she's like a yardstick, I compare people I've loved, never reach up to her....she still possesses me...I've always held a torch for Thelma...Nobody's ever taken her place.

Freda continued her career, first dancing at the Civic Theatre in the 1939 Christmas Spectacular. After the declaration of war “entertainment such as that offered by the Civic Theatre was seen as essential to lighten the national mood and keep spirits up”, (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.74). The troupe of thirty Civic Dancers were the main attraction, with the “Pony Dancers” and the “Lucky Lovelies”, and Freda billed as “L'Etoile”, dancing her nude “Ritual Fire Dance” to Hoagy Carmichael’s 1929 hit “Stardust” with her body painted gold^{ix} (ibid. pp.78–79). In a later interview, producer Regina Raye explained how she developed a “team for the Civic”, including Freda as the star, and that, as well as dancing, “every girl had some kind of war-time

employment.”^x Freda was manpowered to work at the Colonial Ammunition Company, but transferred to Hamilton to work in the office as a wages clerk because the munitions work was frightening and dangerous.^{xi} Later, when the authorities were petitioned to shift Freda back to Auckland so that she could continue dancing at the Civic, a position was found for her in their Auckland office. At this time, she began an “affair” with Isobel, an American “stuck” in New Zealand during WW2 while visiting an aunt in Dunedin.

We had a lovely little house just off the main road...we had a wonderful time...I used to entertain at night, dancing...we didn't belong to a sort of circle...We were loners...I don't think she'd ever had a woman lover in her life, but I came along, slept with her, she really was in love with me...she didn't look, I was going to say 'abnormal'... I was never backward in coming forward, putting my arms around her, kissing her...and things worked out beautifully. We got away with a lot...sweet as a butter box she was...I had a wonderful life with her, she was beautiful.

From 1942 American troops in New Zealand for “rest and recreation” were a major part of the Civic audiences. Performing at the Civic and the Wintergarden every night, Freda continued in her office job during the day. When the war ended, Freda said, Isobel returned to the United States and their relationship ended.

I don't think she ever had another woman lover...Isobel was straight. She'd had two husbands and between the second husband and the third husband I met her...She really did love me but she wasn't a lesbian, she just doted on me. It was just a once in a lifetime thing with her...She has been absolutely...wonderful to me. When I got to San Francisco at one stage... there were almost 20 lovely girlfriends to give me a wonderful party...I was the love of her life...more important to her than her husbands...she just fell into place as though she'd been at it all her life...Nobody ever, ever took my place.

Though convinced Isobel was not “really” lesbian, Freda admitted

she must have had that little kink in her make up... a lot of straight people are like that, they can fall in love at least once with somebody who's different...Some of them live terrible lives with dreadful old uninteresting men...and they never get any excitement from them...And we can whisk them up to dizzy heights!...They go quite silly. Oh dear I'm rotten to the core...but it is true. Because we've got that special flair. Just put our finger on the right spot, I don't know what it is but...they do, they never look back, these square women.

Freda believed that she had never made a “mistake” in picking women who might be lesbians or who might be interested,

Never! Never! I was drawn by instinct...some of the married women used to adore me...these rich married women they don't know half the time what it's all

about...Little squirt like me goes into the bed...it's amazing, the ordinary women who turned out to be lesbians and nobody ever knew. I never made a mistake

Freda said she was never interested in men, and that any sex with them “was purely, what'll I say, an acrobatic session”. In contrast, she explained, she “used to fall in love with women so easily”, insisting “you're born that way.” During WW2 she met Harold Robinson, a homosexual drag artist and dancer in the New Zealand Army Kiwi Concert Party. Freda, nine years older than Harold, assisted him with his dancing examinations, and he proposed marriage, saying he would “change your name”.

I was Mrs Robinson for a few years. I was supposed to be notorious and there were so many people who spoke about that awful Freda Stark...And then I just changed it myself and went back to Freda Stark again.

Harold travelled to London in 1945 having received a bursary to attend Sadler's Wells, and Freda joined him in 1946. Though she thought she could be anonymous in London, her “infamy” arrived before her. Despite this, she met “some marvelous women”.

I went to this wonderful party and I'd just come off this ship from NZ...I never looked back...wonderful people at the club who met me and wined and dined me...I met this gorgeous old girl...she was lovely...she had a lovely flat in Barons Court in London, I loved her, she was the same age as my mother and I used to love just lying in bed and holding her lovely little soft hands, God she was lovely, she was beautiful...she was fat and curvaceous and spoke beautiful English although she was part Italian... She was a darling...I broke her heart once or twice, but we still remained good friends

Freda took a job as a shorthand typist in the Immigration Department at the New Zealand High Commission, and soon began an “affair”, with “Meesh”, a lesbian commercial traveller she became “very fond of”, and who was “a darling” with “a lovely little car”. She joined the Gateways Club where she “lived on Fridays and Saturdays”. Though she had several relationships, she said that she did not have “a deep affair”.

In September 1947 aged thirty-seven, she finally married Harold, then twenty-eight, and concentrated on his dancing career, as her own had now come to an end. She said that she “looked after” Harold, and became “his dancing Mum”. He had “his boyfriends”, and they both socialised in the lesbian and gay communities who were “our life”. However, Harold “dressed her up” and boasted to people she was his wife. Freda thought this was because of his “vanity”, as he “didn't want people to know that we were not having sex together”. They returned to New Zealand in 1953 after Harold's

successful London career began to decline. Despite his own homosexual relationships, Freda said, Harold was jealous of her lesbian “affairs”. She returned to London, on one of her eleven trips, and they eventually divorced in 1973, remaining good friends.

Freda explained that she had always used the term lesbian.

I knew I was lesbian and that's about all...I looked it up in the dictionary...I just thought it was so natural, normal, I didn't know any better than not to be able to leap into bed with a lovely woman. I didn't think that was against the law...I was just natural...uninhibited. It didn't horrify me, I just thought I'm different...I hadn't put a name on it. But I hadn't any kind of guilt.

Role-playing was never discussed in “the crowd” she mixed with

We knew what a queen was but we hadn't any label for a femme at all. They'd say, "You know he's kamp" or something like that...kamp...covered whole degrees...of what kamp was all about.

Freda read *The Well of Loneliness* in London, and met

this lovely old girl...a real old dyke and I'd been invited to go and have drinks with her and ...The Well of Loneliness was on the table so...I could take note, and that's how she introduced herself..."Have you read the book?" and I said "Yes I know all about it".

Haworth and Miller cite “Maureen”, an Australian lesbian friend, telling Freda “I notice you use the word affairs, and I, relationships, which may imply a difference” (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.129). However the term “affair” may have been commonly used at the time for any relationship outside marriage.^{xii} Having returned to New Zealand permanently aged sixty in 1970, Freda began a relationship with Jennie Mackay, and worked at the Auckland University Library until her retirement in 1975. She was a founding member of the Phoenix and KG Clubs (see Chapter 8). Freda said her life was

a marvellous life and I'd still do it all over again. Best part of my life I think, falling in love with women... [though] nobody's ever taken Thelma's place.

It annoyed her that people claimed lesbians did not have happy lives, as her life had been very happy, with wonderful love affairs.

I dream about some of them, even now, and oh I'm glad I was a lesbian! Absolutely! I wouldn't want to be born any other way. Certainly got around. And an exciting life as well. It was really wonderful. And if I ever get born again...I want to come back a lesbian, I wouldn't want to be anything else...we're very special...If there is a God I'd just say "Please God let me come back to be a lesbian again" I love it because I've had a wonderful life being me... it suited me, that life.

ⁱ Tr. “the golden star” (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.79).

ⁱⁱ *New Zealand Times*, 4 March 1936.

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with Regina Raye Redfern, by Anna Soutar, 4 April 2000, OHC, ATL.

^{iv} The interview (undated) was recorded by Donald Rae, apparently a classmate of Graham Mareo's at Auckland Grammar School. His sister Marjorie is claimed to have been a school-friend of Freda's. Rae died in 1994 (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.167).

^v Though unable to locate a birth certificate, Haworth and Miller give “Eric Mareo” as the stage name for Eric Joachim Pechotsch, born in Sydney on 30 September 1891 (Haworth and Miller 2000, p.32). Ferrell and Ellis give a police report as their source for his original names and birth details (Ferrell and Ellis 2002, p.68)

^{vi} Eric Mareo was tried before Mr Justice Fair and an all-male jury. The Crown prosecutor was Alexander Johnstone, KC and the defence counsel Humphrey O'Leary in Haworth and Miller 2000, pp.55–59.

^{vii} Peter Williams QC, response to pathologist Philip Lynch in an article for 8 *O'Clock*, 20 February 1971, cited in Haworth and Miller 2000, pp.155–156.

^{viii} Mareo appealed, and a second trial with Mr Justice Callan presiding was held from 10 June 1936, with a second jury finding him guilty on 17 June 1936. He was again sentenced to hang, but the Attorney General H. G. R. Mason of the first Labour Government, reduced his sentence to life imprisonment (Haworth and Miller, 2000, p.63, pp.149–165).

^{ix} “It was really silver powder mixed with glycerine, but as the spotlight's amber colour made my body appear gold we always called it gold paint.” (Stark in Haworth and Miller, 2000, p.83).

^x Regina Raye created the Civic team for manager Lawrence Quinn. It included Patricia Over, Thelma Creaner, Da Kapita, Joyce Somerville, Peggy David, Lolita Sullivan and Gay Vercoe, all solo dancers, together with Freda Stark (Interview with Regina Raye Redfern, 4 April 2000, OHC, ATL).

^{xi} Interview with Regina Raye Redfern, 4 April 2000, OHC, ATL.

^{xii} The term “affair” does not appear in Orsman (1999) but common use suggests it was used in this sense in New Zealand.

Chapter 18

Bea's story – “It didn't have a name...we just were”

Beatrice (Bea) Arthur (1915-2002)

Introduction and background

Bea Arthur met her life partner Betty (Bette) Armstrong (1909-2000) in 1943, an almost exact contemporary of Freda's, from the previous chapter. While Freda enjoyed many “affairs” with women, Betty and Bea lived together for 57 years. They led very private lives during the entire pre-1970 period, until feeling compelled to speak out during the 1985-1986 Homosexual Law Reform campaign. Like Freda, Betty and Bea were recognised in their eighties by lesbian and gay communities in Auckland and Wellington as important elders and forerunners.

I interviewed Bea following Betty's death, at Parklands Retirement Village, Waikanae, where they had moved when Bette developed Parkinson's disease. Bette died in 2000 aged ninety-one, and Bea within two years of Betty in 2002, aged eighty-six. They are buried together at Waikanae Cemetery.

The lives of Betty and Bea were probably typical for many lesbian couples of their generation. As they were qualified, they could support themselves, set up an independent home and enjoy a domestic life with their many animals and gardens. They had friendly relationships with heterosexual people in various clubs and hobby groups, but did not know or socialise with other lesbians or homosexual men.

Bea was born on December 13, 1915, one of six children in a working-class Napier family. Her father was a tailor, and the family moved north from Invercargill when Bea was three years old. She attended Napier Girls' High School, leaving at fifteen following the 1931 Napier Earthquake, when the family returned south for some months. Back in Napier, she worked at a department store, before leaving aged twenty-four for nursing training at Wellington Public Hospital in 1940.

Betty was born on April 16, 1909, an only child in a middle-class Petone family. Her father was a dentist, and her mother came from a wealthy Blenheim family. Bette attended Queen Margaret College in Wellington, a private school. After her parents divorced when she was fifteen, Betty moved with her mother to Blenheim, boarding at Nelson Girls' College for a year. Bea explained that Betty “wasn’t boarding school material”, and that she left school to work in a Blenheim legal office, and live at home, before she and her mother returned to Wellington. She attended Gilbey’s Business College, qualifying as a stenographer at twenty, and her father then found her a position with the Reserve Bank.

Bea’s version of Betty’s life

Bea explained that Bette liked her work at the Reserve Bank though “she had what they called ministerials to type and they weren’t allowed a mistake and it was rather stressful”. She “got on well with the other girls until she went on holiday with some girl and this girl spread it around that Bette was lesbian.” Bea thought Bette may have made an approach to her workmate and Bette was “terribly hurt, she felt betrayed and that was the start of her misery”, as then “the men in the office all knew...they gave her a very bad time”. However, “she stayed with the Reserve Bank for fifteen years and stuck it out.” Bea was unsure whether the workmate actually called Bette a “lesbian”, but she did make her meaning clear.

The staff made it difficult. They used to go off to the pictures and they’d take turns sitting next to Bette, almost as if she was contaminated or peculiar or something. Bette felt that, she knew what they were doing, and it made her very unhappy...One day one of the men stood and watched her and said, “It’s quite legal you know.” And Bette knew what he meant. But it hurt her. They made it difficult for her.

Bea was unsure if Bette had any sexual relationships before they met.

She was fairly shy...She had a friend with two young daughters who was a widow...Bette was always round their place but the woman was as cold as ice, she was keen on her but she didn’t get anywhere with her at all. I remember Bette told me that they slept together one night and it was a bit of disaster. Bette didn’t get anywhere, the woman was a hetero, she wasn’t interested in lesbians at all really, so poor old Bette drew a blank there...I don’t think her mother realised half of what was going on...Once she met me though I don’t think she was interested in others.

Bette stayed at the Reserve Bank “mainly because of the money”, Bea thought, “as she had a good job and I don’t think she wanted to be pushed out, but I think eventually she just had

to go.” She was a “good conscientious worker”, who then worked for various employers including a lawyer, an architect, the Foundation for the Blind, and the YMCA. Bea recalled

One employer made advances to her so she just immediately got out of that. She didn't go back. She was attractive to men. They flocked around her, she was full bosomed and plumpish and she seemed to appeal to them, but they didn't appeal to her. She couldn't be bothered with them! She wasn't interested in the slightest, she always put them off...I could get on with men because I didn't worry about them, they didn't bother me, I never was harassed by men. They weren't attracted to me at all. But Bette, little Bette! When she went with the Red Cross and she used to nurse in the military wards, there were wolf whistles... being little she couldn't pull the big blackout blinds down and the men used to help her...she was a helpless little thing.

Bea's story

I asked Bea if she had received any sex education, at school or at home, and she explained that she was told nothing.

I didn't know much about it at all. I was very ignorant about those things and it wasn't talked about in our house. My sister had her first period at 12 and I didn't have mine till 15, and I thought “I'm going to miss out on this, this is not going to happen” but when it did I thought, “Oh gosh that's the end of my freedom!” Because I was a bit of a tomboy, I was athletic...My sisters all married and had children and I didn't know what was going on at all. I was curious, but it wasn't my business. Terribly naive...I would have been afraid to marry... I think it could have hurt...I just wasn't marriage material at all.

Even during nursing training, Bea received no sex education.

I should have known a lot more with nursing, but it was one thing, with anatomy and physiology, the clitoris was never mentioned. Never mentioned! (See Chapter 6.) It's not in any books except a maternity book it's got two lines to say that it's the equivalent to the men's penis, more or less. And ... it never spoke about erection. I never knew anything about that, I was ignorant.

There were no references to orgasm or to sexual pleasure.

Oh no, not a mention! Look I've got the books here, there's not a thing. I think it was very, very poor. We didn't learn anything.

Bea was very religious and attended the Baptist Church, becoming engaged to a man she met there.

A very bright fellow, who played the piano beautifully and had a lovely personality He went up to ask Dad if he could marry me. I remember feeling a bit ambivalent about it, I wasn't excited, and I don't think I loved him at all. He went off to the Bible Institute in Auckland and I went to Wellington to nurse. And we wrote for a short time, and it fizzled out and that was that.

Bea enjoyed her work at the department store, as they were “good to their staff”, despite their different treatment of men and women.

They trained up the young men to be managers and ...gave the girls opportunities to perhaps be a cashier and that sort of thing. They believed in helping young people along, they were very good employers.

However Bea realized there was no future for her as a shop assistant.

I was 24 then and I realised there wasn't much future for a person as they were getting older so I began to think about nursing, and I had a friend who went nursing in Wellington. That seemed a good idea so I applied and 20 days later I was accepted...I started in April 1940, and I loved it! Just loved it! I couldn't wait for the next lesson, it was hands-on nursing and we were taught all kinds of techniques and ways of nursing people and that was just what I wanted.

Their relationship

Bea and Bette met in December 1943, when Bette was admitted to Wellington Hospital as a patient, with sciatica, which Bea thought was due to Bette's war work with the Red Cross. Bea was her nurse.

When I met Bette I had just graduated and we were then allowed to live out. I had been in the Nurses' Home all that time. ...Bette's mother saw me when she was visiting Bette and said “Oh that looks a nice nurse, why don't you invite her home” so that's how it started. I was invited to live there with them, in Abel Smith Street. And I was there for 10 years.

It was difficult living with Bette and her mother, Bea said, because Bette's mother was often “jealous”, though “of course Bette was very enthusiastic”. They did not begin a physical relationship “straight away”, though it developed later.

Bette initiated it all, I didn't. No, I was bewildered, I didn't know where I was. I was embarrassed...I was staying with Bette...in bed.

From the beginning they slept in the same bed. When Bea first moved in, Bette had the single bed and they slept together there.

Bette slept with me...We had the single bed...Bette's mother had the double bed, which she relinquished to us later...and then she had the single bed.

Bea did not want to discuss the intimate details of their relationship

I don't like to go into all of that...she said she loved me yes, yes, oh yes. But I must have been a block head...I liked Bette but...I never heard the word “lesbian” until much later...when one girl cut the other girl's throat...one of the girls in the change room said “Oh some lesbian affair!” And that's the first time I'd ever heard the word.

This was the Petley-Davis case in 1967, when Bea was fifty-two years old. Bette and Bea did not label their relationship, as “it didn’t have a name...we didn’t seem to feel the need to be called anything, we just were...it didn’t seem to matter”. They did not know the term homosexual, and there was no mention of it during nursing training. Bea did not speculate about their relationship, but “just went along with it”. Though religious, she never “came across anything in the Bible” which suggested there was anything sinful about their relationship.

I hadn’t come across anything like that. I have since, and thought about it, but I think there are greater things that transcend that. Bette used to go to church with me, but she wasn’t as keen...it was because of the attitude toward Bette that I left the church...I think the minister knew, I think he suspected and his family was very cold to Bette.

In all, Betty and Bea lived with Bette’s mother for ten years, though they parted for some months during that time, when Bea became attracted to another nurse.

This is a sad part. Because there was a person in the department whose mother had died and she was absolutely devastated. She used to go out into her car in the lunchtime and cry. I felt sorry for her and I used to go out there and try to comfort her...I was a fool. I left Bette and went to the Nurses’ Home where this person was living...And Bette would never let go. We used to listen to that request session on Saturday night and Bette was always there, she wouldn’t be shaken off, I didn’t try to shake her off...she stayed to the end of the programme and then she had to go home on the tram, I felt a bit sorry for her, but not sorry enough unfortunately and this went on for... six months, it was awful...I suppose I was a bit flattered which is stupid, just stupid! Anyway it ended...and Bette was right there. She would never let go, and so back I went with Bette...I was still with Bette and her mother.

After this, the couple decided they would live independently, and bought a gorse-covered hilly section in Khandallah. They cleared the section themselves, established a large garden, and had a house built where they lived for nearly fifty years. They shared a bedroom, but now had two beds, as they were concerned about “what people might say”. Though self-conscious about their relationship, Bea thought they still had no name for it.

Wasn’t I the dullest thing? The other nurses, there were other lesbians there...and there were always disparaging remarks about them. So with the other lesbians, I wasn’t interested in them...we didn’t live in the same sort of social strata, they went their way, we had our life, they had their life...We went to clubs and things with mostly all hetero people...We belonged to the Victoria Leagueⁱ, the men were like bees round honey with Bette. She didn’t do a thing. And I remember she wore a Lurex top and a black skirt and she was well bosomed, had a good brassiere on, gosh the men were round her, and I was looking on and I thought “Oh yeah”. I knew what she thought about them. She was a bit of a tease, but she didn’t have any intention of going along with what they wanted.

They did not disclose their relationship to these heterosexual friends.

I think they accepted us, I don't know about the relationship...they never indicated, [if they knew] they were always very friendly...it didn't seem to arise.

Bea did not drink alcohol, so they never went to pubs, but because “Bette loved dancing”, they often danced at home together.

We just did it, in the lounge there, to the records...we didn't worry about pulling the curtains. It was our house, we didn't care.

Other members of Betty's family knew about their relationship, and Bea thought they accepted her because she was a nurse.

One day, at the relatives...Bette heard them say “Oh some nurse”...I was accepted as a nurse...in a profession you know, I was all right socially. They didn't realise that I came from a humble family.

Betty's mother remained very much part of their relationship, even after they moved to their own home, visiting frequently and also accompanying them on holiday.

We couldn't leave her behind and so we took her with us...she wouldn't leave us alone together. When we stayed at the Chateauⁱⁱ on New Year's Eve they had all sorts of things going on, and Bette and I wanted to be a part of it, but oh no her mother sat there... We stayed at Princes' Gate in Rotoruaⁱⁱⁱ, and we couldn't get any time to ourselves at all. She came out to our place every weekend and she'd sit in the best chair and every remark had to be passed to her.

With Bea's family the couple had a different problem, as they did not accept their relationship, and Bea's younger sisters in particular did not like Betty.

That went on all the years...they were jealous...they thought that Bette had pinched me from them...they wouldn't accept Bette at all. But Mum and Dad did...I always remembered their birthdays and Christmas. They didn't come, I think the odd time they might have looked in, Bette was always nice to them, and of course I was too... And you know I'm amazed at that because I mean after us being together for so many years, it didn't occur to them that we were happy, it didn't occur to them at all that our happiness was important to us... [They thought] that she was to blame for everything... [For what] yes, you might well ask. That we were estranged from the family. But it wasn't our fault that we were estranged, it was their fault... Bette hadn't done anything to any of them. She said, “Look our home is open, they can come here anytime they like” which they could. But they chose not to... it was so cruel.

After twenty years, the couple bought another section at Waikanae, building a modest weekend cottage and developing another garden. Both women retired during the early 1970s, Bea from her position as Sister in Charge of Outpatients at Wellington Hospital (see

Tighe's comments in Chapter 23 about meeting her in this role), and Bette from office work. They shared several retirement activities, especially painting, and eventually became involved with the lesbian and gay communities in the 1980s, during the Homosexual Law Reform campaign. During this campaign, they telephoned several religious leaders.

We tried to tell them that it wasn't wrong, we said "We have been together for so many years" and we said we love each other and you know where was the wrong in it... We had our ups and downs, Bette was Bette, she had a very strong will, so did I and it wasn't plain sailing entirely but... We were intensely loyal to each other.

ⁱA conservative commonwealth association.

ⁱⁱThe Chateau Tongariro, a resort hotel in the mountains of the North Island.

ⁱⁱⁱThe Princes' Gate Hotel in Rotorua, a thermal resort area in the North Island.

Chapter 19

Emily's story – "I knew there must have been others"

Emily (b.1921–)

Introduction and background

Emily was born in 1921, so is 12 years younger than Betty and 6 years younger than Bea. Like Betty, Emily came from a privileged background but, unlike Freda, Betty and Bea, who were all recognized as elders by lesbian communities, Emily and her long-term partner Jane, live very discreetly in older age. Unlike Betty and Bea, Emily left New Zealand to live in England for many years where she could live more openly, returning to New Zealand together with her partner after her retirement in 1981, and settling in Nelson. I interviewed Emily at her home. At her request, some details have been changed and a pseudonym used to protect her privacy.

Emily's paternal family emigrated from England to the Taranaki area and was involved in land battles against Maori before moving to Dunedin. The family was catholic and wealthy, owning a small manufacturing business, which her father managed. Like Betty, Emily was an only child and her parents divorced. Aged twelve she was sent to a catholic girls' boarding school. During the Depression the family business failed and her father became unemployed. He was forced to take a job as a bus-driver, and he and Emily went to live with his mother. The change in circumstances was difficult for Emily, as she explained.

It was going from being one of the privileged children at boarding school with professional people's children and "What does your Daddy do?" "He drives a bus"... it was dreadful!

Emily learned shorthand and typing at school, and passed the Public Service examinations (see Chapter 7), finding employment in Dunedin and later Wellington, before moving to England in 1958, purchasing a home there with her partner whom she met in 1960.

Emily's story

Emily said she was aware of being interested in girls at three years of age, when she became interested in "a little girl down the road", though "nothing came of it", and Emily "never told her". She described herself as experiencing very strong feelings for another girl when she was about thirteen.

I just admired her from a distance...Just had that feeling...It was strange. I couldn't understand it...It didn't worry me because I wasn't sexually aware at that stage.

Emily talked about her first sexual experiences, which took place with a girl cousin who “used to come and stay with us up at my grandmother's place”. She said they “used to sleep together”, but that their relationship was “just physical”. Emily did not remember that they discussed what they were doing, and nor did she confess their activities to the priest. She did not recall reading anything on lesbianism, and as she did not read newspapers she was unaware of the Mareo case, which happened when she was fourteen. After leaving school, Emily got a job in the office of an insurance company in Dunedin. She explained how she fell in love with a woman at work, when she was nineteen.

I had a feeling about her. It was fantastic, though nothing happened. I just wanted to be near her. I did let her know, though it wasn't consummated. She didn't want to do anything about it...it was embarrassing...unrequited love... very difficult to go through.

Emily recalled that she was unclear what her feelings meant, and had no name for them.

I didn't know what to think...I was in a state of confusion for a long time. I didn't understand it...there was no one I could talk to about it. I couldn't talk to my father or anybody about it...I just felt different. It was a great puzzle.

She said that she told another woman at work about being in love with the woman, who sympathised, saying “oh dear, what a shame”. Emily thought that this work-mate

Probably discussed it with everybody around the place I don't know, but I was so stupid...I was 21, old enough to know better...she was a bit older than me and the sort of person you could talk to I felt.

Emily described herself as then making an approach to someone else at work, who “was horrified so that was that”. She explained that though she had men friends, she was not attracted to them “in that way”, but just enjoyed their company, and thought they regarded her lack of interest as catholic chastity before marriage. During WW2 some friends who lived on farms billeted American soldiers, and Emily said she visited and joined in the parties, though her main social activities at the time were going to the pictures with friends, and having coffee afterwards. She remembered that sometimes they went for a drink at a pub, explaining though, that “You couldn't march in there and front up at the bar”, but had to “sit in the Ladies' Lounge.”

Emily thought that she had first heard about homosexuality when she joined a theatre group, where members told her about a woman who was, “like that”.

Different ones in the group would say "Oh you know, I don't like sitting next to her" or something like that and I thought "Oh, oh" so that's when I knew that she was one of my kind... And I thought "Well." I was pleased to know that there was someone else like me.

Though she felt she could not say anything to this woman, Emily believed that

There was an understanding between us, because she was the male lead and I was the understudy...there had to be a man in the troupe - we were all girls. She was a bit older than I. She later married, a marriage of convenience for companionship.

Emily described how she attempted to become “normal”, by having a brief “affair” with an airman, “a sort of a war hero thing”. She said this was her first heterosexual experience”, and that

I felt happy and I felt right and thought everything was right, but I became pregnant and that was it.

Her son Mark was born in 1945, and was adopted by family friends. After this, she moved to Christchurch, and worked for Pat Nelson at the Blue Room Tearooms, Colombo Street (see Chapter 16). Emily knew Pat was lesbian and had been a dancer in Paris, but said that they did not discuss lesbianism, as the “subject never came up”, and everyone was “very secretive.” However, she was sure Pat “knew I was, because she would be told by mutual friends”. Emily wondered about Ngaio Marsh, and said she did hear about other lesbians in Christchurch.

A woman who owned a yacht...she was a homosexual...She used to walk like a man...the real 20s style person who really was still in the 20s and was accepted in society...but everybody sort of knew, they wouldn't take her to the bosom. And there were two women working at one of the department stores, and everybody used to look at them...they were quite open about it. There were people in various places and they were accepted. But I wasn't game enough to do that...I thought, "How could you be so open and brazen about it?" Probably because of my own background.

Emily said she knew of no meeting places for homosexuals in Dunedin or Christchurch at this time, as “people just kept to themselves”, and there was “no actual place where they could go.” Life was very difficult for homosexual women in New Zealand during the 1940s, “not only just for me”. She explained that at this time people needed a reason for knowing other people. They could not just turn up with strangers to their families without an explanation as to how they had met. Tennis clubs, theatre clubs or other groups were a useful cover to explain how you knew people you had not met through family, work, or church. Emily herself also joined the Business and Professional Women's Club, but met no other homosexuals there. She was searching for others

because she knew “ I couldn't have been all on my own, I knew there must have been others”.

Emily did not recall finding any material directly addressing lesbianism, though she enjoyed and could “identify with” the film *Wings of the Morning* because “a gypsy girl was dressed as a boy”. In the 1940s she managed to obtain *The Well of Loneliness* from a friend at work, and remembered finding the book was “exciting but very sad, though I thought, well it’s just fiction”.

In the early 1950s Emily moved to Wellington, where she worked in the office of a bank, and lived with relations in Miramar. She joined the local table tennis club, where she met Susan, who was married, and they began a passionate relationship.

We just clicked. But she was married, so it was very difficult...We just couldn't help it...I felt it was wrong but then I thought it can't be that wrong because we're both so happy together, "How could it be wrong?" I knew we were homosexual, I'd known that for some years. It was a terrible conflict...a very difficult situation...her husband knew about it. I didn't know he knew...it was a funny sort of marriage...she wasn't in love with him. He was a lot older...she eventually left him but not for me...although she was very fond of me she realised it was a hopeless situation...We were practising homosexuals but inside a marriage.

When the relationship ended, Emily said she wanted to confess to a priest but, as she had left the church, consulted a doctor instead. This doctor wanted her to “take hormones”, and to read a textbook on homosexuality. Emily decided that he was “old-fashioned”, and ignored his advice. She described how she began to frequent coffee bars, and met homosexual men for the first time.

It was a new world. I met Peter Varley, and a few actors, and a friend of his called Michael, we decided we might as well get married because ...we both liked going to the theatre and music and listening to records. We had a lot in common.

Though the men referred to themselves as “kamp”, Emily said that she did not use this term, but continued to call herself “homosexual”. She described herself as, by this time, keeping work and her private life separate, as she knew she needed to support herself and could not afford to lose her job. For this reason, she said, she no longer discussed lesbianism with her work colleagues or heterosexual friends.

Emily was living in Wellington during the 1954 Parker Hulme case, returning to Christchurch later in the 1950s, where her father had retired. Aware of her lesbian relationship with Susan, he arranged for Emily, now 35, to consult Dr Francis Bennett,

who had testified for the defence in the Parker Hume case (see Chapter 6). Emily presented Bennett as telling her that her father had revealed she was a lesbian.

I said, "Yes, it's true...I am homosexual" and he said "Your father is very worried" and I said, "I can understand that" and he said, "I won't tell you all the things he said about you. "

She explained that her father had told Bennett about Susan, and accused Emily of “breaking up a marriage”.

I said "That's not true, I did not break up a marriage...The marriage was already broken up". That was the worst thing. The fact that he'd even discussed my private life with a total stranger, that's what upset me.

After this, Emily said she left her father and returned to Wellington, where she met Maureen, a younger lesbian, in 1958, through kamp male friends. They began a relationship, and Emily and Maureen met another lesbian couple in Wellington and, through kamp men, another lesbian couple in Auckland. On this occasion, she said, they also drove to Waiwera to visit Pat Nelson, who had retired there. Emily recalled Pat being open and welcoming.

It was pleasant for her to be able to talk about her life, because there would have been so few people that she could have talked to about that. I mean only very close intimate friends.

Later that year Emily decided to needed to get away from New Zealand and sailed to England, where she settled in London, working for an insurance company. She explained that leaving was difficult as it was hard to get away from her family and lead her own life.

Getting away from the family...I was glad to get away from the whole thing... my own mix up, my own distress...there's a way of living that's been established and you have to conform, people have to have a marriage ceremony, children to be born, that sort of carry on - it's always been difficult for people like us.

Especially, she added for homosexual women, as “women have always been second-class citizens”. In 1960 Emily met Jane, a librarian, and they bought a house outside London and began to socialise in a lesbian community. Butch and femme role-playing were not part of their relationship, and Emily thought they were both “born homosexual”.

I think it's a biological thing, some are more female and some are more masculine...it's born in you, it's not something you assume...I had no choice - I chose to be honest about myself. There would be a lot of unhappy people around the place if I had got married.

Emily preferred to use the term “female homosexual” for herself and her friends, as she disliked the term “lesbian”.

It was the derogatory way the word lesbian was used. It's just like when they'd say queers and I didn't like that. I thought well we're homosexuals and that's it. I didn't like being labelled something like that...it's the way people use it, people who are so-called heterosexual, think they're normal...They're not normal as far as I'm concerned. No way.

She thought that it had taken her a long time to find others, because

I don't go round holding up a flag – “I'm homosexual!” I don't have to do that. I like being with other homosexuals, but you don't make friends with people just because somebody's a homosexual... When you're very young that's different, you seek homosexual companionship because you have none of your own. And you think that by befriending somebody that might be homosexual - they might know someone that might be interested in you.

Chapter 20

Katie's story – “That's what I am then, I'm a lesbian!”

Katie Hogg (b.1926–)

Introduction and background

Katie Hogg, born in 1926, is five years younger than Emily, and both women are catholic and South Islanders though, unlike Emily, Katie was from a poor working class Christchurch Irish catholic family. Her story may be typical of women of her generation who married despite being attracted to women. When her marriage ended, Katie became involved with women and eventually identified as lesbian.

Katie went to work straight from primary school, with no formal qualifications, and married at eighteen, becoming a mother of three. She divorced, having spent time on remand after a violent episode and placed her children in an orphanage, supporting them by working as a cook until she could purchase her own bed and breakfast place in Christchurch where they could live with her. Her first lesbian relationship was with Jenny, a prison officer, also married with children. Though their relationship was physical it was not genitally sexual. She met Julie Evans, a teacher, in 1962 and they moved to Auckland, where they purchased a house together in Ponsonby and Katie worked as a hospital cook. Julie died in 1973, and Katie met her current partner Moana, of Ngapuhi descent, the following year.

Katie's story

Katie described herself as always having been attracted to girls, even at primary school, adding that she did not speculate about these feelings and “just felt that it was quite natural” because she was not “attracted to boys”, and was “very religious, very catholic”. However she said that girls were discouraged from “unhealthy friendships” by the nuns, and were not allowed “to show outward signs of affection”.

You were not to touch girls or put your arms around them! Our Lady would blush. Oh absolutely! If you had any thoughts you didn't know what they were anyway, and you couldn't touch them in any case, no, you'd be very bold!

She explained that she received no sex education, beyond veiled warnings.

Cross your legs, used to make Our Lady blush. And to have the skirt above the knee, you were bold, you were bold. "That skirt will have to come down Katie, it's bold!"

Katie thought most catholic women of the time "were kept in complete ignorance." She did not remember reading books or magazines on sex.

Mind you I was brought up during the Depression and you were lucky to have a bloody loaf of bread let alone a magazine. They did get an evening newspaper. During the Depression, if you had a radio you were bloody lucky...you lived a very close kind of life within the family circle.

Katie described her family home as having few books, as they could not afford them. Her parents did not belong to a library because "you had to pay for libraries", though there was a free children's library, Katie joined. Her father borrowed books from friends and neighbours, and Katie described how

If we brought any kids home Dad would ask, "does your father have any books at home that I could borrow?" Dad read anything.

There were imported children's magazines, and though Katie was unable to buy them, she remembered reading them.

The Girls' Crystal and Girls' Own, magazines used to come out...The girl whose parents had the shop used to lend them to me and there would be a serial story about girls who got out the window at college and found a tunnel and one girl was mean and all that sort of thing

Katie described herself as a tomboy, playing mainly with boys, particularly her special friend John.

All the kids were frightened of us, they used to say, "Let's go! Here comes Katie and John!" We used to throw stones at them and that sort of thing, and I was very oriented towards boys' company.

Katie remembered that her mother dressed her as a boy.

Mind you they used to dress little boys as girls in those early days. Until they were about six or seven they had little frocks on. I don't think anybody thought it was odd at all. I suppose another thing was there were very few clothes...we used to get clothes from the nuns, and you got into whatever you could. But I used to love the boys' pants.

Later when Katie became a lesbian, she recalled asking her mother about this, and reported her as justifying it because

"Well there was nothing wrong with that, we didn't have many clothes. And they suited you...you were a real tomboy!" And I said, "How do you think I got like that?" And she said, "we had Pauline and it was four years before you came along

and I was hoping and I really believed that you were going to be a boy...that's why you ended up a tomboy."

Katie explained that she had to go to work straight from primary school, as there were five younger children and the family could not afford secondary education for her. She described her close relationship with her father, who had taught her how to use tools, and also helped her to find employment.

We had to go out and make a noise like someone bringing in money. My first job was in the printing works. My father said "Now when you go there, tell the boss you're very good with machinery and you have helped your father with the car, and your father will see that you're on time every day." It was hard to get jobs because of the Depression.

Katie got the job and said that once she was employed, she had been able to afford to join several women's groups, including the YWCA, where she went "camping and tramping".

I always loved women's company. I was in the surf club during the war when there were no men here and they formed women's divisions of surf clubbing and we went to championships and competed.

She gave the reasons why she was expected to marry.

What are you going to do sitting around here, you've got to make a noise like someone meeting somebody with a vision to marriage and curtains and jam and children and polishing floors and cleaning windows and making frocks and things...I was quite foreign to all that... Wasn't that way inclined.

Aged sixteen, Katie met a man who was mobilised when the war started, and they became engaged on his final leave before he was sent "to the islands" on active service. Katie thought he wasn't really "inclined to women", as he came from a family of several boys, none of whom married. She said that she "got a three-diamond ring, and he went away for nearly two years", and explained that they did not have sex, as she still had "no inkling" about it, because even "the pictures" provided no information.

Clark Gable and Mina Loy and they only kissed and that was it and the next thing you saw they were walking along the beach with a little child...There was none of that "Blue Lagoon", as Dad called it. My father was very protective and even when I was engaged... we never actually got close to one another. We had to walk to the pictures and back home. My father would hear us coming. He'd give us five minutes at the gate, he'd open the leadlight and say, "In you come!" and of course in you went. You never got to do anything till you got into bed on the wedding night.

When her fiancée returned on leave in 1944, Katie was eighteen and remembered feeling she had "grown away from him", but everyone asked, "when are you getting

married?” He had only a few weeks leave and she said that “before I knew where I was” their families had organised the wedding frock and the caterers, and they were married.

We had a honeymoon and I wondered what he was on about, I thought he was trying to do artificial respiration, because I was a virgin, I didn't know what was going on...he was as ignorant as I was and we were supposed to be performing these bedroom robotics and anyway it was sufficient because when he went away I was pregnant. My mother told me I was pregnant...she said “Have you had any periods lately?” And I said “No”. “Well” she said, “You're pregnant.”

Katie's husband was still overseas when their eldest child was born at the nursing home, and Katie told the story of how she fell in love with the nurse and “couldn't take my eyes off her” When the war ended, her husband returned to a railways job and they shifted around the country. It was “a disastrous marriage”, she said, as neither were “fitted for married life”. The marriage became violent, ending when Katie shot her husband with his own gun, and she was charged with attempting to do grievous bodily harm. She explained that her husband had said “he was going to kill me”, because “he didn't want to be in this situation”. Katie described thinking about “my three children”, and how “they're not going to be left motherless”, explaining that “once the story unfolded I was exonerated”. She was remanded at Paparua Women's Prison, and talked about the close relationship that developed with Jenny, a prison officer.

I used to be taken out of my cell at night, down to her flat for little drinkies, little gins and things, we had a very nice relationship. But it wasn't really a sexual one...she might have been gay I don't know, very butch lady but nothing was said.

While Katie was in prison, her children were placed in an orphanage. They remained there after her release while she worked as a cook at Warner's Hotel, Christ's College and then at Sunnyside Psychiatric Hospital.

There were no benefits or anything in those days. There was nothing...I was saving for the day when I would be able to have them with me, and the only way I could see that happening was to buy a little bed and breakfast place where we had our own accommodation and I could have them with me...that took me about seven years before I had sufficient money, and bought Pine Lodge.

During this time, she said, Jenny had married, and though their relationship was very physical, it never became genitally sexual.

We put our arms round each other, and used to sleep together and that sort of thing...I had feelings, and she obviously felt the same but we never ever said anything, well you didn't, neither of us would have known what to say...when I had my days off I used to go and stay there at her place...she and I used to sleep together because her husband didn't want anything to do with her after the twins were born, he had been single till he was 55 when Jenny married him.

Two homosexual men came to board at Pine Lodge, and Katie said she “picked that they were queers...but I didn’t know there were women queers.” She explained that she knew about male homosexuality, because of her uncle, who was called a “Nancy-boy”, “fairy”, and “queer”, but she “didn’t have a clue what they did, or if they did anything, I didn’t think about it”. She first heard the word “lesbian” from the men, who told her they had seen her with Jenny and “knew they were lesbians”. Then, she said, they introduced her to their lesbian friend Julie Evans, who was a secondary school teacher, and she had her first sexual relationship with a woman, in 1960 aged 34.

I wondered what on earth had happened to me because I was absolutely madly in love with her from the very first moment I saw her. She came to get in the car and it was like as if someone hit me with a big wet sack. And it was on from there. She told me all about lesbians because she picked up that I didn’t know what I was on about. I told her that I loved her and she said, “Well you’re ridiculous, you’re a married woman, you don’t know anything about it.” Well from then on I knew what I was on about.

Katie described herself as realising that she was a lesbian.

I thought, “that’s what I am, I’m a lesbian, women who love women...that’s what I am then, I’m a lesbian!” The penny dropped and I started to get the whole thing in perspective, why I’d always felt like I did...I had a realisation of what it was all about. It’s not something new and it’s even in the bible, and Julie told me all about it and I was very relieved to know that I wasn’t the only one, and that it was practised down the centuries. Very relieved to know finally that I was going to forget about the bloody church and them pulling me apart by this sin business, and that I was going to accept it and we talked, and I told her I’d finally accepted it and I didn’t give a bugger what they thought. So then we got on with it very happily.

They were able to meet privately at Pine Lodge, which Katie said was fortunate as “we could never of met at our people’s places”, and Julie was still living at home. Though they did not know any other lesbians in Christchurch, they did attend kamp men’s parties. Socialising was

mostly at private parties in those days, and Tallulah, a great big drag queen in Christchurch, everybody knew him, he used to throw some magnificent parties up in the hills. People used to get their booze and drag it up the hill to Cashmere.

Katie explained that their reasons for socialising privately were because of six o’clock closing and because Christchurch pubs did not allow women in the main bars in those days.

They had what they called a cats’ bar, a little bar at the back where the women used to drink and when you wanted a drink there was a little wee slide and you used to knock on the slide and the barman would lift it up and ask you for your orders and he’d bring them to you and he’d shut it down again.

She and Julie used the terms “kamp” and “homosexual”, as “lesbian” was “not really used then”. Because Julie subscribed to “the first lesbian magazines” *The Ladder* and *Arena Three*, Katie said that she read these too. However, she explained that she found it difficult to reconcile lesbianism with catholicism, and it became “a struggle”, because she went “to confession confessing it”. Eventually, she said, a heterosexual catholic friend explained, “whatever one does, if it’s from a point of view of love it isn’t wrong in God’s eyes”.

That made me feel good though I didn’t say anything to her, I made out I didn’t hear it. Then I thought “why the hell should I be crippled with this bloody conscience, all this bloody God business, why should I make Julie unhappy about it”. From then on I thought “to hell with it, bugger it, they can all go and get stuffed. I know where I’m going and I’m not doing anybody any harm. And I’m not going to break her heart by leaving her! Because that’s what the priest told me I had to do, so I left the church instead.

Soon afterwards, Katie said, the pair decided to leave Christchurch too, because Julie’s family refused to accept their relationship and they no longer felt comfortable there. In 1963 they bought a house in Ponsonby, Auckland, where though they could socialise in a larger kamp community, Katie explained that they needed to be cautious.

We started then to go to one or two places...Julie always had marking to do or exams to prepare or something and we didn’t go out a lot. And she was always terrified of being sprung. We went to a party and twin boys that she taught turned up. Well she nearly died, she worried about that for months, that she was going to be sprung. That they were going to put the word around that she was at a gay party...if you’re a teacher and you’re found out to be a homosexual, well! She lived in fear so she wouldn’t go anywhere...We used to have drinks at home, or we went to the occasional gay party we knew was going to be safe, but she always cased it before she even went in, and we had a few parties here, in a controlled environment where nobody that was going to be a danger to her would turn up.

After the couple had been together ten years, Julie died suddenly of a heart attack in 1973, aged only thirty-three, and Katie was devastated. She explained that later she met her current partner Moana, and continued to live very privately.

I let people think what they like, I don’t care whether they think or they don’t think, it’s nothing to do with them anyway. I’ve always minded my business and I hope everybody else minds theirs

Katie explained why she thought many women of her generation were not able to live as lesbians.

I suppose they never worked it out, or never had an opportunity, or just suspected it and didn’t do anything about it, or thought they were evil, or all sorts of reasons, because it was never open and you could never acknowledge it and accept it and talk to other people about it. It just wasn’t discussed. People would point out gay

men because they're more obvious, they'd say "Oh that joker up the road he's a bloody Nancy girl" or "that husband of hers is a big queer" because that's the way it was referred to. But women were never discussed in that way.

She presented herself as not knowing what she would have done, had she not met and fallen in love with Julie.

I don't think I'd have known what I was, I think I probably would have gone on fancying the lady that's up the shop, and never realised what it was all about. Or I probably by now would have realised that I'm attracted to women so I must be a lesbian, but I don't think I ever would have got around to doing anything about it. You see don't forget I was very religious.

Like others in this section, Katie pictured the pre-1970 publicly visible Auckland lesbian scene as sometimes wild, with drunkenness, fights and all-night parties. She thought this was because

It was so frowned on to be with each other, that's why I think young lesbians 30 years ago were so outrageous because it was a let-off of steam, they got together and they were all the same and we'd have a bloody good night and get drunk. Because we were so looked down on, lost our jobs if anyone found out. But when they were together, and used to drink more than they should and used to have fights, it was a release that they could actually be together. Be themselves! And go around kissing a girl and nobody looked...having a place to go to be yourself was very important, especially when you're madly in love with that person, you want to be in company where they're all kissing one another and they've all got their arms around one another, it's very important for your development as a human being, because that's what you are and that's where you need to be.

Chapter 21

**Frankie's story – “ it was an in-the-dark thing:
the old hormones just drive you wherever you need to go.”**

Frances Kinney (b.1938–)

Introduction and background

Frankie, born in 1938, is twelve years younger than Katie whose story was told in the previous chapter. Frankie is also of Irish descent, but unlike Katie, Frankie is from a Protestant middle-class Auckland family. She grew up during the affluent period after WW2, with family assistance through taxation and the family benefit, public education and health programmes and little unemployment. Frankie has two sisters, and was state school educated, attending Auckland Girls' Grammar School. She trained as a bookkeeper and shorthand typist, before joining the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation and training as a broadcasting technical operator. Frankie realized she was lesbian from a young age, and after discreet relationships with other girls through Bible Class and school, eventually found kamp communities and networks in the cities. Though initially shocked by the association with prostitution, drunkenness and violence associated with some of these communities, she was able to establish a social life with a circle of lesbian friends, before moving to England for several years. On returning to New Zealand, she purchased her own home in Auckland.

Frankie's story

Frankie said that she first heard about homosexuality as a child, as her Uncle Harry was homosexual, and her mother talked about “how he would take her lipstick”, and “put his hair in curlers...so it was sort of in the family...and all a bit of giggle.” Even before she was seven, Frankie recalled having feelings for girls, hoping “that would be okay” and that it “wouldn't mean the end of family life”. She remembered a cousin visiting

I used to get her to tell me stories about girls that would eventually turn into boys and be able to race out and do all the stuff that the boys could do, so one catches on pretty early about this sort of stuff, in terms of that they seem to get a better deal.

In a later conversationⁱ, Frankie explained that she knew not to discuss this with her parents, because “kids get told off” for inappropriate gender behaviours, and that “parents are very aware of these things” as they do not want

different kids – they want the same – they want their kid to be like all the other kids in the street, and they don't want undue attention drawn to the family.

She remembered reading a novel with a lesbian character, that her parents had borrowed, when she was about ten years old,

I was absolutely fascinated and I thought "They write stories about it"... those were the days when friends passed around these paperbacks...Maybe it came from some uncle's semi-pornographic collection.

Despite the openness in her home, she believed that she received limited sex education.

Mum was ironing, and I said to her "Oh I know how to get babies" and she said "Well don't you be trying it". We got some sort of sex education...she used to say "When you get married you must keep him happy because...then he won't wander".

Frankie thought that she had begun to have sexual relationships with girls from the age of thirteen, at Presbyterian Bible Class where she had "a good social life", with activities including "sports, Scottish dancing, operetta, and camps away".

They were a wonderful way to be with other women. I had a bit of conflict about it later on...very strong urge...when you're adolescent. I couldn't reconcile the thing because it meant that you had to have the men as decoys to appear to be okay, and do this other thing on the side, which seemed a bit subversive to me, and you should be able to shout it from the mountains but of course you don't do that. So the better the cover, the more chance you have of perhaps having some sort of lasting relationship...it was a very confusing time.

She said that she did not discuss her confusion with her girlfriends, as a lot of her sexual encounters were "just seduction", explaining that it could be difficult.

In a dormitory with 200 people when you're seducing somebody you don't know whether she's going to yell "Don't do this dreadful thing to me" or whether they're going to make too much noise...it's really quite a tricky thing. It's the ultimate in dangerous living when you're 13 or 14 because you know you might get caught out.

If she had spoken about it, she thought, her preference would have been to talk to someone who "did the same thing as me".

Other people that seduced people, rather than the people you're seducing because...it's an in-the-dark thing, that people don't want to know about in the daytime. You can have a little kiss and a cuddle at night in the dark and a little whatever, but, once it's out in the open it's an admission and once it's an admission if you're not happy about it...you have to do something about it...and so it's a thing of denial.

Frankie said that when it was unspoken "it didn't exist", and that this was possible when she was young, and did not think "much beyond the present". She recalled that at the time she knew others at school and church were doing the same things.

A lot of these people had like crushes and you knew that they were going to get over that, and I sort of knew that I wasn't...when you're young...the old hormones just drive you wherever you need to go.

She told the story of the strategies she developed to get other girls to do what she wanted, including getting them to kiss each other,

like your boyfriend's kissing you, "was my line. I was full of life and drive and everything. It just seemed to me the most natural way of life. I did have conflict about it, and I knew it wasn't quite right.

At her school, Frankie thought some teachers were in relationships together, and also had "that sort of crushy thing...some of them were a bit sweet on each other" which was "quite nice". When the Parker Hulme case occurred, Frankie was sixteen and in her last year at school. She followed the case carefully.

I got messages I could be a potential killer...I could understand that somebody could feel that strongly about being separated from somebody they loved...that was very clear to me. The sensational stuff I thought was such a shame and a lot of bad press for people who actually loved women, same sex people.

Then she remembered, when she was eighteen, her Uncle Harry came for afternoon tea and brought his partner.

There was his little fingers up in the air, and we had the lovely afternoon tea and the men played the piano. But after they'd gone, there was this giggling and carrying on in the kitchen... they were fond of Harry. But it wasn't something you'd want to be.

She thought that her parents may have wondered about her, but "nobody sees what they don't want to", and she was careful, as she knew "what's going to be approved of and what isn't", by how Uncle Harry was giggled at, and also from the book her parents had borrowed that it was "a bit of a taboo thing." Frankie left school at this time in order to have more freedom to be with a woman she had fallen in love with at a bible-class camp.

You've got a lot to deal with in that I had boyfriends and she had boyfriends because...you don't want to get found out. And so what happens then is there is a lot of stress...and possessiveness because there's no certainty in anything.

She did not recall she and her lover discussing what they were doing.

I didn't push my luck too much because I was a bit concerned that if ...there was too much discussion it would ruin it. It was almost a furtive thing... a nighttime thing.

Now that she was at work, Frankie said she did meet someone she could talk to about lesbianism.

She was an English woman who travelled around a lot and once I gave her a kiss...she was just so lovely and she said "No, you mustn't ever do this again"...and I thought "Well that's okay"...we got that sorted.

There was a also primary-school teacher at bible class camp that she talked to, she remembered, who didn't think that lesbianism was "a terrible thing" and "worked very hard" for Frankie to "overcome" her "guilt or fear", by taking her to "the psychologist at the Training College".

At twenty, Frankie left Auckland, and went south to Nelson, where she took a job picking fruit. Here, she said, she met other lesbians for the first time.

I met my first other person that I thought was for sure a lesbian, a Maori woman on another orchard and she used to look quite butch. Everybody went to town on Friday night and I'd see them walking around town and she had this camel-coloured jacket on and these trousers and she had this lovely little petite Maori girl with her who was all dollied up, and I thought "I wonder if I could ever talk to them?" I used to go off to dances.... this woman was there. And I got to talk to her and didn't waste any time pussyfooting around. It turned out I was right and so thereafter we used to go over there and have little parties...they used to do lovely food...cold meat and raw onions with mashed potatoes and peas and beetroot. Really good kaiⁱⁱ, and we'd play the guitar and sing and dance and yeah it was really lovely.

The Maori women described themselves as "queer", she remembered, and they were part of a small community that "accepted" them and who "might have known", though Frankie herself hoped they "didn't know".

You think you're doing so well at concealing it. But by then I was a bit beyond all the trailing the men around, I couldn't be bothered with all that...going both ways...or pretending to...you don't think you're obvious but maybe you are. Some people think because they wear a long dress and lipstick and have a perm and earrings you can't tell that they're a bit sort of suss...it makes me smile to think that they'd go to such lengths to do this when the practised eye can unmask them at a wink...So I probably wasn't as invisible as I thought.

She began a relationship with a local woman, who rode a "650 Gold Flash" motorbike, explaining that they stayed overnight at each other's houses.

Again it was one of those night time things... it wasn't talked about much but I think that I was a fairly affectionate person and quite romantic, so as I got to know her a bit better maybe there was a bit more talk about it... had she been a different type of person I feel it would have been all out in the open and I'd have been really on my way. But she was a closed person.

She told the story of her friend's mother coming into the bedroom unexpectedly, and being "shocked" and "horrified", because, Frankie thought "there must have been some daytime stuff by then". After this, Frankie said, she met with her friend's mother for a

“talk”, finding her “very reasonable”, so they were “able to continue”. However, she said, her friend’s mother pleaded with her not to take her daughter “up north”, but this proved to be too difficult when Frankie had to return to Auckland.

I couldn’t not take her because when I said “come up later...don’t come with me” she vanished into the orchard with a shotgun. She was one of these hunting types, and it was very unnerving to be hearing these shots going off in the orchard when you’ve just told somebody don’t come with me north.

As a consequence of this, the friend did accompany Frankie to Auckland, the two looking after her parents’ home while they were away. On their return, she said, her parents allowed her friend to stay on, but when a boyfriend called,

my friend got very jealous and just walked out of the room...I was a bit brownd off with her because that’s not how you play the game if you don’t want people to know. So...just before my 21st birthday I thought, “I’m going to have to clear the air.”

Frankie said that she decided to tell her father first and remembered thinking

“He’s going to have to know, I can’t carry the burden of it any longer, I want to be free of the worry about it with the family” and I said ...I really liked women and I want to be with women ... and then he said “Don’t worry about that Frances we know you’re a bit retarded.” What he actually meant was a late developer...but “as long as you don’t go the lesbian way, it’ll be all right, you know what a lesbian is don’t you?” And I said “Well yes I do” and I thought ...I’d wasted two hours.

The next development was, she said, that two days later her mother asked if there was anything between the friend and herself, and that she admitted that there was.

She said, “What am I going to tell your father!” I said, “ You don’t need to worry about him because I told him”. She said “how did this happen”. And this woman who isn’t very interested in the bible [says] “But in the bible it says it’s wrong!” I said, “We won’t worry about that”...I felt as if I was in the dock and I had to be my own defence, and I didn’t do too badly.

After this, Frankie explained, her mother talked to her father, and “all hell broke loose”, as he shouted,

“You’re nothing but a menace walking the streets...and I’m going to the doctor tomorrow and I’m going to get you off the streets” ...he went to the doctor and he came home and he said “I can’t do anything about it apparently”. Meantime I’d been to see my friend who knew the psychologist and I said, “Could we organise something?” So we did go and it worked. I was very surprised that they went. After that, although there’ve been a few odd things, they’ve stood by me. Dad got over it...he’s just a man who lost his temper when he didn’t know what else to do...I went back to the fruit and then when I came home it was all virtually ok...I’ve got to give them credit, they never banished me or anything like that.

From 1959, Frankie said, she and her Nelson friend lived in Auckland, after returning from Nelson for the second time. She thought they began socialising at the Queens Ferry pub at this time, after Frankie heard about this meeting-place from people at work.

I was quite practised at getting people to talk about that aspect of life without owning anything to do with it...you can still get information through people who don't approve of that sort of behaviour because it's sufficiently sensational for them to have to take an interest...it's very compelling stuff...I had probably gathered information here and there so I went down there and I didn't meet anybody. You couldn't go into the public bar and drink at that stage, women couldn't go in there. So I had to go into the lounge bar.

It was here, Frankie recalled, that she first met kamp men, portraying them as quite friendly, and inviting her to their private parties.

I'd spend all day pressing my trousers and having the bath and ironing the shirt and getting ready and off we'd go at four o'clock and we'd meet people there. And it was six o'clock closing and Anna Hoffman and her Afghan hounds and these open MG sports cars, and people like that used to come, and the police wagon would come at six o'clock every Saturday night... just before the pub closed and there would be riots and brawls.

She described what the parties after the pub closed at six o'clock were like in those days.

Sometimes they were at Parnell, sometimes at Mount Eden ...you'd get this very mixed group of people...fantastic parties, you'd get off duty policemen there ...there'd be Anna there... the arty crowd, all sorts of interesting people, old people, young people, they were really sensational parties...there'd be gay boys, Maori gay boys...From the lesbian point of view there were only one or two but just to be part of an enjoyable party rather than...anything to do with sexuality.

Like some of the other narrators, she described the Ca d' Oro coffee bar as an important kamp meeting place.

I did really feel very comfortable...because a lot of weirdo people hung out there...people that I felt were a bit suss...I didn't have much experience of that and I didn't particularly want to.... it was a thing of searching, but I can't say that it yielded anything for me.

When the relationship with her Nelson friend ended, Frankie moved to Wellington, and began work as a technician for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation. She soon found the kamp meeting places, including the Royal Oak Hotel.

The Bistro was to overcome the difficulty of six o'clock closing...You had this lovely little meal and you could drink jugs of beer at night...it was a Saturday thing, people went in the afternoon...there was a coffee bar and we used to go there after the pub and people would take vodka and stuff and put it in the coffee at the Sorrento... the people that one mixed with were, to put it bluntly, the dregs of society. I mean you were mixing with criminals, prostitutes, hoons, Hank was a hoon that lived off the earnings of Charleen...these people were very interesting, they could leave a flat overnight they'd just spent thousands of dollars furnishing

and just vanish [see Chapter 16]...I thought how wonderful, not to be so caught up with material stuff...I had to go to work...I knew that sort of thing wasn't for me, but I found it upset me being tarred with the same brush.

She remembered thinking that because “lesbian life” was “like any other”, there should be choices as to what circles lesbians might socialise in. However, she said, in the early days “there was virtually no choice”, and “you had to be with the people who would accept you”, and there were “not many of them.”

Frankie explained that she did not use the term “lesbian”, at this time, which she hated it because “it was sort of like something green and scungey”. She thought that it was around this time that she read *The Well of Loneliness*.

When I got to know more people and we got groups and we used to move from Wellington to Auckland and Christchurch. Then people tended to...swap books and you gained more knowledge because you actually were starting to be...I suppose in a loose way, a sort of network of people that you could talk to and you could share books with them, you could party with them, you could holiday with and all that sort of thing.

During a later conversation, Frankie explained that despite the alternative culture at Broadcasting, lesbians still “had to pretend to be what we were not”, and “part of the reason” she “hated work was having to wear all those clothes”. Women were not permitted to wear trousers to work, and Frankie said that she disliked “getting up every day and having to put on all this girls’ gear, using all that energy to marry up who you are with what you’re wearing”. She lived for the weekends, she remembered, when she could wear shirts and trousers, and because it was often difficult to find clothes she liked, told how she got a friend to make her “a little velveteen jerkin” to wear with them. Eventually, she said, she began to feel that she could not cope with living a double life.

It had nothing to do with how outspoken or how loud or how obvious you were, if you were a person who wanted to be open and honest and be who you are, because you’re young.... Those people would have come and stabbed you in the back because if they associated with you...they can’t have... their life exposed by your outness... I could never understand how they had the strength to live the double life because I couldn’t. I did it for as long as I could and then I couldn’t do it any more, so I just never understood them and as a result they became the enemy, and in the jobs you had to be very careful. If you thought anybody was and they were high up the ladder and they were your boss you bloody well put your dress on that day and looked really cute and had a boyfriend swinging by at lunchtime... I’m sure there were tons of people at Broadcasting who thought I was cutesy but wouldn’t touch me with a barge pole because I was open.... If anybody had asked me I would have said “Yes”. And when I got close to people at Broadcasting I made it my business to say “Look, there’s something I want to tell you before somebody else does, because

I want you to hear it from me. I don't want any dishonesty between us, if we're going to be friends you need to know this and if you can't handle this I understand." Because I just couldn't handle that double life stuff, it's too hard.

This desire to be open created problems when Frankie transferred to Christchurch in 1966. Some months later senior staff became aware that she was having a relationship with a younger woman at the radio station. She was ordered to resign, but flatly refused. After a stressful year during which “no-one spoke” to her, and where she had to work exclusively with men, she did leave, and moved to London, and did not return before later in the 1970s.

ⁱ Follow-up discussion about the original interview and additions to selected items.

ⁱⁱ Kai - tr. food.

Chapter 22

Bubs' story – “We were the town's tomboys”

Raukura (Bubs) Te Aroha Hetet (1940–1993)

Introduction and background

Bubs Hetet, born in 1940 was two years younger than Frankie, and the women knew one another through the Nelson and Auckland kamp communities. Bubs' life seems typical of many Maori lesbians of her generation, who left tribally based rural areas to live in the city (see Chapter 8). Though earlier Maori tradition may have accepted homosexuality (Royal Commission 1998, Te Awakotuku 2001), by the 1950s and 1960s many felt they could live more openly in urban environments (Carmen 1988).

Bubs was born at Tokaanu on 21 June 1940 of Tuwharetoa and Maniapoto descent. She was a “special birth”, born “in a veil”, and the eldest of three girls born after three boys. Her father worked for the Department of Public Works, and the family moved several times. Bubs attended Queen Victoria Maori Girls' College and Te Kuiti High School, leaving without qualifications. Though her parents were bi-lingual, she was not taught to speak te reoⁱ as they thought she needed English for her future work and life, typical for many Maori of her generation. She had some knowledge of Maori customs and culture, including food, music, marae protocol and history, acquired through practice and association.

After various casual jobs, Bubs worked for the New Zealand Post Office in Tokaanu, taking examinations to qualify for higher grades, before joining the air force, where she qualified as a driver. She purchased a house in Ponsonby, Auckland, after leaving the air force, rejoining the Post Office in Auckland and later Turangi in senior positions. After taking redundancy in the 1980s she purchased a restaurant in Te Kuiti, but ill health forced her early retirement and return to Auckland. I interviewed Bubs when she was terminally ill, and she died of lung cancer in 1993 and is buried with her family at the Turangi urupaⁱⁱ. Her premature death from this cause makes her life typical of many Maori, and reflects the consequences of colonisation as discussed in Chapter 6, with high levels of smoking among Maori women, poor Maori health statistics and a shorter life expectancy than non-Maori New Zealanders.

Bubs' story

Bubs reported that she became interested in girls at the age of six, kissing them behind the “old bike shed” because she “liked little girls. They were little dolls. Live ones”, adding that she “hated real dolls”. She said that her mother gave her dolls, and tried to make her more “feminine”, including giving her “ringlets”, which she “persevered with”, as she had “no choice”, until when she was about ten years old, she “chopped them off, one by one”. Bubs discovered “the facts of life” when some girls were trying to “teach one another how to kiss and all that”. She said that she was “in for that”, but these girls were “too fast”. At that time, she was “a real tomboy”, so she was “off girls of that type”, and “liked the little fluffy ones”.

Bubs attended Queen Victoria Maori Girls' College until she became ill, then transferred to Te Kuiti High School where she sat and failed School Certificate. When her family moved to Tokaanu, Bubs left school to work on a farm. Her lack of qualifications meant that throughout her working life she took examinations for promotional purposes, “every exam that was going, just to get ahead”, because “if I'd got school cert in the first place, I could have missed them”. Her mother found her a job at a local hotel, where she met Piri, who became her best friend.

The best thing that happened to me...we just got on so well...it was mainly me following Piri because in our pecking order she was the higher one, to begin with.

Their mothers were friends, and Bubs said they approved of the girls' friendship.

We were always living together or sleeping at each other's house. We had freedom to roam anytime we liked to one another's place without asking permission.

Bubs explained that Piri also “liked girls”, and aged sixteen they had tried “not to be interested in the same girls”, but if they were, solved the problem by doing “swappies”, until their girlfriends began “really meaning something”. During these years, she said

There were many windows we jumped out off, visiting our little girlfriends around the place. I was an excellent horsewoman and we always had horses, they used to be a draw card for the girls.

Bubs told stories of how girls would “pick her up” when she was out riding, for example Carol, a pakeha girl on holiday from Auckland.

She had a friend called Jenny. Carol got me, Jenny got Piri and the romantic spot we had was the hot pools...ride and swim all day and off to the hot pools at night. Then in the hot pools, well! That's where friendships were either cemented or broken. Carol and I went together for quite a number of years.

These relationships were affectionately physical, but not genitally sexual, Bubs remembered. Though these girls knew that Bubs and Piri were also girls, Bubs thought that they were not really “kamp”.

They were just out for a good time. They were city-ites they knew it all, you know city folk, and they knew the name of the game, and there's a couple of country hicks. That was their attitude to us. But we didn't look a gift horse in the mouth, we were in boots and all.

Bubs recalled a special “childhood sweetheart”, at this time, and that Piri “had the sister Julie”. However,

We were broken up because the parents found out about us because she got herself pickled and blabbed "Everybody, I love Bubs"...They broke us up but they never broke Piri and Julie up...Julie turned out to be a bit of a devil woman and ended up blackmailing Piri...she'd say, "Give me so much money or I'll tell your Mum.

At this time, Bubs recalled, she and Piri left Turangi to go fruit picking in Nelson, where they first met Frankie and her friends. In Nelson, they “fancied” many girls, attracting their attention in various ways. For example, one group lived in a bach in the orchards.

We made out like a couple of prowlers...give them half an hour of the scares...and then go visiting them as though we were just seeing how they were getting on. We get into the bach and hear about these prowlers so we said, "we'll sort this lot out...so out we both bounced heroes.

Bubs told the story of how she and Piri began to dress as boys, and how they first had genital sex with their girlfriends.

We really liked them, it wasn't just for the sake of getting them. We really felt something for these girls eh, really fond of them, I always felt fond of anybody, never went after anybody I didn't like...There was one particular girl Suzie...These were blind dates we made. Suzie and Jocelyn thought they were meeting a couple of blokes at the old apple barn dance, and we turned up. All I knew was that mine would have a mohair cardigan top on and the one in a print frock would be this Jocelyn that was Piri's girlfriend...I had my tie on and about half a dozen under my belt. When we got there...we just introduced ourselves...Piri was Dick, I was Tom. Suzie wanted to go and have a dance...I got up and I was dancing with her, we had all this bloody apple cider, I was knocking it back as though it was going out of fashion, so I ended up in the bloody landrover with Suzie and she got the hots for me and I thought "Shoot I haven't even done it...what am I supposed to do?"

Bubs explained that she only needed to do “heavy petting”, as during the 1950s many girls did not want to have sexual intercourse before marriage, so she was not expected to take it any further. They became these girls’ regular dates, Bubs still certain that Jocelyn and Suzie had no idea they were not boys.

We'd be dressed in shorts, but we always had tops on. The bloody sun would be sweltering down, the girls would be in their togs. Suzie was really quite nice. Piri and Jocelyn hit it off a treat. I got quite fond of her, I really did eh, and she was really fond of me and it didn't matter about our difference in stature and that though I was supposedly the boy, I was short.

When the fruit-picking season ended, they returned north, and as Bubs was now eighteen, her mother found her a Post Office position as a telephone operator on the manual exchange at Tokaanu. Out of work time, Bubs and Piri had more adventures. Bubs told the story of how she and Piri bought sailor suits from an Army Surplus shop, dressed as boys, and took the train to Wellington, having become “sugared” on a bottle of brandy. On the train were a number of “army, navy and air force chappies”.

They looked at us and couldn't make out what we belonged to. Somebody said, "I know what they are, they're naval cadets". I forget what we went to Wellington for. Maybe we went down there to see one of Piri's girlfriends. It was always her girlfriend that lived miles away. We used to do these crazy things. Carriage load of men! Just as well for our short back and sides, and we were young and didn't have boobs.

Bubs then told the story of how she and Piri visited Auckland for the first time, in 1961, and encountered “the kamp crowd”.

At that time, we were at this stage in our lives thinking we were quite unique, and we could be the only weird ones in the whole wide world.

They met a kamp man, who Bubs explained had “incredible long lashes”, and was “real pretty”, and arranged to meet him at the Ca’d’Oro Coffee Lounge, which he told them was “the meeting place of the kamp crowd”. They sat drinking coffee, with Bubs dressed in winter clothing, and wearing her “bush jacket”.

But it wasn't bush bush, still dressy and these blasted footballers came in, they took one look at our mate and they went for him. But at this time I had my eye on the waitress so I didn't notice what was going on and Piri was always very volatile and quick to fire up. Next minute these guys had our friend on and Piri blew her top and threatened to throw her coffee in their faces if they didn't bugger off and that's when it all started. I said "Hey, what's going on" so because of our short back and sides and because she stuck up for this guy, they immediately thought we were queens, so we were in the thick of it. Then I said, "this is not right, we're girls from the country just up visiting Auckland" and by then this guy was so angry I said, "Let's take it outside". When we got outside I said "You can lay off, I'm a girl you can take my word for it". And he said, "prove it" and went to grab me to unzip my jacket eh... in seconds we had the police there.

Bubs described how they were taken to the Central Police Station to make statements, and were then released. Later, they “ended up in this fantastic party in Dominion Road”, and Bubs thought no more of the Ca d’Oro incident until she arrived home, “and I gets this call from my girlfriend”.

She said, "You didn't tell me you were going to Auckland?" And I said "Well I didn't". And she said, "Have you bought today's Truth?" I said "No". "Then go and buy today's Truth before you say any more". So I went and bought it and there it was. "THOUGHT GIRL WAS A QUEER.". Didn't say my name or anything, just where I'd come from and the fact I was on holiday, and that I was employed "at a country telephone exchange."ⁱⁱⁱ

Bubs said that despite her fear of public exposure because of this newspaper item, she felt relieved to have found others, and from this time onward she and Piri identified themselves as “kamp”.

It was actually the kamp boys that we first met then the girls. But the boys, I preferred their company in a lot of ways, I had a close relationship with them.

Bubs did not tell her family that she was kamp. She thought it was unfortunate that she was not “born with a penis”, adding that if she had, there would have been “a lot of kids around the place”. As she wanted to be a man, that was “the role” she took up, and why she had “basically gone with women”. However,

I didn't actually see myself as separating us as one kamp and one heterosexual, I just saw it as people attracted to one another...I saw myself...as the breadwinner, the protector, the provider and I showed this in little ways like I'd go home and I'd even make sure I'd go out and get kaimoana^{iv} for all the families...because that's how I was taught. That I don't fill up my own larder, I fill up everybody else's so consequently in my relationships I used to idolise my women. I'd put them on a pedestal and I'd work my butt off for them.

It was through her work, Bubs said, that she met Janet, who was married to a Post Office co-worker, and who became “the biggest headache for the rest of my life.” Piri became first involved with her before she did, Bubs explained. She described herself and Piri as having short haircuts, riding motorbikes and dressing in pants and shirts when not at work, but thought they were just seen as “the town’s tomboys”.

The town's attitude came out when Janet and I were forced apart and the kaffuffle started up and the town accepted Piri and I as being their tomboys. They were very proud of us actually. Because we were girls doing things that girls didn't do, you know motorbikes and breaking in horses.

The two had set out to join the air force together, and were accepted, Piri enlisting in 1962. Bubs explained that because she had become “involved” with Janet, she “pulled out”, to stay with her.

She had that English rose way about her. Typical Pom...It was lovely. We'd go there on Friday nights, our late nights at work...and she'd cook us our dinner and all that.

Then, Bubs explained, they were “forced apart” by Janet’s husband, when he found a letter from his wife to Bubs.

After he read the letter it was only natural...that he would break us up but he made the mistake of bringing...the post office welfare from Rotorua...to tell the post office that I was a sick person and not fit for the position I was in...Because I was a lesbian.

The Post Office acted on this complaint, and there was an investigation. Although being a lesbian was not illegal, Bubs said that if it had been proved she was lesbian, she could have been made to resign as unfit for her position as a Post Office Savings Bank teller.

I got wind of what he had afoot so what I did I went around the township to the people and it was popularity poll time. I started putting over the innocent country hick...the way I played it was to say "these with their strange ways from the city have come", and I faced the people with the word "lesbian" because naturally none of ours were anything like that. My own people didn't know what the word was...it seemed to them only that they were trying to make "tomboy" a bad thing. The people knew that I was one the best riders, broke in horses, rode motorbikes, very reliable, always honest. So they weren't going to have me besmirched by this lesbian word. I got my mother and I went to the chemist and the doctor with her in tow. I gambled with my mother, probably the hardest thing was that I hadn't been honest with her, but it turned out to be my greatest strength. I would never have got my mother to confront the chemist and the doctor if I had. When I said to them "How can you prove I'm a lesbian?" Peter didn't want his wife's reputation besmirched...I said, "Have you thought it was Janet that was the one that converted me? After all, she's the married woman". I hated doing that but I was fighting for my life.

Bubs explained that the chemist and doctor wrote testimonials about her for the Post Office welfare section.

The chemist wrote down as far as he knew I was just a local tomboy...when we got to the Doc my Mum said "It's my fault why my daughter's like this, she's a tomboy" and in an innocent way she explained that I had the hand me downs from my brothers...I was quite happy to run around in trousers and she was quite happy to let me do it. So I got out of that one, but the outcome was why in 1963...I joined the air force.

Bubs thought it best to leave Tokaanu when Janet's parents became involved. They thought Bubs was "definitely to blame", and she said that she found it "a shock", that people she had "got on so well with", and who had "liked me for who I was, turned totally away to hate me for what I was".

In the air force, Bubs was stationed at Wigram. Here, she explained, she needed to hide her lesbianism, as homosexuality was grounds for a dishonourable discharge. She related how service lesbians contacted her "my first weekend on base", inviting her to a party, and that though she socialised with kamp groups wherever she was stationed, she was careful lest the authorities suspected she was lesbian. She tried to seem heterosexual by having platonic friendships with men.

I was a little butch number, short back and sides...my protectors were the men, so when other girls were being accused of being lesbians...nobody would believe it of

me...My own girlfriend was a corporal...and she was as feminine as anybody. But the men turned round and accused her of being a lesbian and came and warned me to not associate with her...But I turned round and showed my loyalty to her by saying "She has never ever indicated anything like that to me" lies, lies, lies.

Bubs said that she knew women who were dishonourably discharged from the air force for lesbianism.

one over in Whenuapai ...we didn't think she was. But she got turfed out, she wasn't even with our little group...I had some close shaves at Ohakea. I had a good mate there and her and I broke the rules, drank in barracks, slept in one another's beds. We were having a fling...the warrant officer caught us when we got bloody drunk and flaked out in bed together. When [the warrant officer] caught us she knew that I knew that she was kamp too, so she just roared me out.

Bubs explained that women who were suspected of lesbianism, even if they were not actually “caught”, were rejected if they tried to “sign back on” when their enlistment period ended.

We were told "your services are no longer required". It was a nice way of saying, instead of a dishonourable discharge, we'll just say the position that you filled is no longer vacant. That happened to Pauline who fell for Stella. Half Pauline's age, real nice until she got to officer material, and then the trouble started. So Pauline was bombed out, and Stella went on to become an officer...she had to walk on glass because they knew...There was nothing you could do for Pauline...she went into it like a bull at a gate. You couldn't protect too many friends unless you wanted the chop yourself.

Some air force lesbians, including Bubs, took the risk of socialising in the city kamp scene. Bubs patronised the Occidental in Vulcan Lane, where she recalled first meeting Charleen (see Chapters 9 and 16).

I met with Anna Hoffman and Anna's right hand girl Charleen...Blonde and beautiful...I just came in and picked Charleen up in the air force vehicle...the first night, she ripped off my shirt and ripped my back to bits and when I got back to barracks...I daren't let my back be seen by any of my girlfriends.

Bubs served in the air force for five years during 1963 -1968, and was there during the Petley-Davis case (Chapter 8), remembering them as both “lovely women”. Bubs left the air force in 1968, and was herself one of the women not recommended for enlistment, her service personnel file stating

Does not mix well. I have no proof of anything but strongly recommend that she is not re enlisted...Forceful personality which is not always properly directed.^v

These comments are apparently coded references to Bubs’ lesbianism, as the files were requestable, and military authorities may not have wanted to make contestable statements without “proof”. After her (honourable) discharge, Bubs again worked for the Post Office, settling in Auckland, where she purchased a house in Ponsonby, on her

own, obtaining a mortgage through the Post Office Savings Bank. She was involved in the Auckland kamp scene, holding parties at her home, where Maori and Pakeha kamp men and women drank beer, cooked “boil-ups” with puha and pigstrotters, and played guitars and sang. Her group also met at Auckland beer houses which were “the in place for gatherings”, or at pubs, including the “Family and Naval”. Many lesbians played sport – “everybody was softball crazy and hockey crazy” – and the groups began to want clubrooms and places to meet after sports matches. They discussed the need for a kamp girls’ club, and in early 1972 Bubs found the first premises for what became Auckland's KG Club.

The building was not used until we actually found it. . It was named KG - for Kamp Girls as well as Karangahape Road Girls, or Karangahape Gays. It was the name that really suited the place eh?

Bubs became an enthusiastic patron, but was disappointed that she could not invite her “queen friends” to the KG Club, and did not agree with the “women only” policy.

Queens had always opened their arms to me in their establishments...they partied with us and all of a sudden we get a building and it was a no no for them...I always related better to men...and thought of myself as a boy, the only thing I didn't have was a diddle, and probably that would have got me into more trouble than I could have handled.

Most of Bubs’ lovers had been Pakeha women.

I'd only been with two Maori women...There's this little kittenish thing, I don't see too much of that in Maori women...possibly because of their toughness.... apart from that I used to think it was me that wanted to be the kitten. I'd see in the European women the gentleness to handle this kitten.

Bubs travelled, visiting Europe, Egypt and Australia “flitting around” gay bars, and “fantastic balls and evening pubs and you were there all night”. She felt that she had made the best of not being a man.

I'd get into a skirt and dresses on occasions that I had to and feel as though I was in drag...it took me many years to finally get it into my head that I didn't have to be the big butch number all the time. I was allowed to dress up because I was a woman after all, in appearance, so no big hang ups about it.

She explained that for her, sex was never the most important aspect of a relationship.

That part of my life is not something I was really very good at...I don't think I had any prowess in bed. To me in a relationship, that part of it was not the main part. I liked the joining of minds and souls and all that romantic cuddles and the kisses sort of thing...I didn't think of it playing a big role...I enjoyed making love. I didn't like sex for the sake of sex. But if people wanted me to make love to them, I'd make love to them. I never used to push it.

However, Bubs said, she did not like her lovers making love to her.

Basically I thought of myself as a man. I didn't feel as though I was physically right for anyone. I couldn't just give myself to anybody, that was part of it... what I did I always did to please people and if they liked being made love to that was fine...I used to get out of them making love to me by getting them so engrossed in what I was doing to them that I could then dodge everything. It would be all over and suddenly they'd say " I didn't satisfy you" and I'd say "of course you did, not a problem" and I'd get out of it that way.

ⁱ Tr. –the Maori language.

ⁱⁱ Tr. burial ground.

ⁱⁱⁱ *NZ Truth*, 31 January 1961, p, 15. “Thought Girl was a Queer”.

^{iv} Tr. seafood.

^v Air Department file for Raukura Te Aroha Hetet, assessment 1 September 1968 (in her possession).

Chapter 23

Tighe's story –

“I knew when I was five that it wasn't socially acceptable.”

Ursula (Tighe) Instone (1940–)

Introduction and background

Tighe Instone, born in 1940, the same year as Bubs Hetet, also knew that she was attracted to girls from an early age. As a teenager, she became part of the women's hockey community of closeted lesbians, who socialised together without naming themselves as lesbian. Later she found the camp/kamp urban communities, and is typical of the post-WW2 generation who socialised at public venues as well as at private parties. Tighe grew up in Karori, a middle-class Wellington suburb, the eldest of three, with a younger brother and sister. She attended a private girls' school, Samuel Marsden Collegiate School for Girls, before training as a general nurse at Palmerston North Hospital, and later as a psychiatric nurse at Porirua Hospital. An early lesbian mother, Tighe has one son, and has worked in a variety of occupations.

As Tighe prefers the spelling “camp”, this is the form used here.

Tighe's story

From the age of five, Tighe explained, she was attracted to girls. “There was always somebody that I had a bit of a pash on.” Aged eight, she encountered Sister Bea Arthur (Chapter 18) at Wellington Hospital, and said that she developed a crush on her, and hoped to see her whenever she visited Outpatients. Tighe did not recall discussing these feelings with anyone, as “I knew not to. I guess it was the ideology of the time”. She recalled soon realising “how much the boys were favoured over the girls”. Girls learnt sewing and boys learnt woodwork, and Tighe said that though she asked to take woodwork, this was refused. Resourcefully, she found a boy to teach her woodwork, and said that she later organised cricket games in which girls could play. When she was in standard five, she recalled

I didn't know what had hit me...I went to Girl Guides, and met Barbara. She became the whole focus of my life. I absolutely worshipped her, from the moment I set eyes on her.

Tighe remembered fantasising about kissing Barbara, and managed to do so on one occasion, when she “literally saw stars”. She recalled having

hundreds of photos of Barbara...I used them for bookmarks so I could look at them while I was reading. I took them all down off the wall because my father got so upset about them.

She believed that Barbara's mother understood her feelings for Barbara.

She knew that I had a crush on Barbara and she thought it was lovely and it was just my father that couldn't cope. He asked me was I a lesbian...I said no, but I didn't know what it was...I knew it was something awful...I looked it up the dictionary but it wasn't in that dictionary.

She said that she was afraid to ask anyone else what the word meant, because

I was intimidated by the way he asked me, it was obviously something terrible...when he said was I lesbian, I knew I was. But I couldn't really face that yet, and I didn't really know what he meant, but I knew if it was a terrible thing, I'd be it....my mother made some awful comment about what a homosexual was, so I thought "I'm one of those because that was the context he'd put it in...later my mother said "Don't you ever do that to me!" - Somebody had a baby that wasn't married - and I knew I would, I just knew I was going to, and the crazy thing was I never went to bed with boys, but I had this feeling that it was going to happen to me, and it did.

Tighe said that she received little sex education. She remembered girls at school telling her about "periods", but her mother "could not bring herself to talk about it", until the first one "arrived". She explained that she knew the biological difference between boys and girls, through having a younger brother.

I remember taking his nappies off and showing my cousin because we could have a really good look...because we wondered about these things. When I was in standard two a girl told me about trains going in two tunnels...her parents were quite sort of avante garde in this department, because they went to Paris a lot, she was a little hive of information.

Tighe recalled reading about the Parker-Hulme case when she was fourteen and finding it interesting because the word "homosexual" appeared in the newspaper. The same year she remembered visiting her cousin, a boarder at Solway College for Girls. They "got into very intense kissing and cuddling", which her cousin said "a lot of girls did at Solway". However, Tighe said, the cousin ended these sessions before they went home, and she felt "heartbroken". At her own school, some girls did have "special friendships".

A girl in my class had a crush on one of the prefects, and they got very chummy and then one of them put a stop to it. Because that's what used to happen, there would be these intense friendships and then somebody would chop if off, and people wouldn't be friends any longer...We called them pashes, but my mother called them crushes so I used both, it was part of the culture.

Tighe reported playing hockey for College Old Girls' while still at school, and that she was aware some of the players had close friendships, though nothing was openly discussed. After leaving school, she took her nursing training at Palmerston North Hospital, because, she said, his got her "away from" home and her father, especially his "strict and often irrational discipline". At the hospital, she often got "crushes on the senior nurses", and would "sit in their bedrooms and talk to them", wanting to "be around them" and gain "their attention". She said that she wanted to kiss them too.

I would fantasise about that but I wouldn't because I knew that then they probably wouldn't want to be friends with me...I knew when I was five that it wasn't socially acceptable. The ideology was so strong that even though it wasn't necessarily something you could articulate, we knew.

When she fell in love with another nurse, she said nothing, and though a friend had similar feelings for women, they never discussed this.

She had an older friend she absolutely adored. We understood each other...she'd been a boarder at school. She told me years later about some of the things that happened there - much more than what I as a mere day girl was involved in. Because it was all really in my head, but with them it was more than that. I don't know how sexual it got, but it certainly was kisses and cuddles.

When Tighe finished nursing training in 1962, returned to Wellington and took a job in the advertising department of the *Dominion* newspaper, explaining that, unlike nursing, this job enabled her to have weekends off for hockey and socialising with the "hockey ladies" who had lesbian relationships, though did not discuss or name them. She remembered socialising with her workmates too, at this time, meeting them at the Caledonian Hotel, in Adelaide Road, where they introduced her to self-identified lesbians, including Laurie Sherwood¹.

My workmates introduced me to Laurie and I thought she was a chap. I said "G'day" and this little voice said "G'day Tighe" and they thought this was funny, but they also thought they were doing me a favour, by introducing me to another lesbian. Later two lesbians worked at The Dominion. They used to invite me to their place; we used to drink upstairs at The Royal Oak and meet at the Bistro for lunch. I was on the periphery of everything but I wasn't anywhere. My workmates all knew I was a lesbian. When somebody rang up to put this advertisement in the paper, which said, "camp preferred" I said, "Camp preferred? What do you mean? Do you want to bring a tent?" and they roared laughing...I didn't know what it meant.

She lived with her parents for a while, but said that she had become used to "independence" while in Palmerston North.

So I went flatting. Mum was beside herself over that because of the shame, your daughter could live in a Nurses' Home but to go flatting...then I got the studio, I thought I can live at home and have the studio in Manners Street...I was doing a lot of artwork so I thought I'll be an artist...this will be my new career, and

identity, and I had horn-rimmed glasses and ripple shoes and a duffel coat. I was a very asexual person. I was interested in playing hockey and doing my artwork.

Tighe described meeting Joanⁱⁱ at the Regent Hotel, opposite her studio, when she was drinking there with the hockey team.

The moment I clapped eyes on her I was gone, I was absolutely gone...I don't know how, but we eventually got it together.

Tighe explained that because Joan was a devout Catholic, she soon began to feel guilt about their sexual relationship.

She loved it, but she didn't feel too good about it...she would say the next day "We're not going to do that again". At the time I was so in love. She was beautiful. She was film star material, she was absolutely stunning. I was 22 and she was 42. I don't think I realised how much power the church had over her because I wasn't religious, she didn't talk about it a lot...I didn't know the church thought it was a sin. I knew everybody else thought it was wrong, and I promised her I would never tell anybody.

Tighe said that she refused to agree "never to do it again", as she knew Joan "could never stick to it" because "as soon as we had a few drinks she'd get all amorous anyway, so it was all irrelevant". Then, she added, "the next day" she would "feel remorse that she'd let it happen yet again". She explained that Joan had similar difficulties in all her relationships.

There were four loves in her life, but both the chaps had been married so she couldn't marry them, and both the women were women, so the people that she loved the church forbad, and it was just tragic for her.

Joan and Tighe lived together for about eighteen months, but Tighe said that they did not call themselves lesbians – "we didn't call ourselves anything" – and they socialized only with heterosexual people. Their relationship was "closet, we were totally closet", and though Tighe said she still had "all my hockey people", the hockey environment was "very closet too". She explained that she and Joan did not discuss their lovemaking as such.

The discussion was very simplistic, she said "We shouldn't do this" and I thought "why not? How ridiculous. When we're drunk we do it anyway" which we did, when we've had a few drinks, it won't be a problem. So I didn't really take it terribly seriously. But I got very upset when her will strengthened, I couldn't understand why she didn't want it, it was so wonderful being in love.

Tighe thought that her parents may have spoken to Joan about their relationship, and "had a go at her", because Joan eventually withdrew. Tighe said that she then became very depressed and took an overdose. She was diagnosed by a doctor as having a nervous breakdown, and sent to Queen Mary Hospital at Hanmer Springs.

I had a lovely time there. I fell in love with Audreyⁱⁱⁱ. I didn't have a relationship with her, I just adored her, and the two Sisters down there, they tried to get me and Barbara^{iv} together because they thought that would be more suitable. We became great friends, but we weren't interested in each other. Then I went back, I didn't live with Joan again but spent time with her. We were back to the same old pattern, but she was trying very hard, and there was a probably a lot of pressure. Much more than what I knew about. It probably wasn't just the church, it was my parents too, and that was when I went off with this chap.

Tighe related how after a brief sexual encounter, she became pregnant, though did not tell the man. She depicted Joan as being “outraged” and not speaking to her until after the baby was born.

I tried to kill myself and the baby...My mother had told me that my father was going to lose his job because of me and Joan, and I thought now I've done what she said “you must never do to me” and I thought well of all the different sorts of suicides mine was altruistic...the easiest thing is that I'm got rid of. I was stomach pumped, and unconscious for three days. I didn't particularly want to die, but it was how awful it was for my family, I was such a disgrace, I brought such shame, my father's employment was in jeopardy, these are the things my mother told me.

Tighe had her son in the Alexandra Home for Unmarried Mothers, in Wellington, in 1967, taking him to the Karitane Hospital where she found someone to care for him while she returned to work. She described her parents as refusing to assist her because they disapproved of the situation. Joan, she said, first agreed to see the baby when he was six weeks old.

From the moment she clapped eyes on him, he was the baby that she never had. She had an abortion once, with the first chap and she never really got over that, and this was the baby that she never had, she just adored him.

Tighe said that their relationship finally ended when she met someone else.

I met Jenny^v and started having a relationship with her...Joan was very jealous of all my other relationships...the only time that she liked any of the women I had relationships with was when it was over...Joan became another part of my life and quite involved with the hockey women because she'd mind the baby while I played.

Tighe depicted herself as starting her new relationship much more consciously.

Jenny didn't really call herself a lesbian, but the reason I courted her was that somebody told me she was a lesbian. This was the first time that, in my head, I knew what I wanted. A man from work introduced me and said “She's a lesbian” and took us both to the pictures to meet. She was the barmaid at The Caledonian, I knew her from there, but didn't know she was a lesbian. When we went to the pictures we held hands by starting off holding little fingers. Next day I asked a friend where Jenny lived. I went racing over there, about eight o'clock in the morning and knocked on the door and she was just going to have breakfast, so I had breakfast with her. And that was how it all started. So once I got the message I wasn't backward in coming forward, I knew what I wanted and went and got it.

Tighe said she and Jenny began to live together, flatting with a “camp crowd” near Majoribanks Street in the inner city. She described this group as holding private parties, identifying as “camp”, and as going “to the Bistro in the daytime”, rather than at night, even though ten o’clock closing had begun. Tighe recalled thinking that it was “pretty sordid and dangerous”, and therefore being “quite cautious”. She explained, “We all were looking for a safe place”. They also went to The Caledonian, as Jenny worked there, and Tighe said that this was where she was introduced to Frankie (Chapter 21). They also socialised at the Sorrento Coffee Bar, which later became the Sunset Strip, notorious for drug dealing. Tighe said the camp ladies went to the Sorrento until “the early hours of the morning”, after Carmen’s Coffee Bar closed, or after the Dorian Club had closed during one of the short periods when women were admitted. Tighe explained that the Sorrento was “pretty sleazy, but one of my most wonderful memories is in the early hours of the morning with all the clientele in a great long line hanging on around the waist of the person in front of them all singing and dancing up one side of Ghuznee Street and back down the other”.^{vi} However, Tighe thought that she did not really know what she wanted during this period. She explained that right from the age of five,

Everybody was living their lives in a certain way, there was a whole lot of stuff going on in my head that was a little bit different. I think that gradually the pennies were dropping, because I wasn’t that sexual. It was in my thirties that I really came to understand how sex could be enjoyed. I did the mechanics of it...but I don’t think I really had a climax...So it was as if I was searching, but I didn’t really know what for. And it was all exciting and confusing and terrifying and amazing.

Tighe thought that “over the years, I was gradually drawn to those who were comfortable with who they were, or identified themselves as camp in some way, whether by the way they dressed or the way they described themselves.”^{vii} She remembered certain “defining moments” in her life.

I saw this chap wearing a tee-shirt and jeans and bare feet on a Sunday morning walking down Majoribank Street and I thought I want that, it was some sort of freedom he had, and I recognised that he was a gay guy. It was like I wanted that feeling of well-being in who I am...

Then, walking down Mein Street with Joan and saying “I’m not going to do this for the rest of my life”. You had to put on all this paraphernalia in those days to go to work, you had to put on make up and set your hair and wear high heels and gloves and handbag and scarf and everything - and I just looked at Joan and thought this is what she’s done every day for over 20 years, every morning, she’s got up like this and put on all this paraphernalia and gone to work, and I thought I’m doing this now but I’m not going to do it for the rest of my life, I’m not going to do it for the next 20 years, I don’t like it, this isn’t who I am. But I didn’t know who I was; I didn’t know what I was going to do instead...I wanted to feel

comfortable with myself in the way I saw that camp man feeling comfortable...he knew who he was and I knew I didn't.

Tighe described herself as wearing “tailored blouses” and trousers at weekends, and as pleased when “front zips” were introduced in 1967 for women’s trousers. She said that she enjoyed the button-down shirts and Ivy League trousers brought in from the US together with “Old Spice” aftershave and homosexual magazines. She said she was thrilled to find an “outfit” that included a “tartan waistcoat” for sale in a Wellington shop^{viii}, which she then was able to wear with her trousers.

She recalled borrowing several lesbian books at this time, probably brought in from Australia, many which ended “negatively”.

Laurie Sherwood had bookcases of them...grotty, awful lesbian novels...I didn't like them very much. Frankie gave me 'The Well of Loneliness'. I just loved it, I read it in 1969, I just thought it was wonderful.

In addition to “kamp/camp”, Tighe recalled other terms used by the “crowd” she socialised with in 1969 as including “the butches” and “the ladies”, and that men called each other “butches” and “bitches”. She said she began to socialise with a larger camp group, attending big privately held “camp parties” at various Wellington locations, including flats in Earl Terrace and Nairn Street, where she first met Genevieve Jordan^{ix}.

She was far more sexually knowledgeable and a wee bit older than us...She was terrifying. Genevieve and her friend used to come to parties at Frankie's place up Nairn Street, and Genevieve used to follow people out and bail everybody up in the toilet. I tell you, she was something else. So that was when I first joined a camp group and started to realise that I was camp too.

Because Tighe had a son, she was able to obtain a State flat, in Porirua. She told the story of Louise, who came to stay with her after her Maori lover Nancy’s family from the Bay of Plenty broke up their relationship.

Her family all came down to rescue her from the dreadful woman. They got the police who were chasing Louise all around Mount Victoria. She got up a tree and watched them all looking for her ...then she was scared to go home, she came and lived with me at Porirua. Nancy's family took Nancy to Island Bay somewhere...Louise and I went in the car and sat outside because Louise was feeling Nancy was taken a prisoner, which she was. Eventually they got back together, and went and lived up North, but that was the sort of awful sort of crisis that people had in those days.

Tighe was not sure on what grounds Nancy’s parents were able to involve the police. Later, Tighe moved back to Wellington, renting at the Hanson Court Flats in 1969. She reported that a woman “asked the other occupants to sign a petition to the Wellington

City Council to get me out”.^x After beginning a relationship with Teresa, they purchased a house together in the (then working-class) suburb of Island Bay, obtaining a private mortgage from Mr Wylie, a lawyer^{xi}, and holding a garage sale to raise their deposit. Here, they were “constantly harassed by a neighbour”, who shouted “lesbians” at them, and complained to the council about their “chooks”.^{xii}

Tighe felt that her lesbian identity had “consolidated” through the years, and that life “had been a search”, starting at five when the teacher refused to teach her woodwork. She thought that clothing was important for lesbian identity.

The thing that I loved about the Tavern women and the Bistro was that everybody dressed - well the butches did anyway - as lesbians. When I discovered that scene, I immediately got rubbished by the hockey women because they didn't like the way I was dressing.

Many lesbians feared the consequences of visibility and looking obvious at work or in public. Tighe related the story about how, when she took a cleaning job, and wore trousers during the daytime in central Wellington.

I saw a lesbian going to her work in the office. I said “G'day” and the next time I saw her she told me “You sent me up in front of my workmates”. So you never knew what was going to offend somebody...When I worked at State Advances in 1969, the public service decided to allow women to wear trouser suits to work. That's a huge difference -previously you wore one lot of clothes for your recreation and one lot of clothes for work. It was like you had these two personas.

ⁱ Now deceased.

ⁱⁱ Now deceased.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pseudonym.

^{iv} Pseudonym.

^v Pseudonym.

^{vi} Tighe's feedback, 4 July 2002.

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} Conversation with Tighe in May 2003.

^{ix} Genevieve Margaret Jordan (1941-2002) became a top public servant, and NZ secretary to the Queen from 1982; she was awarded the Queens Service Order for public service (2002), and was a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (1995). (Obituary *Evening Post*, April 11, 2002).

^x Tighe's feedback 17 July 2002.

^{xi} *Ibid*.

^{xii} *ibid*. “Chooks” = NZ slang for chickens or hens.

Chapter 24

Morrigan's story –

“It was really nice to recognise someone else from the secret society...sort of secret squirrelish.”

Morrigan Severs (1942–)

Introduction and background

Morrigan Severs, the last story in this section and youngest woman in this study, is from the group who became political activists during the 1970s, forming lesbian-feminist groups. She was a founder of the Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE) in Christchurch in 1973, and has continued lesbian and feminist political work. The impetus to do so is apparent in her story, as she became dissatisfied with living a lie and was determined to create change.

Morrigan, the eldest of three girls, is from a middle-class Christchurch family. Educated at Rangi Ruru Girls' College, a private school, she attended Christchurch Teachers' Training College and became a primary school teacher. She married and divorced, and has two sons and two grandchildren.

Morrigan's story

The first time Morrigan consciously remembered hearing about lesbianism was at her girls' secondary school, when she heard other students whispering and pointing at two girls.

Something was going on between them. There was no language put around it but whatever it was, was something to be whispered about and to shake heads about and to go titch titch titch.

She recalled feeling interested by their relationship, which she didn't see as frightening, but “just odd or different”. There was no name for it, but Morrigan saw the girls as having “a lot of physical closeness”. In retrospect, she thought that even if it wasn't sexual it was very close, causing comment.

Emotional closeness was okay in my girls' school...it was kind of formalised. The younger girls were expected to have pashes on the older girls and were supposed to give flowers to the object of the pash and to blush when she came near and be the joke of the other girls, who'd say “Oh look there's your pash!” It was commonly talked about so you just kind of picked it up.

She explained that some girls got pashes and others didn't, and some girls got into it more than others and "made a big deal of it, and a big fuss about it- a bit of a performance". She herself never gave flowers to a pash, because she thought it was "a bit silly".

it was such a performance and there was a lot of what I probably thought of at that stage as silly girlish giggling and blushing.

Morrigan described relationships with other girls as considered very important.

We learned to dance together, we played together, there was a lot of closeness. I had really intense friendships with girls and that was allowed, it was expected... you had sleepovers, where you go to stay with other girls and talk into the night...I didn't have any kissing, though with hindsight, it probably wasn't because I didn't want to. It was just not being a woman who took much initiative...no one took the initiative with me...lost opportunities.

Morrigan was not sure whether the teachers knew about the girls' pashes, but she remembered the girls' knowing "there were teachers who had special relationships". She recalled that the girls thought the teachers' relationships were "the same, close emotional friendships" they had, and that the teachers had them because

They were older women and they never married because their fiancées were killed in the war...there were stories of why they didn't marry...it was also acknowledged that their relationships were important...there was Miss D. and Miss X...it was known that they did things and spent time together...I didn't think of it in a sexual context...that wasn't in the frame at all really...I just didn't think about sex at all.

Morrigan was aged twelve when the Parker and Hulme case happened, but she did not remember the word "lesbian" being used, or that she connected the murder with close friendships between girls. She said she received some inadequate sex education around this time, including a film about rabbits.

It was this kind of blurry, jumpy black and white sort of reel about rabbits having babies. It was very odd because we kept rabbits and I'd seen rabbits and the rabbits had babies and I knew that that's what happened, rabbits had babies. But the film seemed quite strange and no one talked about it afterwards...it bore absolutely no relationship to human sexuality.

She did not recall receiving any sex education from her parents, or the girls at school talking about sex - only "romance". Most girls at her school did not have sex with boys.

We'd find it hard to do that...I didn't go anywhere where I wasn't chaperoned. When we met boys from the boys' schools from St Andrews and Christ's College when we went to dances, or we went to private social functions, there were adults like a mile deep around you...you didn't get to see a boy without the chaperone.

Morrigan clearly remembered seeing many cowboy and action films, where she imagined herself as the hero.

It was always a man doing all the action things and I can remember seeing a film where the man was doing the action things and then he was kissing the girl, and...I can remember thinking "But hey something's not right here". There was a really clear disjunction for me with a realisation that actually I was the woman, I wasn't the man. The silly person in a frock standing there. I can remember the scene, I've got a freeze-frame...she's standing there and he's kissing her. He's the "doing" person, and I thought "I'm not that person in the frock".

Morrigan did not recall discussing this with others, and said that she simply assumed that she would marry in the distant future.

I was busy riding horses, I was doing things, I had a very active life, I played sport and I was out and about, I didn't like going to dances and social occasions and having to get dressed up in frocks, I never wore them. I loathed them, they were really tedious and awful. My friendships were with other girls who were riding and there were a few boys too, but most of them were girls.

After Morrigan had left school and was at Teachers' Training College, she remembered hearing about men like Oscar Wilde "who were a bit odd, not like proper men". She continued to follow her "intense emotional relationships with women" though

It didn't seem to be going anywhere...Probably all I had to do was to reach out but I didn't. I don't think I ever thought it through, I just thought it was somehow inappropriate to touch anybody like that. I wouldn't have thought about touching a boy like that either. I would have had wonderings, but there were still lots of other things going on in my life. I was still riding then, I was doing other things...it didn't occupy a very big part of my life.

At nineteen Morrigan did the expected thing and married. She maintained a close emotional friendship with one particular woman friend for many years as well as close friendships with other women. Her closest friend moved away and they wrote constantly. After Morrigan visited this friend in Auckland, she came to live in Christchurch again. They began meeting at the library, "and then we became lovers, and it was just really easy". Her friend made the first move, and they were both

Fairly wordless... it felt like something we were waiting to do...we were deeply in love. It was a big emotional experience.

Her friend was not married, but did live with a male partner, then ended this relationship to live alone. This, Morrigan explained

Facilitated our relationship, because I could visit. We spent enormous amounts of time together as women could do in those days.

She recalled that they declared their love, kissed and cuddled, and then

Moved fairly quickly into having sex. I thought this was a wonder I haven't found this before. I thought this was like coming home.

She did not remember any one particular moment when they first realised and discussed the implications of what they were doing, though they acknowledged their relationship as very important.

However, I was married and had two children and so it created an incredible tension. We spent a lot of time together, had holidays together and were together a great deal...that went on for a number of years.

Morrigan explained that she did not tell her husband, because then she might not have been able to continue the relationship.

He would have been displeased...the relationship wouldn't have sustained that and I would have had to make a choice. I wasn't able at that point to make a choice. The other part of the story fits together where we found that there were others...we weren't the only ones in the world...Gertrude Stein for instance had been what we were. We are special, there were other special women in books.

They searched for lesbians in books, though Morrigan was unsure where they first

It wasn't a word that was in common usage. We were "like that", "you know", are there any others who are "you know" are they "like that", it was like a secret, a secret society, were there others that belong to the secret society - yeah that's a good way of framing it up. And there must be others because Gertrude Stein was.

They remembered them looking up the word "homosexual" in the library, and speculating about whether there were others "like that" in Christchurch.

We understood because we were being secretive about it that they would be being secretive about it too. So you would have to speculate...was this woman who hadn't married, or had this seemingly close friendship with another woman, could she belong to this group as well? This group of women who were "like that"...we would speculate on what were the signs and what would you look for and how would you know, and how would you recognise other ones.

After some time they did meet some other lesbians, Morrigan thought perhaps this was "through a friend", or through "someone who knew someone". Eventually, she explained

There was a group of us...there were other women and they lived together, who were also "like that". We began meeting with them and doing things together and gradually getting to meet other women, so we had a kind of friendship network and it got wider. Still wasn't very wide...We were drinking at the Gresham then, there were gay men there, but there were straight people as well.

Morrigan said that though she remained married, she was able to meet and go out with her friends as her husband worked at night. The relationship with her friend had ended because she felt unable to leave her marriage, which she explained was because she did not know any other lesbians with children at this time.

I couldn't sustain that kind of lifestyle...my relationship broke up because I wasn't able to leave then, and, because what I saw of others and lifestyles and behaviour

and things, I thought how could I bring my children up, my idea of how I wanted to live my life with the children didn't fit into the incredible use of alcohol, the partying, the kind of relationship disloyalties, and that's what I saw was happening...I thought this is just my life, this is how it will have to be, I will be married, and that wasn't too dreadful, it was a fairly amicable sort of arrangement. We did a lot of things separately and I'll just have to go on meeting women. When that relationship broke up it was really devastating and then I just went off at night to bars and met other women and I had a lot of different relationships and thought that's all it is, that's all I can hope for, is to just have sexual relationships.

Morrigan said that by this time the friend she had been in that first relationship with identified as lesbian, and remained Morrigan's best friend, while Morrigan continued having casual relationships.

They couldn't go anywhere because there's nowhere to go because I've only got this limited time between putting the children to bed at night and when he might get home. I had elaborate systems set up, like going to motels after the pub and then having to wake up - I overslept once and it was just dreadful, I made up a load of lies about what had happened, and he was concerned about where I was and where I'd been, and I said I'd been to a party.... I didn't like that. I didn't like myself. I didn't like the lies, I got too tired anyway. I was working, I was teaching and I was bringing up children, and I was married and I was having relationships with women, it was a busy, busy life.

There were no support systems, Morrigan explained, only the groups who met at The Gresham Hotel, or the British Hotel, in Lyttleton, where she began to drink on Saturdays.

That was an amazing venue because it was all the sex workers off the boats, the sailors, all the transsexuals, it was queer nation really, we all used to drink over there. I met a woman there when I was teaching school and was still married and we'd been meeting in the staff room without a flicker of recognition...in our dresses and our professional personas.

Morrigan depicted the women meeting under these circumstances as experiencing

A delighted recognition that we were both there, you belonged to a secret society, it was really nice to recognise someone else from the secret society...Sort of secret squirrelish...that had it's own sort of tension too, and excitement of getting over to the British on a Saturday, where the gay men thought we'd really like it if they called us "boys", because they wanted to be "girls".

Morrigan said she found this interesting because

I thought about how it was when I was growing up and that I never wanted to be a girl..I found that really difficult being a girl and wanting to do boys' things and how hard it was trying to be taught to be a young lady when it didn't fit.

She described socialising with the Gresham group away from the pub, and inviting them back to her home for tea and coffee "in full view", which was part of the "tension of it".

My lover came around. That was the thing, there was tension and excitement, I might get caught, but it was also very distasteful. I was in a relationship with this guy and I didn't feel okay about being disloyal or lying.

Morrigan had heterosexual “allies” she told about her women lovers, asking them to say she was visiting them. If he phoned, they would say she had “just popped out”, and then they would phone her lover’s place and she could “pop back”. She explained that being with women was “this thing that I was...but it was still a hidden thing”. However,

I wanted to be it, I enjoyed it. It was something that felt right, that was me. I think the only time that was hard was my break-up from my first relationship where I was mucking around and I thought “this is really hard”, but it wasn't that I didn't want to be that, it was the hardness of being a lesbian and in the closet... That was the hard part.

Then, Morrigan said, she met a woman and fell “deeply in love” thinking that “it’s now or never”, as she felt she could not go on.

I was unhappy with myself. I thought there must be some other way and because of the commitment we made to the relationship, we believed we could make it work with children. She would co-parent the children and that was a really important factor.

With her new lover Morrigan said she used the terms lesbian, homosexual, gay, kampf and queer. She thought that the Gresham group had now begun to call themselves “gay”, rather than “kampf as a row of tents” or “queer as a two-bob watch”. Morrigan described herself as realizing that her sexuality was “clearly something that I was”.

And a part of me, I wanted it to be part of my whole life. I felt very strongly by then, in a relationship that was supportive, that felt that we could actually bring up children, that we had a place in the world, this is what I liked about it, that I wasn't going to hide in corners any more. I hated myself doing that, it didn't feel ok.

She told her husband, and said that he was “absolutely devastated” when she left him for a woman and identified as lesbian, as were her mother and some heterosexual friends and relations. This passed, Morrigan explained, as they “got the hang of it”.

I think especially because of being in a relationship. Particularly my mother understood that. I probably modelled a lot of my relationships with women on the relationships of my mother. Her relationships with women were really important to her.

Morrigan recalled one particular friend of her mother’s who “smoked cigarettes out of a holder”, and wasn’t married. This woman was called by her surname, wore trousers, and was a very close friend. She remembered that her mother explained

“That’s just how she is.” She was her good friend, my mother had a wide range of women friends that she spent a lot of time with, playing bridge.

She felt that it was unethical to hide and that ethics, “in a moral system”, is about

Being true to yourself and being honest to people. What I didn't like was the dishonesty, that I had to tell lies all the time. And that was the most enormous relief when I stopped telling lies and I said to people that I lived with a woman.

After she and her lover began to live together with her children, Morrigan recalled that they began to tell other people. She thought that part of meeting others and joining a group was having a “conscious sense of being alongside other women who were like that”. However, Morrigan explained, she began to want “more than that”.

I didn't want to be something that you did on Friday nights or Saturday nights at bars with other people who were like that. That wasn't enough, and I can remember telling my children. I wanted people to know. I was pleased with myself and the relationship, I was pleased we'd done this but I can't remember the language around it, I probably said we're living together, we were lovers.

Morrigan depicted herself at this period in her life as wanting to meet other women form a support and friendship network and “do things”, around the children.

By then we'd met another lesbian who had a child, and then we met another one so there were two. We had the children, we needed to attend to their needs and go and do family-type things. So we just did that and wherever we went we were out...I wanted to be as I was, that I knew was quite right and proper for me to be like this, but I wanted to be like this in the world, I wanted the world to know.

However, Morrigan explained, she did not simply want the world to accept her, describing herself at this time as wanting to change the world.

I'd been part of other movements like the peace movement and other liberation movements for change so it wasn't just to find a personal place myself in the world, I wanted change for everybody. I didn't want people to go through what I'd gone through in my own developmental journey in becoming a lesbian. I thought that was really dreadful and I wouldn't wish that on anybody.

Chapter 25

Overview and Summary of Part Four

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of commonalities and connections emerging from the chapters in Part 4. The period covered extends from 1906, when the oldest woman was born, to 1970. The eight narrators all led lesbian lives before 1970, and there are connections among them through lesbian communities and networks.

Similarly to the overview and summary of Part 3 in Chapter 15, this chapter examines the information available to the narrators, their communities, identities and the terms they used, their relationships, how they supported themselves, the punishments they experienced and their housing, to show how these elements contributed to their ability to lead lesbian lives. In particular, I consider how the narrators were forced to use strategies of discretion, evasion and actual deception as organising principles in their lives. The lesbians who grew up during the post-WW2 period, Frankie (born 1938), Tighe and Bubs (born 1940) and Morrigan (born 1942), socialised in the publicly visible urban kamp communities, and eventually came to feel they could no longer lead double lives. As might be expected, the older lesbians, Freda (b.1910), Bea (b.1915), Emily (b.1921) and Katie (b.1926), employed strategies of discretion more consistently and for longer than the younger lesbians. Despite being publicly exposed as a lesbian in 1935, even Freda used caution and discretion in her “affairs”, especially those with married women, and her white marriage to Harold may be seen as camouflage, giving her more freedom to develop these affairs.

Some comparison is made with the experiences of the women in Part 3, where these narrators’ accounts provide relevant illumination and insight, as the oldest women, Bea and Freda, were recalling events from eighty or more years earlier. All the narrators’ accounts are retrospective, that is, everyone was talking in the 1990s about much earlier events and their “process of remembering” helps explore “the subjective meanings of lived experience” (Thomson et al. 1994, p.33). Representations of the past, like the stories recounted in Chapters 5 and 6, can be “managed, mediated cultural constructions”, so that memory is something often manipulated by “the structures of cultural and political power” as well as being “the source of...resistance to established

power” (ibid. p.37). The “interactions between ‘private’ and ‘public’ memories” (Thomson 1998, p.300) allowed narrators to retain their forbidden knowledge of love between women while subscribing to the “collective myth” of ignorance on the topic, to adapt Thomson’s ideas on Anzac memories. The overseas and local stories on lesbianism pervaded the New Zealand culture the narrators inhabited, informing their realities and understanding of themselves, and the attitudes towards lesbianism of those around them. Later, they learned the key messages of the official discourse, that there should be silence on the topic of lesbianism and no information about it. This is the version they tell in their stories, shaping retrospective narratives in ways challenged by other memories, for example, their knowledge of love relationships between girls or women at their schools, while at the same time using this experience and these stories as a basis for rejecting compulsory heterosexuality.

How “accurate” then, were the narrators’ stories? As Tonkin suggests, though “the voiceless...can voice an opposition”, they are susceptible to “the processes of self-construction”, so that it is not always possible to determine whether “tellers are authors or authored by their telling” (Tonkin 1992, p.132). Oral history reveals “less about events than about their meaning” (Portelli 1998, p.67, original emphasis). As the narrators in this study told their stories, they made sense and meaning of their experiences. When narrators achieve new understandings from telling their stories, this enhances rather than detracts from their “truth”, in the same way as I consider women in Part 3 of this study were able to achieve through writing letters or diaries. Any production of a text, whether oral or written, weaves words into forms that convey meaning for the speaker or writer, who hopes this will communicate similar understandings to their listener or reader. When Bea explained that she and Bette “had our ups and downs, Bette was Bette, she had a very strong will, so did I and it wasn’t plain sailing entirely but...We were intensely loyal to each other”, the meaning she makes seems to be not that far from that of KM writing to LM that “I can’t be satisfied unless I know you are near...because in my horrid, odious intolerable way I love you and am yours ever (Baker 1971, p.197). When Hodgkins wrote of Dorothy Richmond, that she had “grown so fond of her, I don’t know how I am ever going to let her go, she is one of those people whom you want always with you” (Hodgkins 1993, pp.92-94), she seems to make an emotional meaning similar to Katie, who explained that when she first met Julie, she was “absolutely madly in love with her from the very first moment I

saw her. She came to get in the car and it was like as if someone hit me with a big wet sack”.

In Bethell’s letter to Holcroft she wrote that Pollen’s death was “a complete shattering of my life: from her I have had love, tenderness, & understanding for 30 years, & close and happy companionship...in this house for 10 years. I shall not want another home on this planet” (Somerset et al. 1948, pp.13-14). Stark made similar meaning in her story, as she explained “Nobody ever took her place. I don't know why, I don't put it down to her dying...I just loved her. She filled my whole life and when she died I didn't think I'd ever survive. But I did. Life has to go on”.

Stories told by narrators, like those in Chapter 16, of “dumb things straights say” included Frankie’s story of coming out to her father, who responded to her revelation that she liked women with “Don’t worry about that Frances we know you’re a bit retarded.” What he actually meant was a late developer...but he said “as long as you don’t go the lesbian way, it’ll be all right”

Many stories were narratives of defiance, of standing up to authority or of “getting away with” actions, like Bubs’ stories of her escapades with Piri. These narratives of resistance and rebellion helped bolster up lesbian communities, and often gathered their own momentum. Even if such stories were not literally “true”, like the legends created about working-class hero Luigi Trastulli (Portelli 1991, pp.1-26), they encouraged lesbian survival. Coming-out narratives and published collections of life-stories (for example Penelope and Wolfe 1980, Adair and Adair 1978, Lesbian Oral History Group 1989), convey how oral stories told in pre-1970 lesbian communities helped lessen feelings of isolation, guilt or self-hatred. Damousi notes how Australian Communist Party women represented themselves in their narratives as “rebellious and adventurous, defying conventional stereotypes” (Damousi 1994, p.208). What is important is not “what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli 1981 in Damousi p.115). Passerini suggests, “all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose” (Passerini 1989, p.197); she saw her Italian political activists as having “seized on a common imaginary world” (Passerini 1990, p.55). The accounts of these narrators, who are the lesbian survivors of the pre-1970 period, allow an understanding of the processes they used to construct the worlds they inhabited and also

the ways that New Zealand lesbians told their stories and presented themselves. Both the public persona some narrators presented within pre-1970 lesbian communities, and their more private reflective selves, are present in their stories, as they looked back over their lives and gave their past experiences meaning. Katie, for example depicted herself as a tomboy, relating the story of other children saying “Lets go!” when she and her friend John appeared. Bubs story of she and Piri disguised as sailors on the train similarly presents them as “bad girls” defying the expected feminine stereotypes.

Some narrators seemed to tell their stories as a means of “injecting their own worldview into the elusive area of public knowledge” (Olson and Shopes 1991, p.198). Bubs, for example, wanted to express that she thought both women in a relationship were “kamp”, though she had, before her relationship with a married woman inclined to the view that she herself was kamp and her lovers not. Being blamed for the relationship altered her view, and she wanted to tell the story from this perspective and place it into a public archive. Others appeared to “remake” or “repress” memories still “unsafe” and “painful” (Thomson 1998, pp.300-301). Freda, for example, glossing over the dark horror of Thelma’s murder and the social consequences of her subsequent notoriety, appeared to tell her tale of survival as an inspiration for others. Bethell’s memorial poems to Pollen may serve a similar function, of encouraging others to understand that life continues after the tragic death of a lover.

When narrators spoke of former partners who had died, for example, Freda of Thelma (d.1935), Bea of Betty (d. 2000) and Katie of Julie (d.1973), stories from dead speakers beyond the narrators became available through their recollections (Parekowhai 1992). While I mainly use the narrators’ stories as the basis of this chapter, I include some of their stories about others, so that these women also feature.

Questions of retrospective self-construction and presentation are raised throughout this chapter, highlighting how the narrators created meaning and constructed and made sense of their experiences, together with myself as interviewer, producing the “conversational narratives” (Grele 1998, p.44), on which the stories are based.

Information on lesbianism

The narrators reported receiving little or no sex education, and despite the discourses (Chapters 5 and 6), they did not recall hearing about lesbianism. The speechlessness of

this sex education conveyed the important message that sex was silence, and lesbianism unspoken (see Foucault 1990a, Rich 1979), despite the narrators learning about love between women from various sources, significantly their girls' secondary schools.

Of the eight narrators nearly all attended single-sex girls' secondary schools (Freda, Epsom Girls' Grammar School, Auckland; Bea, Napier Girls' High School, Napier; Emily, Sacred Heart Convent, Timaru; Bubs, Queen Victoria Maori Girls' College, Auckland; Frankie, Auckland Girls' Grammar School, Auckland; Tighe, Samuel Marsden Collegiate School for Girls, Wellington; Morrigan, Rangi Ruru Girls' College, Christchurch). Two were boarders, Emily and Bubs, and the rest day girls. Katie did not attend secondary school, and Bea attended for a short time only because the 1931 Napier earthquake interrupted her schooling. The school culture regarded "crushes" and "pashes" on other girls as common and expected. Girls discussed these feelings, as well as noting that many teachers lived in couples, or appeared to be romantically involved. However, a discussion of these relationships was not part of the formal education at the schools, or mentioned or acknowledged officially.

The contradiction is that while some narrators said they had received no information on lesbianism, they had been knowledgeable insiders within a school culture of love, and part of a long tradition dating at least from the inception of girls' schools (note Sahli 1979). Rather than the loves of women actually becoming "more numerous every day" (Willard 1889 in Faderman 1999, p.33) they may simply have become more noticeable in the nineteenth century as women became more independent outside the family. If love between women was never accepted in any century (Moore 1996, Raymond 1986, Rich 1981), then part of women's culture of same-sex love was the information about keeping silent, passed on to each new generation by their lovers (see Grahn 1984).

The message conveyed was that though these relationships were common, they could not be discussed outside the school culture. Thus, knowledge may be said to contain ignorance (see Sedgwick 1990, pp.73-74). Admitting to knowledge might risk having one's friendships suspected, and information would "quickly become a secret to be kept from others" (Donaghue 1993, p.16). Partly, this may have been because the relationship might be threatened. Morrigan noted that, while girls at Rangi Ruru could express their "emotional closeness", when two girls were known to have "physical" relations this was not acceptable. Though Tighe's cousin told her that girls at Solway

went in for “intense kissing and cuddling”, and Tighe knew that there were “special friendships” among the day girls at Marsden, she described not learning until later that the boarders at Marsden were doing “much more” than this. Obviously, the culture of boarders was closed, and girls knew not to discuss their love affairs with day girls, parents or people outside the school. However, mothers and grandmothers of some of these girls had also been boarders, and would have remembered their own school relationships. They, too, must have kept silent, as admission could make these women complicit in both knowledge and practice of lesbianism. Girls also learned from watching their teachers in couples that it could not be admitted or talked about (the teachers did not discuss it). The aftermath of the 1954 Parker Hulme case made girls’ schools concerned about these “special friendships” (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991), driving them further underground, and meaning that lesbian teachers became even more cautious, as Katie’s story of Julie’s fears confirms.

The discourse of forbidden desires, revealed through these silences, is indicated by the narrators’ common realisation, when they did begin relationships, that they must not disclose their lesbian feelings or reveal these friendships. Tighe explained “the ideology was so strong” that even as a child, though she could not articulate why, she knew she must not reveal her lesbian feelings. The narrators described discovering lesbianism through practice, by falling in love and starting sexual relationships that they said were initially unnamed. Their lesbianism was in this sense constructed through the absence of language, and by meaningful silences (Rich 1979, p.308) and the physical caresses of women. Gossip and pillow-talk were the narrators’ first sources of information, as they learned about lesbianism from their lovers. Though surrounded by silence and proscription, information could be conveyed without needing words for physical acts, and sexual knowledge and techniques passed within communities of practice. Eventually words were learnt, in the manner described by Grahn: “the careful teaching my first lover gave me, as she recited in strictest secrecy the litany of words and phrases related to the forbidden subject of our way of being” (Grahn 1984, p.xii). Emily and Katie described obtaining sexual information from their female partners in this way, Katie explaining how she obtained lesbian cultural information as Julie “told her everything” that she “needed to know”. After a sexual relationship with a man, Freda presented herself as having become more knowledgeable about sex in general as this got her “started” as a lesbian. No other narrators reported early sexual experiences with boys, Morrigan presenting the girls at her school as being so “heavily chaperoned” they

had few opportunities for this kind of experimentation. Katie presented herself as not understanding what her husband was doing on their wedding night and then as falling in love with the nurse while having her first baby. Bubs said that she and Piri pretended to be boys with some girlfriends in Nelson, with whom they began sexual relations, and that they learnt more later from the sexually knowledgeable married woman with whom they each had a relationship.

According to Bea, she and Betty lived together for years before putting a name to their relationship. However, Betty had previous lesbian experience, and had survived some years of social ostracism from co-workers at the Reserve Bank (Chapter 18), as Bea knew, because she told this story. Either Betty protected Bea from forbidden knowledge during their early years together, or Bea told a “public” and official version about her ignorance despite knowing about Betty’s experiences, and despite working with lesbian nurses. She may have been reluctant to socialise in these nursing circles, after the “sad part”, when she became involved with another nurse, leaving Betty for the nurses’ home to be near her new friend. Her memory of how much she knew at this time could reflect the conflict between “public and private memories” (Thomson 1998, p.300); the version repeated to Betty over the years that she was comforting a nurse whose mother had died, and the private knowledge surrounding an “unsafe” recollection (ibid. p.301) and what the other relationship may have meant to Bea.

Katie explained that her family was too poor to buy books, which were difficult to borrow as libraries charged fees, though her father borrowed what he could from other people. Katie herself borrowed adventure books from the free children’s library, but libraries did not feature in the stories of other narrators. Frankie said that her parents borrowed and exchanged books with friends, and that she read a novel they borrowed with a lesbian theme and understood “they write stories about it”. She had a homosexual uncle, explaining that though the reasons were not explicit, she understood it was “a taboo thing” from the way he was treated by her family. She described having several early sexual relationships with girls from school or church, but said that she and the other girls did not discuss them. Later, both Tighe and Frankie read books described by Frankie as “grotty, awful lesbian novels”, borrowed from friends who brought them into New Zealand from Australia during the 1960s, and which were “swapped around”. Most narrators reported reading *The Well of Loneliness*, including Freda, Emily, Katie, Frankie, Tighe and Morrigan. As elsewhere, this book “remained important” during the

1950s-1960s and provided information on “how to be a lesbian among the young who had no other guide” (Faderman 1991, p.173). Betty was nineteen and Freda eighteen during the 1928 trial of *TWOL* but neither reported being aware of this event.

When Freda was at the centre of the 1935 Mareo case, Betty was twenty-six, Bea twenty, and Emily fourteen. They did not remember being aware of the case, but as it affected social attitudes, encouraging people to think of lesbianism in a context of murder and “abnormality”, it did affect their lives. This context emerged again with the 1954 Parker and Hulme case. Frankie, who was sixteen at this time, said that she followed the case in the newspapers and understood the feelings involved, though thought it gave a “bad press” to women who loved other women. Tighe, who was fourteen at the time, described herself as asking the meaning of “homosexual” because of the case. The increased discrimination at school or home towards girls’ friendships made it likely the younger narrators’ parents and teachers became more vigilant (Glamuzina and Laurie 1991), and the parents of Frankie, Bubs, Tighe and Morrigan would have received a copy of the findings of the Mazengarb Report in 1954 (Chapter 6), designed to influence their views. The narrators all reported reading about the 1967 Petley and Davis case, Bubs explaining that she was in the Air Force at the time and knew them, describing them as “lovely women”. Bea, aged fifty-two during the time of this case, presented herself as first hearing the term “lesbian” then, when she overheard other nurses referring to this case as “some lesbian affair”. Morrigan described how she learned “that there were others”, like Gertrude Stein who “had been what we were”, and that she and her lover “weren’t the only ones in the world”, because there “were other special women in books”.

Davis and Kennedy (1993) describe how lesbians in the bars learned the rules and behaviours appropriate to lesbian culture in Buffalo. The stories told in New Zealand, recounted in Chapter 16, provided information for young kamp girls seeking partners and learning how to live as lesbians, stressing the importance of silence and discretion. Some information was by example, or by direct comment, as when Tighe presented a lesbian as angry because she had greeted her near her work during the day, while wearing trousers. This story conveys both the importance of obeying the rules in order to be accepted by the lesbian community, and also presents Tighe as a defiant outsider, challenging the need for heterosexual camouflage and costume.

The sexual revolution of the sixties, though heterosexually driven, produced some benefits for lesbians. The increasing sexualisation of compulsory heterosexuality and the development of ideologies insisting on active heterosexual participation, are analysed by Jeffreys, arguing that the eroticising of the single woman now expected to “join in the sexual servicing of men previously reserved for her married sister” had negative consequences for lesbians (Jeffreys 1990, p.106). Though this is partially true (women found it difficult to refuse sex with men without being suspected of lesbianism, for example), many changes were beneficial for lesbians. More public discussion of sexuality encouraged women to understand their dissatisfaction with heterosexual relationships and, like Morrigan, to become open to lesbian relationships. Though “negative and grotty”, the books that became available in the 1960s provided lesbians with more information than either the messages conveyed through silences, or the cautionary tales of the overseas and locally produced stories described in Chapters 5 and 6. For all narrators, gossip and the oral culture of stories told to lesbians by lesbians remained the most significant source of information before 1970.

Lesbian relationships

Narrators described beginning lesbian relationships because they fell in love, as also appeared to be the case for the women in Part 3. Several mentioned Hollywood films, and all were exposed to stories of “love” and “romance” from films, novels, television soaps, and ideologies encouraging them to hope for and to seek love as fulfillment, because “sex is worth dying for” (Foucault 1978, p.156). Most love scripts contained messages that a woman’s destiny would be achieved through love, and the “right” person was waiting somewhere. After the introduction of television in 1960, “soaps” reinforced these ideas (Geraghty 1991), with a focus on “the inevitability of the deepening of true love” (Radway 1987 p.162). For women attracted to other women, ideas of ‘true love’ may have inspired them to act, and to develop a relationship with their own “right” person.

All narrators confirmed having genital sex, reinforcing Hamer’s view that most lesbians living in the twentieth century were “sexually aware and had sex” (Hamer 1996, p.10). Though they described romance and romantic friendships as important, they eventually wanted these to include kisses and cuddles, Tighe describing her fantasies of kissing. They soon wanted genital sex too, because, as Frankie explained, “the old hormones just drive you wherever you need to go.” This is reminiscent of Anne Lister’s view that

the Ladies of Llangollen did not have a “platonic” romantic friendship, especially during “that feverish dream called youth” (Lister in Whitbread 1988, p.210).

Bubs depicted herself as attracted to girls at the age of six, kissing them “behind the old bike shed”. Though Tighe said she knew at five it was not socially acceptable to have “dreams” and “pashes” about girls, she described falling in love with Barbara when she was eleven and making her “the whole focus” of her life. Frankie recalled being attracted to girls when she was seven. She explained how she contrived to kiss them as a teenager, her memory of this suggesting that she deceived them through various pretences, such as asking them to kiss each other the way their boyfriends kissed them. However, the other girls may have pretended to be deceived while fully understanding what they were doing, suggesting the ways in which girls might participate in same-sex erotic activities without needing to admit lesbian desire. Morrigan spoke of her “really intense friendships with girls” which included “no kissing”, because she did not take “much initiative”, and no one “took the initiative” with her. Tighe described being attracted to other nurses while training but said that she made no approaches to them as she feared losing their friendship. She told the story of a passionate and sexual relationship with Joan, whom she described as remorseful after lovemaking because of her religion, and for that she tried after each time to make Tighe agree not to “do it again”.

Freda said that she bedded her mother’s friends and other married women, presenting herself as “whisking them up to dizzying heights”. She presented her passionate relationship with the experienced and slightly older Thelma as the most significant of her life, explaining, “No-one ever took her place”. Freda’s understanding of the triangle that ended in Thelma’s murder was affected by her comparative inexperience at the time in relation to the worldly Mareos. She presented herself in the interview as rejecting Mareo’s advances, but it is also possible that all three did have sex. Freda’s remembered story was the public version she told in court, and the fact that she did not present any other more private version during the interview does not mean there were not other versions she had forgotten or hidden from herself.

It is possible that Freda and Betty, as well as the women in Part 3 who were also young adults during the “short winter’s day” of the 1920s (Bell 1976, p.59), had different attitudes to sex than some slightly younger women. By describing a Christchurch

woman as a “real 20s style person who really was still in the 20s and was accepted in society”, Emily (b.1921) apparently believed that earlier there had been more open attitudes to sex in New Zealand. This may account for differences between Betty (b.1909) and Freda (b.1910), and the more reserved Bea (b.1915). Freda’s association with theatre may account for her more open attitude, as may class differences between Betty and Bea from their families of origin, as well as Bea’s religious beliefs. Bea regarded lovemaking as very private, preferring not to discuss it during the interview.

Bubs portrayed herself as having sex only when she “really liked” a girl, as it was not the “main part”, and she preferred “the joining of minds and souls” and “cuddles and kisses” to “sex for the sake of sex”. However, the lusty life and lovemaking with visitors she described as happening in the hot-pools, as well as her later sexual experiences in Auckland, contradicted this portrayal, demonstrating that her wish to keep lovemaking special was not always realised.

Morrigan described her first relationship with a woman as taking place during her marriage, presenting it as happening because she and a friend were “deeply in love”, with their lovemaking seeming like “coming home” and “something we were waiting to do”. When this relationship ended, she related stories of casual encounters that she had resigned herself to, because she could not leave her marriage and children. She explained that once she found a lesbian lover willing to co-parent, she was then able to leave her marriage and live as a lesbian.

Initiating a relationship with someone generally involved disclosing at some stage that one knew about lesbian possibilities. Beyond simple, unnamed physical caresses, women sometimes needed to indicate their interest. Like the earlier codes of mentioning Marie Antoinette or Juvenal’s sixth satire, women could use *TWOL* in this way. Freda described how “a lovely old girl” in London placed it on the table, asking Freda if she had read the book, to which she could reply, “Yes I know all about it”. Perhaps Peter Dawson was making a similar approach, when she showed *TWOL* to Janet Frame (who then spent all night reading it).

Most narrators lived with partners, some establishing life-long partnerships, like Betty and Bea for 57 years, and Emily and Jane for over 40 years since 1962. Freda, Bubs,

Frankie, Tighe and Morrigan had several domestic relationships indicating that most narrators did want commitment, despite Freda's use of the term "affair".

Many narrators also described significant lesbian friendships as well as love relationships. Bubs' stories of her friendship with Piri created meanings about support and companionship through their many adventures, for example, while dressing as sailors, or dating girls together while pretending to be boys. Despite occasional rivalry over romantic interests, she depicted their friendship as sustaining them in an isolated community. Ex-lovers often became important friends. Morrigan described her first lover as becoming her best friend, also creating meanings of support and companionship, and Tighe described even Joan, with her guilt about lesbianism, as having become a friend after their relationship ended. The "unbroken ties" and close friendships between former lovers is a feature of many lesbian communities (see, for example, Becker 1988, Weinstock and Rothblum 1996).

Lesbian communities and connections

As a group, these narrators tie into many of the networks or occupations known among New Zealand lesbians to have included lesbian circles: Freda in theatre circles, Bea in nursing, Bubs in the Post Office and in the armed services, Frankie in broadcasting, Tighe in women's hockey and nursing, Morrigan in teaching, with Emily and Katie joining women's clubs. The lovers or friends they spoke of were also part of these circles: Julie in teaching, Piri in the Post Office and the armed services, and Betty joining a women's club.

Emily reported that people needed to explain to family and friends how they knew other people and where they had met. Drama, music, gardening, sport, church and other clubs and societies were suitable places, for example, some homosexual men and women met at the New Plymouth Theatre Society (Saphira 1997, p.103). As noted in Chapter 8, over three hundred women's groups were established here before 1970 (Else 1993, pp.571-575), providing many acceptable opportunities for women to meet. Emily, for example, said she met her married lover at a tennis club, while Freda described meeting lovers through family connections or theatre groups. Based on current knowledge, it seems that lesbians did not meet openly in any of these organisations.

Tighe spoke of socialising with the "hockey ladies", reporting that they were "closeted" and did not mention lesbianism openly. Betty was a member of the Pioneer Club,

though Bea did not remember that Betty recalled lesbianism being discussed. Emily did not report lesbianism being mentioned at the Business and Professional Women's Club, or Katie at the YWCA or women's divisions of surf clubbing during the 1940s. However, there may have been communication among lesbians in these circles not noted by these narrators, that was indirect and oblique rather than directly articulated, including signals like looks, smiles, nods, winks or other gestures, as well as the vague expressions noted by Morrigan such as "like that". The women in Part 3 who were members of women's clubs, notably the Pioneer Club, the East Harbour Women's Club, and the Taranaki Women's Club, also suggest that women meeting through these networks had their own techniques of communication and ways to make their romantic interest apparent, for example, as Andrews did at conferences.

Bea reported that she and Betty had no lesbian friends, living as a solitary couple and socialising in heterosexual circles without disclosing their relationship. Bea said that she was aware of other lesbian nurses, and though she thought they were a group, perhaps many of them also lived as solitary couples. Tighe recounted how she and Joan socialised with (presumably) heterosexual people, discreetly in pubs, while Tighe also continued socialising in women's hockey circles, eventually finding the Wellington kamp crowd through her workmates.

Opportunities to meet other self-identified lesbians were limited and, as elsewhere, younger pre-1970 New Zealand working-class lesbians together with a few middle-class lesbians tried to create publicly visible spaces where lesbians could socialise (Kennedy and Davis 1993, Nestle 1981, 1987, Faderman 1991). As pre-1970 New Zealand women had limited access to hotel bars or to public places, lesbians met in a few coffee bars and hotel lounge bars on the fringes of kamp men's communities and bohemian networks. The narrators' reports of places where they socialised confirm the importance of the venues listed in the few written sources (Chapter 8), adding some new establishments. Bubs, Piri and Frankie reported frequenting the Ca d'Oro Coffee Bar in Auckland (Te Awakotuku 1991, Laurie 1990). Tighe, Emily and Frankie said they frequented Wellington's Tete a Tete Coffee Bar, (Laurie 1990), the Picasso in Willis Street and the Man Friday in Dixon Street. Frankie and Bubs reported patronising the Occidental and Queen's Ferry Hotels, in Auckland, and Bubs said that she also drank at the Family and Naval Hotel and the unlicensed Auckland beer-houses. In Wellington Frankie described socialising at the Tavern and Bistro Bars of the Royal Oak Hotel, and

after closing time at the Sorrento Coffee Bar (later the Sunset Strip). Tighe reported socialising at Carmen's Coffee Lounge and Carmen's Balcony in Victoria Street, and with a camp crowd at the Caledonian Hotel as well as at the Tavern. Morrigan identified the British Hotel, Lyttelton and at the Gresham Hotel in Christchurch as the main venues for her group.

At these public venues, women could meet the "kamp crowd" and be invited to kamp parties in private houses when the pubs closed at six pm. Frankie and Bubs said they attended parties at Parnell and Mount Eden in Auckland, with Maori and pakeha kamp men and women, and Katie described going to pakeha kamp parties in the Cashmere Hills in Christchurch. Frankie found Maori kamp parties in Nelson, with "really good kai" where they would "play the guitar and sing and dance". Maori urbanisation (Dunstall 1981, p.403) helped produce kamp communities, and there were strong Maori influences as Maori kamp men and women brought their culture to town (Te Awekotuku et al 1993). Bubs and Piri, like so many others, eventually moved to Auckland. As elsewhere, the existence of urban lesbian communities attracted more lesbians to the cities (Martin and Lyon 1990, Kennedy 1996), and newspaper reports (Chapter 6) advertised their presence. Though most were still very discreet, those who socialised publicly lived on the edge, risking loss of employment and other social punishments if they were exposed.

The narrators' experiences suggest the post-WW2 New Zealand kamp communities provided friendship, solidarity and support. However, they were informal, scattered, and unstructured, with cross-class and cross-race affiliations, and included heterosexual people, prostitutes, and criminals, making some narrators feel uncomfortable. Frankie described feeling upset that she was "tarred with the same brush", as "criminals, prostitutes and hoons", and Morrigan said she found this atmosphere unsuitable for her children. The mixed composition of the communities appears to have encouraged anti-establishment and anti-police attitudes, especially given the role of the police in containing and harassing kamp men, prostitutes and obviously kamp women, even though lesbianism was not illegal. Male homosexuality and prostitution were criminal offences, and crime and the illegal sale of alcohol combined to produce transgressive and subversive urban cultures. As elsewhere, these cultures became the basis of many post-1970 political developments that challenged societal prescriptions and stereotypes (Kennedy and Davis 1993, Te Awekotuku 1991, Te Awekotuku et al. 1993, Kennedy

1998), and Hay described Stonewall as lighting the fuse of a powder trail laid in the 1950s and 1960s (Hay in Weiss and Schiller 1988, p.41).

Some narrators had contact with lesbians and lesbian communities in other countries. Freda lived in London, frequenting the Gateways Club and Brighton lesbian venues, as well as socialising in San Francisco lesbian circles. Like earlier expatriates, Emily lived in England for nearly thirty years, becoming part of a discreet lesbian circle, and living more freely away from New Zealand and her family. However, she suggested that socialising with others was important mainly because “they might know somebody” you could meet and that, once she was in a relationship, lesbian circles were less important for her. Frankie lived in London during the late 1960s, socialising in the lesbian scene, and Bubs, Tighe, Katie and Julie all travelled overseas. Formal lesbian organising existed in the US and in Britain by the 1960s (see Chapter 8), and some narrators read or subscribed to *Arena Three* and *The Ladder*. Various messages of the sixties urged more openness and many condemned dishonesty, hypocrisy and phoniness (see , D’Emilio 1983, Faderman 1991, Hamer 1996). Some narrators, for example, Morrigan, felt the consequences of honesty were preferable to the guilt of deception, while Frankie found she could not cope with the stresses of duplicity and living a lie. Combined with the other influences of the sixties, ideas from overseas lesbian communities or publications helped prepare the ground for the different kinds of thinking and organising that emerged in New Zealand during the 1970s.

Lesbian identity and terms

By the time of the interviews, all narrators identified as lesbian, though some preferred pre-1970 terms like *kamp* or *homosexual*. Earlier, they had identified themselves in various ways. Lesbians in the hockey community did not name themselves, so Tighe said she did not call herself anything before meeting the *kamp* communities. She said that she was told Jenny was lesbian by heterosexual co-workers, even though Jenny “didn’t really call herself a lesbian”. Frankie described disliking the term “lesbian” as it sounded like “something green and scungey”. She said that she used “queer”, though it too was “pretty horrible”, and that she began using *kamp* after meeting the *kamp* community, as Katie also reported. Bubs said she and Piri were at first known as the “town’s tomboys”, and described how they privately began calling themselves *kamp* after their trip to Auckland, when they found the *Ca d’Oro*, and were featured, though not named, in *NZ Truth*.

Morrigan could not remember when she first heard the word lesbian, but thought that it was not “in common usage”. She said that she did not use the terms “lesbian”, “homosexual”, “kamp” or “queer” before 1970, reporting that her group used the expressions “like that”, and “you know”, and that they were like a “secret society”, speculating about “the signs”, and how “to know and recognise other ones”. Tighe also reported that her kamp crowd tried to “spot others”. Freda said that she came to love the term “lesbian”, but Emily said she disliked it, preferring “female homosexual”. Narrators’ accounts confirmed that the term kamp/camp was used as both an adjective and a noun, with both spellings being used. There seemed to be a preference for kamp/camp as an adjective, for example, as in “kamp ladies”, or “kamp crowd”, and this may be because terms like gay, kamp, lesbian or homosexual used as adjectives may be regarded as denoting “one characteristic among many”, while their use as nouns may have been less popular among the narrators because they denoted an “all-embracing essential property” (Zwicky 1997, p.22), that many pre-political lesbians were unwilling to claim.

The narrators appeared to be aware of sexual identity or orientation from an early stage. Frankie said that she realized others did “the same things”, but even at the time thought they would “get over” it, while she would not. Bubs said that she believed some of the women she had sex with were not “kamp”, but just “out for a good time”. After the episode with a married woman, she said that she decided that the idea that “one was kamp and one heterosexual” was wrong as both were “people attracted to one another”, and neither should be “blamed” for the relationship. Though Bubs presented herself as “the breadwinner, the protector, the provider”, in a traditional Maori sense, and said she had earlier thought of herself as a boy, she described how she later decided that she “didn’t have to be the big butch number all the time”. Though Bubs thought the girls she and Piri took out believed that they were boys, perhaps the girls only pretended to think this. The cases of Falleni, Bock, Rotciv, and Mr. X suggest that some women may know their partners are women, but pretend they do not and keep the “secret”. Their desires are normalised by an unspoken pretence where neither woman need confront lesbianism.

The earliest relationships the narrators saw were between men and women, where men enjoyed the privilege of functional clothing and better access to resources. Many

narrators rejected the identity of New Zealand “woman”, perhaps unconsciously understanding it was constructed through “heterosexual systems of thought” (Wittig 1992, p.32) and really a “male-identified” identity produced by heterosexual relationships (Hoagland 1988, p.300). Though unable to articulate their misgivings about this prescribed identity, becoming tomboys was one resistance against enforced heterosexualisation and feminisation. Tighe recalled understanding at age five that boys’ shorts and games represented male privilege. Morrigan said that she realized from the pictures that she did not want to be the “silly person” in the frock. Katie presented her mother as colluding with her tomboy daughter, dressing her as a boy, and justifying it because they “did not have many clothes”. Bubs said that her mother told people during the enquiry that her daughter was a tomboy because she was a girl with only older brothers, and no sisterly hand-me-downs. There were few adult models of resisting women, though Tahuri is depicted as observing women in traditional Maori communities wearing men’s clothing, and younger women cross dressing (Te Awakotuku (1989, pp.77-80), and Bubs may have been influenced by these traditions. Stage cross-dressing in circus and pantomime and the fantasies of film also offered some alternative images (Chapter 5).

Some earlier New Zealand kamp identities seem to have developed from local sex/gender models, perhaps influenced by Polynesian gender liminality models.ⁱ Hall’s 1928 depiction of Stephen the invert in relationships with “normal women” was influential and popularised the ideas of Havelock Ellis.ⁱⁱ Pat Nelson described a lover as “butch” in some areas of life and “bitch” in others, implying that they did not have fixed identities, but flexible behaviours relating to different activities, similar to Lyons and Martin (1991). The terms “butch” and “bitch” to denote active or passive sexual activities appear to have been introduced by male homosexual stewards on the “Home” boats, and the term “femme” was unknown here before the 1970s.ⁱⁱⁱ Freda said that role-playing was not discussed in “the crowd” she mixed with, and she reported that they “hadn’t any label for a femme at all”. Tighe said that women in relationships with butches were called “the ladies”, and that “butch” was in common use here during the 1960s. Doan claims this term was not used in Britain before the 1960s (Doan 2001, p.196, n.8), which may also be the case in New Zealand. For New Zealand women and men, these terms may have referred to practices rather than social roles. The butch and femme identities described by Kennedy and Davis (1991) in Buffalo, an American industrial city attracting large numbers of working-class lesbians to the steel mills, and

by Nestle (1987) in 1950s working-class lesbian bars in New York, do not appear to have existed in pre-1970 New Zealand. Rather, some pre-1970 lesbians here may have regarded themselves as “men”, or as the “real” invert, while their partners were “normal” women, like Johnny (Chapter 16). Some women, including married women, appear to have moved in and out of kamp communities according to their current relationships, as Freda and Bubs described, without taking on a lesbian identity. Emily reported that role-playing was not part of the relationship between herself and Jane, and considered that both of them had been “born homosexual”, which was “a biological thing” as “some are more female and some are more masculine”. She believed lesbianism was not “something you assume”, and that she had “no choice” other than being “honest about myself”.

Greater social controls may have existed in larger overseas communities, where women moved into organised, pre-existing communities with social boundaries and rules. Pre-1970 New Zealand communities were small, and codes of conduct may not have been as rigid, with butch and bitch/lady denoting sexual activities, rather than identities. The pre-1970 use of kamp/camp or lesbian may have described categories of practice rather than identity for some, like the lovers described by Freda, or Bubs, in communities of practice.

Significantly, Freda explained that kamp “covered whole degrees” of what kamp was about. Probably most pre-1970 women leading lesbian lives, like Joan or the “hockey ladies”, did not want to label themselves. Like Reinstein’s circles, perhaps they did not call themselves lesbians, as this would “hasten the naming of themselves as a distinct kind of person and the inevitability of her emergence in the public world” (Kennedy 1996, p.35). If community is “always, somehow, speech community” (Moonwomon-Baird 1997, p.204), then many pre-1970 lesbian communities were speech communities of meaningful silence and innuendo, asking, as Morrigan described, “is she one?” in a “secret-squirrelish way”, which she depicted as giving a sense of belonging. The reluctance to name, except within the group, illuminates the caution exercised by the women in Part 3, whose use of terms like celibate, spinster or blue-stockings might not have conveyed the sense of lesbian to the younger narrators, though it may have been clear to Freda or Bea. However, without doubt women in both sections would have understood the meaning of “lady-husband” used by Alla Atkinson.

Work, family and independence

Families often found it difficult to cope with their daughter's lesbianism. Freda's family appears to have been supportive, despite the publicity and notoriety resulting from her involvement with a murder case. Bea reported that her sisters never accepted her relationship with Betty, though she said that Betty's mother was supportive and encouraged Bea to move in, eventually giving the couple her double bed. This suggests she was aware that Betty was lesbian, knew she was in trouble after making an approach to a woman at work, and was aware of her current interest in a married woman. Her suggestion that Bea live with them can be interpreted as arranging a lesbian relationship for Betty with a respectable nurse to keep Betty at home and avoid potential scandal.

Tighe reported her father "couldn't cope" with her lesbianism and she became alienated from her family, especially after the birth of her son. She described trying to kill herself for "altruistic" reasons, as she had been told that her father would lose his job because of her lesbianism. This was not an uncommon reaction. At least one lesbian was told to live elsewhere if she was going to persist in this way of life, as she was disgracing the family (Chapter 16), similar to the apparent responses of the Beauchamp and possibly the Hodgkins families Part 3.

Frankie related the story of coming-out to her parents, and how her father, who appeared to have read the "arrested development" theory, told her that they knew she was "a bit retarded". She said that after their initial negative reactions, her parents were supportive. Bubs said that she did not tell her family she was lesbian, and felt pleased she had not done so, as otherwise she could not have enlisted her mother's support for her denial and deception during the enquiry.

The 1930s depression shadows how Freda, Bea, Betty, Katie and others lived. Remaining unmarried was possible only for women able to support themselves, as women were not eligible for the unemployment benefit (Chapter 7). Freda presented Thelma as marrying Eric because she had no other option. Women's wages were about two-thirds of the male wage, and outside the professions and skilled occupations this was insufficient for many women to support themselves adequately, the variables of class, race and age further affecting these opportunities.

The two decades from 1945 were characterised by “unsurpassed prosperity and social tranquility”, helping bring a “new distinctiveness and complexity to New Zealand society” (Dunstall 1981, p.397). However, women continued to be employed in “short-term, semi-skilled jobs and in professions of low status” (ibid. p. 415), with inequalities of pay. The number of female clerical workers rose in the Public Service from 5 to 25 per cent between 1939 and 1947 (ibid. p.427), a figure including Tighe's first lover Joan, as well as Betty, Bubs, Piri, Tighe and Morrigan who worked for the State in various capacities. Until the late 1960s, most women entered the workforce “without altering either the assumptions about their 'place' or the actual pattern of discrimination which kept them in 'sex-typed jobs' ” (Chafe 1978 in Dunstall 1981, p. 428). Though the narrators worked in traditional female occupations (teaching, nursing, post office clerks) others, and at times the same women, also worked as farm hands, drivers, or radio technicians in traditionally male work. Three narrators, Freda (who learned dancing as well), Emily and Frankie, learned shorthand and typing, and worked as stenographers. Frankie became a broadcasting technical operator, an unusual occupation for women at this time, even though women could not progress further to become technicians.

Most narrators and their partners received sufficient education or training to obtain paid work. Class and race were factors in the type of employment they obtained, as well as their gender and their lesbianism. Bea became a registered nurse, despite her limited secondary education, and Betty learned shorthand and typing and became a stenographer. Though Katie received only primary education she was able to obtain employment, and eventually became a cook. Betty, Emily, Morrigan, Tighe and Bubs attended private schools, which was unusual as only about 15 percent of secondary school students were educated outside the state system.^{iv} Though Bubs failed School Certificate and did farm work, she later gained qualifications through the Air Force and the Post Office, indicating the importance of the armed forces and public service employment for pre-1970 Maori lesbians. Morrigan attended Teachers' Training College, earning a wage during her training.^v Most narrators and their partners were fully employed throughout their working lives, Bea becoming a sister at Wellington Public Hospital, Emily working for the Government in London, Betty for the Public Service in Wellington, Katie as a cook for the Auckland Public Hospital, Julie as a secondary school teacher, and Freda in various offices in addition to her stage career.

Finding and holding down a job required compromises. Teachers had to be above reproach, and women in any occupation had to conform to societal prescriptions. Slacks were not acceptable for pre-1970 women in the public service or most private sector occupations, as women were expected to wear frocks or ladies' costumes, use make-up and have "feminine" hairstyles. Tighe described the "paraphernalia" women had to wear to work, and how "you had to put on make-up and set your hair and wear high heels and gloves and handbag and scarf and everything" and her realization that Joan had done this "every day for over 20 years". Frankie disliked "getting up every day and having to put on all this girls' gear, using all that energy to marry up who you are with what you're wearing". She and other narrators "lived for the weekends", and like lesbians elsewhere, they sought spaces where they could "wear shirts and pants" (Nestle 1987, p.37), and Frankie the "velveteen jerkin", she had a friend make, because few alternative clothes for women were available in New Zealand shops. The distinction between work and leisure clothing contributed to their sense of leading double lives. It could be dangerous to be observed wearing "masculine" clothing even during leisure hours (see Chapter 16). Clothing may be seen as the "technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self" (Craik 1994, p.1), with fashion a technique of "social conduct expressed and displayed through clothes" (ibid. p.9). For women unwilling to present themselves in feminine work clothing, there were few options. Passing as men to access male incomes and opportunities was possible for some, like Hank Tobias, and narrators reported women supporting themselves through prostitution or crime, like Charleen or Anna Hoffman (Chapter 16).

Marriage was the expected way women would be supported in pre-1970 New Zealand, and many previously married lesbians came out in the post-1970s period here as elsewhere (see, for example, Abbott and Farmer 1995), especially after the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) in 1973 (see Chapter 7). Despite the pressures to marry, most narrators resisted. Freda presented Thelma as marrying Eric in a white marriage during the 1930s depression as she had no other means of support. Three narrators married for some period of their lives. Freda explained that she married Harold Robinson in a white marriage, for companionship after her dancing career ended, and that changing her name enabled her to avoid notoriety. Katie was a WW2 war bride, describing herself as unable to resist family pressure; and like many others of her generation Morrigan married at nineteen, in 1961.

Four narrators had children, Katie and Morrigan within marriage and Tighe and Emily as single mothers. Emily adopted her child out to family friends and Tighe boarded her son while she worked to support him. Katie and Morrigan took their children into later lesbian relationships, but Morrigan said she could not leave her marriage until she met a partner willing to co-parent. Katie ended her marriage after a violent episode and after she left prison her three children remained in care until she could support them. She explained that she purchased a bed and breakfast establishment so that she could work and have the children with her. Narrators did not raise losing custody of their children because they were lesbians as an issue. Tighe had no contact with her son's father, Katie and Julie did not reveal their lesbian relationship to Katie's children or former husband, and Morrigan's former husband eventually accepted her lesbian relationship.

Most narrators rejected the societal prescriptions and the accompanying discourses of matrimony and motherhood. Married or not, an unwillingness to accept societal prescriptions and fit in with others' expectations was a common factor in how the narrators presented their pre-1970 lives.

Medical treatment and punishments

Loss of employment was a major punishment for lesbians, as it could result in their inability to support themselves and sustain the economic basis of a relationship. Several narrators experienced employment difficulties. When Lynette (Chapter 16) was asked to resign from the Wellington Post Office, she complied, as no doubt many others in similar circumstances did. The wording of the 1955 Public Service Manual (see Chapter 4) could be used to interpret lesbianism as "disgraceful", "improper" and "detrimental" conduct, leading to dismissal. Though not a criminal offence, lesbianism was regarded as a mental illness, and could also be depicted as immoral conduct. Frankie told the story of how when she was asked to resign from broadcasting after her lesbianism was revealed to station staff in Christchurch, she refused to do so. Though she described the following year as extremely stressful, when no one spoke to her, for unexplained reasons she was not dismissed. Bubs told the story of how her lesbianism was discovered when her lover's husband found a letter. An enquiry followed as to whether she was fit to work as a Post Office bank teller. She presented herself as using a strategy of deception to obtain testimonials from the local doctor and chemist stating that she was not a lesbian, but a "tomboy". She described her mother as assisting with this, though said that she felt guilty about having to lie to her. She was not dismissed, or

asked to resign, and perhaps the strategy worked because some racist Pakeha regarded rural Maori women as unable to conform to Pakeha standards of femininity. Bubs was able to join the Air Force despite this episode. However, she was not re-enlisted for a second term in the Air Force, though could not be given a dishonourable discharge, as they could obtain “no proof” against her. She was then re-employed by the Post Office, indicating that the original complaint was not kept on file.

Techniques controlling the narrators at work relied on fear, shame and the likelihood that women would resign if asked to do so rather than risk dismissal. Frankie was unusual in her refusal to resign, and Bubs in her fight against dismissal. There are stories of others in the Public Service who when their lesbianism was discovered, were encouraged to resign by being transferred to positions doing repetitive work in undesirable and remote locations, with little chance of promotion or further transfer. Many lesbians would have heard these cautionary tales (see Chapter 16).

Some techniques of containment involved ostracism and discrimination from other employees, rather than by management. Betty felt ostracised by co-workers at the Reserve Bank who became aware she was lesbian after she made an unwelcome approach to one of the women. Betty refused to leave, and “stuck it out” there for fifteen years. Many lesbians were guarded and restrained in their work situations, like Julie, as a teacher, who feared dismissal, or Katie as a cook. Some would not apply for more senior positions because this could mean employers discovered more about their lives. One US narrator explained “on jobs people actually accepted lesser work where they would not be exposed” (George in Adair and Adair 1978, p.75). Despite the threat of losing their employment, post-WW2 New Zealand lesbians did have the advantage of living during a period of full employment, and their security in knowing other jobs were available may have contributed to the desire for more openness that characterises their stories.

More frightening perhaps than the punishment of job loss, was the fear of medical treatment. Surviving ostracism and isolation could affect mental health, and lesbians who did consult doctors had good reason to fear the New Zealand mental health establishment. Gluckman’s recommendations for the treatment of lesbians as well as other local and overseas stories are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 8. His work was accessible and available, informing ordinary physicians that in treating lesbianism they

should “pay attention to the wider community implications of the illness” (Gluckman 1966, p.449). There are many stories of New Zealand lesbians forced, persuaded or enticed into treatment by their families and doctors, probably encouraged by Gluckman’s prescriptive ideology. Pre-1970 New Zealand lesbians experiencing psychiatric treatment told their stories to others, who repeated them so that they became community stories (see Chapter 16). Additionally, lesbians working in the health sector before 1970 have also reported stories of aversion therapy, psycho- pharmaceutical and electro-convulsive shock “treatment” administered to lesbians as well as to homosexual men, at places such as Porirua, Oakleigh and Sunnyside Mental Hospitals. These stories all worked as cautionary tales and as warnings of what could happen to lesbians. However, this area has not yet been formally researched in New Zealand (see also Chapter 8).

Several narrators in this study reported consulting doctors of their own volition or being taken there by their families. Emily, Frankie and Tighe all said they consulted doctors or received treatment connected with lesbianism. Thelma and Betty were also said to have consulted doctors, Thelma apparently confiding in a “Dr Walton” about consulting doctors for “her nervous and worried condition” (Lynch 1971 in Haworth and Miller 2000, pp.155-156). Emily described how her father made her see Dr. F.O. Bennett, who supported Dr Medlicott’s folie a deux defence in the Parker Hulme trial, (see Chapter 6). She explained that her father told Bennett that she had “broken up a marriage”, but he was disinclined to believe this and did not refer her for further treatment.

One narrator who did not consult a doctor was Katie, who instead went to see her priest. As the priest consistently told her she must end her relationship with Julie, and as she was not prepared to “break Julie’s heart”, Katie left the priest and the church instead, staying away for many years.

A room of one’s own

Most narrators wanted to escape from familial surveillance. Emily said she left New Zealand to be free of her family, especially after her father had forced her to see a doctor. Bea left Napier for nursing training in Wellington, while Tighe left Wellington for training in Palmerston North. Tighe described renting a Manners Street “studio” where she could paint and live independently. Bubs, Piri and Frankie told stories of going to Nelson for the fruit picking in order to leave home. Later, like many other

Maori lesbians, Bubs and Piri joined the armed forces, and after returning to Auckland for a time, Frankie moved to Wellington. Katie and Morrigan left home on marriage, in the most traditionally accepted way for women to leave their family homes.

Many narrators rented accommodation before they were able to purchase homes, and may have indirectly benefited from the provision of state housing that lessened the pressure on the increasingly undesirable inner-city rental market, enabling more single women to “go flatting” (Chapter 7). However, this was not always acceptable to families, as Tighe’s pretext of renting a “studio” indicates.

Pre-1970 lesbians needed to present as heterosexual in order to obtain rental accommodation. Tighe told the story of how another tenant tried to raise a petition to get her out, and there are similar accounts from other lesbians among the community stories. Some stories describe how lesbians have removed any evidence of lesbianism before landlords’ inspections. Most narrators eventually purchased houses, obtaining more security and escaping the threat of eviction. Bea said that she and Betty could do as they liked in their house, including dancing together. However, unlike Andrews and Kirton in the previous section, she explained that they could not use a double bed after leaving Betty’s mother, for fear of visiting friends.

The generally high levels of home ownership in New Zealand encouraged women to want to buy houses. Katie described working and saving during the 1950s to buy Willow Lodge in Christchurch, and how later she and Julie bought their house in Ponsonby, Auckland, a less expensive area at that time. Bubs too, bought in this area, obtaining a mortgage through her Post Office employment. Bea described how she and Betty bought and cleared a section in Khandallah, had their house built, paid off this property and then bought a weekend cottage at Waikanae. Emily bought property in England and, when she and Jane returned to New Zealand, bought a house in Nelson. Frankie purchased a house in Western Springs, Auckland, and Tighe described how she Teresa bought their first house in Island Bay, Wellington, after holding a garage sale to raise the deposit. She told the story of how she was again harassed by neighbours, despite owning their home, with a woman shouting “Lesbians!” at them. Despite the discrimination against extending credit to women (Chapter 7), the narrators obtained accommodation and mortgages and, like the women in Part 3, created their own

domestic spaces, essential for developing relationships, socialising with other lesbians, and for securing the privacy necessary for living as a lesbian.

Private life

Elsie Locke, writing of her heterosexual youth, commented “romantic moments are the treasure of two people, and no concern of the outside world” (Locke 1981, p.113).

However, for lesbians the desire for privacy was also linked to the fear of discovery and punishment. The use of duplicity and double lives, in order to protect their relationships, are common threads in the narrators’ stories. Kennedy suggests that the discussion of love in Reinstein’s circle was inappropriate except within an intimate relationship (1996, p.35) but, for some New Zealand narrators, this was even more restricted.

Frankie did not discuss anything with her early sexual partners because “once it’s out in the open it’s an admission”. This goes further than Reinstein’s circle, who avoided discussion of lesbianism and the term “lesbian” because this would “hasten the naming of themselves as a distinct kind of person and...emergence in the public world”.

Discretion, Kennedy suggests, was an organising principle not only for Reinstein, but also for her family who “willingly ignored or avoided” signs of her lesbianism (ibid. p.35). The relationship between sexual knowledge and ignorance is no more a simple binarism than is being “in” or “out” of the closet (Sedgwick 1990). In these circles, “you didn’t belong if you were the blabbermouth type” (Faderman 1991, p.109). Also, what might it mean to admit knowledge? Perhaps this explains the anecdote told by Sonja Davies, which I used myself in previous work referred to by Ferrall and Ellis (2002, p.82), to show that 1940s people did not know about lesbians. In this anecdote, one nurse asks another “What are lesbians?”, while another wonders, “Is it a political party”(Glamuzina and Laurie 1991, p.160). I have changed my view about this exchange, and now regard this as at least a disingenuous exchange as even deliberate dissembling. Perhaps one, or even both, nurses were lesbians, and the interaction was a conversational public display of innocence, with their pretended ignorance concealing the dangerous knowledge of lesbian existence. Even when a well-meaning heterosexual friend helped Katie’s religious anxieties by explaining “whatever one does, if it’s from a point of view of love it isn’t wrong in God’s eyes”, and though this made her “feel good”, she did not respond, and said that she “made out I didn’t hear it”.

Frankie explained that being visible could provoke repercussions from lesbians at broadcasting afraid of being “exposed”, like Prudence Gregory (see Chapter 8). Tighe

reported Joan's insistence that she must deny they had a sexual affair to everyone, and Morrigan explained that she kept her lesbian relationships a secret from her husband, so she could "go on doing what I was doing". Morrigan thought that she was able to meet her women lovers because of women being able to "spend time together in those days" without people suspecting their relationship was sexual. Katie said that she and Julie were cautious because Julie feared she would be dismissed as a secondary school teacher if her sexuality was disclosed, saying that she "minded her own business and hoped other people mind theirs".

Frankie found it difficult reconciling the need to have "men as decoys to appear to be okay", while doing "this other thing on the side". However, she realised that "the better the cover", the more chance there was of a "lasting relationship with somebody". Betty and Bea pretended to be heterosexual publicly, Betty flirting with men and Bea enjoying the male admiration of her friend who had "no interest" in them. Pretence and secrecy protected lesbian relationships. A 1968 letter to *Arena Three* claimed "People who feel really deeply are reticent about their private affairs", and that "the happiest relationships can be destroyed by public ridicule".^{vi}

Concealment was the predominant characteristic of all pre-1970 relationships and transactions, and the ways the narrators were forced to use evasion, duplicity and deception to protect their lives and relationships helps illuminate the practices of the women in Part 3. "Discretion" was not just a matter of not "coming out" to other people, but required a number of less pleasant strategies to implement successfully. Other people had to be given room so that they could avoid knowing. Rich suggested "lying" described as "discretion" might mean the "liar leads a life of unutterable loneliness" (Rich 1980, pp.190-191), and the later life of Bethell, for example, could be seen this way. Certainly, stories told among lesbians suggest that when the partners of closeted women die, the surviving woman is often unable to receive support from other lesbians, or from heterosexual friends or family unaware of the significance of the lost relationship. Keeping "the secret" may be sexy for some (Kennedy 1996, p.199 n.6), but for many pre-1970 lesbians lies, secrets and silence were inhibiting rather than liberating.

It became more difficult for New Zealand lesbians to keep "the secret" during the later 1960s, partly as a consequence of the sexual revolution, meaning the "fluid

relationship” between “knowledge and ignorance” could no longer “persist” (ibid. p.39). By the 1960s Betty and Bea were in their fifties, and it was unlikely people would have questioned them about their sexuality. However, for younger lesbians, changing social conditions both enabled and required new approaches to lesbian life and relationships. Morrigan, Tighe and Frankie, for example, said they felt uncomfortable about deception, and living with a public and private persona. Frankie explained that she did not have “the strength to live a double life” and disclosed her lesbianism to new friends, as she disliked “dishonesty” and was no longer prepared to “hide in corners”. These changing ideas prefigure the shift in strategy from discretion and invisibility to pride and visibility in the following decades.

These lesbians had lived through the time when this aspect of their selves could not be “incorporated into a tellable narrative” (Liang 1997, p.290). Narratives are “among the most important social resources for creating and maintaining personal identity” (Linde in ibid. p.288), and most of these narrators did eventually tell their stories in lesbian communities, as well as hearing the stories told by other lesbians. However, because the “enforced invisibility” through the centuries also included “inaudibility”, lesbians remain “hard to hear as lesbians” (Moonwomon-Baird 1997, p.204). Every act of lesbian visibility is “an act of resistance” (Pharr 1988, p.85), so that the narratives in this section may also assist the voices of the women in Part 3 to be heard as lesbians.

Summary

The main source of information on sexuality for the narrators was gossip from other lesbians. Books and magazines circulated, despite censorship, and were influential, particularly *TWOL*. Narrators were familiar with cases involving lesbians reported in the pre-1970 media, and most searched for and found lesbian communities, private friendship circles, or house parties, some women travelling and establishing overseas lesbian connections. All narrators eventually identified as lesbian, most using the terms camp/kamp or homosexual before 1970. Some pre-1970 lesbians regarded themselves as kamp and their partners as women who would return to heterosexuality, suggesting categories and communities of practice rather than fixed identities.

Narrators began relationships because they fell in love with other women, and all eventually had genital sex. All established committed love relationships and domestic partnerships. Most did not marry, and those who did later divorced. The material

circumstances of the mid-twentieth century enabled all the narrators to live independent lives, becoming self-supporting and, despite the difficulties of access to credit, able to purchase houses. Initially, they kept “the secret”, leading double lives, and using discretion, dissembling, denial and outright deception to protect their lives and relationships. Changing ideas about privacy, greater openness about sexuality generally, and more public discussion of lesbianism meant most no longer wanted to live a lie, and some eventually became part of the 1970s lesbian political movements.

In their retrospective recollections of their pre-1970 lesbian lives, the narrators presented themselves as women forced to lie, but who preferred honesty, forced to socialise in rough and often unsafe environments, though preferring better surroundings, and as supportive friends and passionate lovers. They presented themselves as lesbian survivors, and their stories are narratives of strength, resistance and rebellion.

ⁱ See Herdt 1994, Besnier 1994 on fakaleiti in Tonga, faa'afine in Samoa, mahu in Hawaii, Grahn 1984 and Roscoe 1996 on berdache in Native American societies. Blackwood (1999) describes identities available to females in West Sumatra, Lang (1999) describes: two-spirited” women in North America. Carmen 1988 describes the pre-1970 male-to-female transsexual communities of Wellington and Auckland.

ⁱⁱ These ideas were common among some pre-1970 homosexual men who had “trade” i.e. sex with men they did not regard as homosexual, including married men. (Personal communications from Barry Neels and Royce Sutcliffe; also Carmen 1988.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Personal knowledge as well as the opinion of several informants.

^{iv} In 1940 16 percent of secondary students were at private schools, by 1975 the proportion had dropped to 14.5 percent (Dunstall 1981, p.413)

^v By 1972 the number of students at Teachers' Colleges had doubled, reaching 10,693 (ibid).

^{vi} “Mrs. R.F.Kent”, *Arena Three* 5 (7), July 1968, cited in Hamer 1996, p.185.

PART FIVE

END WORDS

Chapter 26

The conclusions

It is a given that in every society and at every historical time some women have been attracted to other women. Attraction is one thing, but being able to live as a lesbian is another. The question motivating this entire study is, how were pre-1970 New Zealand women able to lead lesbian lives or have lesbian relationships. The research shows the importance of material circumstances in determining whether or how a woman could lead a lesbian life. If as Woolf suggests she needed “money and a room of her own” to write fiction then she required at least these basics to live as a lesbian. Pre-1970 New Zealand women leading lesbian lives needed ways to achieve economic independence and to find a room of their own, if not their own roof. The pre-1970 material circumstances for New Zealand women as explored in this study, though discriminatory and difficult, were by the twentieth century sufficiently favourable to enable some women to make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives, and defy societal prescriptions by living independently of men. Most women in this study resisted marriage, and others were later able to leave their marriages. Class and race affected these outcomes, with working-class and Maori women having fewer options to achieve independence than upper or middle-class women, and also being more at risk of containment by the state if they defied conventions. Learning how to read a wide variety of lesbian lives is essential to furthering research into lesbian histories in New Zealand.

In seeking commonalities between pre-1970 writing suggesting lesbian experiences and the stories of pre-1970 lesbian narrators, I found that the oral history narratives illuminated the writing in new and revealing ways. Taking Penelope’s lesbian perspective and using

Hoagland's lesbian conceptual framework allowed the stories to be understood in context. Each story informed an understanding of the other stories and taken together they wove a complex narrative of pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian life and relationships. Unfamiliar experiences, events and artifacts are often not recognisable before being placed in context, as evident when discussing schools of painting or writing or the natural sciences. Any New Zealand life may not be recognisable until placed in a New Zealand context, and only several oral histories can provide the critical mass required to see how specific experiences are manifest. Some lesbians did not want to be seen with others for this reason, as their activities and styles became identifiable when placed into a lesbian context. A study of New Zealand lesbian experiences suggests the tools of analysis and interpretation that might be used and the theories that could best explain them. For some heterosexual researchers, however, recognising and interpreting lesbianism was not important or seemingly relevant to their projects. They either did not notice lesbian relationships or misusing the concept of romantic friendship, chose to interpret them as platonic (for example, Gill 1993, Porter and Macdonald 1996). In other cases, scholars have actively denied that relationships in their subjects' lives were lesbian (for example, Brewer 1996, Scott 2000).

How the narrators talked about silence was key to how the written stories could be interpreted. Like Blanche Cook, I found the evidence was really there in their letters, diaries and poetry, and the question became how to read and understand these writings. When analysed in a lesbian context, I could interpret love letters between women as clear indications of lesbian romance. I could assume that passionate statements meant what they suggested, without recourse to complicated explanations of how words were used differently in the immediate past, or believing that love between earlier women was not expressed sexually. Looking at lesbianism in context provides the tools necessary for recognising it; reading about KM in isolation, for example, does not permit an understanding of how conditions for women and for lesbians during her lifetime constrained or enabled her lesbian relationships.

I learned how to interpret the silences in the writing and fill in the gaps, realizing from listening to the narrators' stories of rebellion and resistance that I should not assume that the women in Part 3 of this study did not also want to be heard and to express the

importance of their lesbian relationships. Bethell's explicit poetry, calling Pollen her "consort", and her descriptions of their domestic life and profound grief at Pollen's death signal that she wanted this relationship acknowledged. Some of KM's writing and Hodgkins' paintings suggest they, too, had comments to make about lesbianism. This study raises the question of how lesbian themes and constraints are elements of the creative process, indicating that unravelling these from a lesbian perspective will allow new and compelling interpretations, bringing deeper and more complex levels of understanding to New Zealand literature and art. The narrators' stories of how lesbianism was at first either unspoken or referred to obliquely by expressions such as "like that", illuminate how the women in Part 3 may have employed similar strategies in their work and also in their lives.

This thesis has argued that only by using discretion as their organising principle as Kennedy (1996) suggests, could most pre-1970 women in New Zealand make lesbianism the organising principle of their lives, protecting their relationships, livelihood and lesbian existence within private worlds of concealment. I began with the assumption that the women used discretion as a strategy simply to protect their employment prospects and the possibility of establishing secure lives, but realized that the alternatives during this period often required women to live hard lives of risk on the edge, within the interstices of society, engaging in disguise, crime or prostitution to survive outside accepted frameworks.

As I pondered on the implications of the legal apparatus used to contain lesbianism in New Zealand, the basis of which had traversed a long path from classical times, through religious, medical and fictional interpretations imported here by nineteenth-century colonists and added to locally by their descendants, it became clear that the authorities did not require specific laws against lesbian sex acts to contain lesbianism, as women could be controlled through the ordinary mechanisms of patriarchal society. Depending on their age, class, race and degree of resistance, pre-1970 women in lesbian relationships could face serious consequences, particularly younger women who ventured into male-controlled spaces, such as the public streets or bars. This could bring them to official attention and consequent containment through various regulations and laws. From classical times, it seems little distinction was made between the perceived promiscuities of heterosexual or lesbian activity. Examples in the present study show how pre-1970 New Zealand women in public places might be linked to prostitution and contained for moral offences, vagrancy, or

wearing disguise, and made an example of in the media. Medical and psychiatric treatment, or the threat of it, was also used to control lesbianism, classified as a symptom of pathological psychiatric illness in pre-1970 New Zealand, and women perceived as lesbian could be encouraged or forced to seek treatment. Rather than seeking the stories of New Zealand women who were the lesbian survivors of the various moral crusades and panics that gripped New Zealand officialdom during the pre-1970 decades, I might have sought the stories of those who experienced punishments or treatments and were incarcerated in girls' homes or mental asylums. The need for such research is indicated by the present study, as the implementation as well as the threat of legal, medical and social consequences would have deterred some pre-1970 women from leading the lesbian lives they wanted.

Older middle-class women who were part of discreet private networks, could meet through the women's clubs and organisations some had helped establish, or in the private lesbian worlds of their own homes and domestic spaces ("the title deeds are ours alone"). The narrators were describing events from their pre-1970 youth, and it was from these accounts that I realised young lesbians were those most at risk, as they chanced the consequences of socialising in public venues to make friends or meet partners.

The stories in this study suggest that pre-1970 women able to successfully escape the prescriptions and ideologies of heterosexual domesticity were discreet women who did not disclose their relationships to outsiders, as their existence did not then need to be acknowledged and other people could be given the room to pretend ignorance. I concluded during this research that because knowledge about lesbian possibilities and lesbian existence permeated New Zealand culture, women's pretended ignorance was their best protection against the dangerous consequences of admitting to forbidden knowledge and revealing their complicity. Also, where other people are forced to know, they may set sanctions in motion to contain what they perceive as a threat.

For threats and constraints against lesbian possibilities to be effective, cautionary tales and warnings had to circulate. People did not need to actually read the material themselves, or even to hear about it through gossip, to learn that lesbianism was not acceptable, as the silences were meaningful. Paradoxically, anti-lesbian discourse itself unsettled heteroreality by confirming lesbian existence, and knowledge about lesbianism in New Zealand

increased as media reports filled in the gaps, conveying the idea of lesbian existence and the possibility of alternatives.

In interrogating my own experience alongside that of the written and narrated stories I realised that the so-called double life many were forced to live was a range of lives, some constructed through half-truths and omissions, and others produced by courage, resistance and rebellion. The study suggests that pre-1970 women who successfully lived as lesbians presented themselves as conforming to gender prescriptions in matters of dress and behaviour to hold down jobs, have access to housing and maintain relations with family, neighbours and heterosexual friends. The strategies used to manage the contradictions in their lives were discretion that sometimes became dissembling, denial that could be duplicity, and silences and masquerades that could become lesbian inaudibility and invisibility. At the same time, narrators took delight in resistance and subversion, in taking risks, and in the dangers of discovery. Their narratives of resistance show how some pre-1970 lesbians could balance the complexities of their many lives, disguising rebellion within outward conformity at work and in other situations controlled by heterosexual culture.

The question of what drove women like Elsie Andrews or Ursula Bethell to act on their desires, and live life on the edge, is partially answered by these insights from the narrators' stories. The narrators took risks, seeking ways to have lesbian relationships without being caught, because they fell in love with particular women. Popular culture manufactured, promoted and reinforced the heterosexual ideologies of romance that also encouraged lesbian love. Women in this study developed those "attachments...so much less restful than friendships" (Willard 1889 in Faderman 1999, p.33), illuminated by Frankie's remark that "hormones just drive you wherever you need to go", at least during that "feverish dream called youth" (Lister in Whitbread 1988, p.210). However, only economically independent women could translate lesbian romance into a way of life.

The women in this study were not victims. They pushed the boundaries of what it was possible to become, resisted the prevailing ideologies and made up alternatives for themselves. Many felt entitled to the freedoms and privileges enjoyed by boys and men, and rejected the New Zealand prescriptions of domesticity and heterosexual conformity for

women. Material progress for women meant progress for the possibility of lesbian expression. This study suggests many women themselves created the circumstances enabling them to lead lesbian lives, by completing education or training, leaving home, obtaining paid employment, taking risks and facing alienation from their families. Towards the end of the period some who were driven into leading double lives and forced to lie began to feel that they would not and, in some cases, could not, continue lives of concealment. From socialising in private friendship networks, some established more accessible groups and meeting-places (“start with something simple”) and began to meet in publicly visible spaces.

The denial of lesbian existence impoverishes the understanding of earlier New Zealand women’s lives. As lesbian history is contained within “the minor details of ordinary life” (Hamer 1996, p.4), developing new ways to use existing sources of information will help scholars move beyond heterosexualised and limited accounts of the New Zealand past, and to read the silences and fill in the gaps. It must be assumed that often women disguised the evidence of their lesbian lives, and also that family or friends may have destroyed or removed material. The fragments that remain require an awareness of the context within which lesbian lives existed, and of the compromises women needed to make if they were to survive within pre-1970 New Zealand society. Further, many women left poetry, letters and diaries clearly indicating lesbianism; these materials need to be placed together with information about the details of their lives and interpreted accordingly.

I also concluded from this study that women in lesbian relationships were always named, labelled and punished, from the tribades of classical times to the female homosexualists of early twentieth-century New Zealand. The many terms used for resisting women suggest that not only were the women characterised and named by others, but that they may also have named themselves using terms that, as Faderman (1994, 1999) suggests, are now lost to us. The old maids, bluestockings, lady husbands and kamp ladies of this study indicate some of the names pre-1970 New Zealand women used for themselves.

By assembling stories constructed from a selection of written and oral sources this study provides a new basis for understanding pre-1970 New Zealand lesbian lives. The desire for lesbian relationships can be understood as an ordinary part of women’s experience that has

been demonised, disallowed and contained through silence and social punishments. Despite such mechanisms of anti-lesbianism limiting and constraining their options, some pre-1970 New Zealand women still imagined alternatives for themselves, acted on their desires, and led lesbian lives of silent resistance and hidden rebellion.

I conclude this thesis with the words of Adrienne Rich with which the study began, that silences must not be confused “with any kind of absence”. Lesbians have never been absent from New Zealand society. Strategies of silence provided safety for their lesbian lives and relationships, while they lived with the dangers of discovery. KM’s epitaph captures this contradiction well: Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.

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