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**Reading Community: Periodicals as Archives for Australian  
Lesbian Public Cultures 1970-2000  
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**Reading Community: Periodicals as Archives for Australian  
Lesbian Public Cultures 1970-2000**

Submitted by

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Bachelor of Arts (Hons) (UniMelb)

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the histories of Australian lesbian periodicals from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s and their role in maintaining and documenting the varied lesbian readership communities. Further, the place of the magazine medium in articulating Australian lesbian identities and subcultures will be analysed, noting the conversations between writers and editors across and within publications. The 1990s will be highlighted as a transitional period, encapsulating multiple changes in the production of the periodicals, including the sharp increase in city-based newsletters and their downfall by the end of the decade. Evolving discourses around the place of lesbian feminism, queer politics and homonormativity peaked during this decade, shaping an emerging generational divide. This thesis is defined by a close reading of the magazines, imagining them as lesbian spaces for the exploration of significant topics and the articulation of tension and division.

This thesis explores the rich archives of Australian lesbian periodicals, noting how they preserve representations of Australian lesbian communities. The publications' entanglements with various political, social and cultural movements will be highlighted, developing a specific voice influenced by lesbian feminism. The magazines' production will be examined, changing from collective practices to individual ownership and how this impacted revenue raising from advertising and connections to business. Lesbian motherhood will be explored, from the discursive creation of the identity to responses to conservative rhetoric. The development of lesbian sexual public cultures will be detailed, noting the evolution of lesbian sexuality and the place of state recognition of

partnerships. Visual components of the magazines' will be incorporated, with attention to lesbian dress and its connection to identity and subcultural affiliation. Taking the magazines as lesbian space, who has been included and excluded from this imagined community will be considered, noting the constructions of Australian lesbian identity boundaries. This thesis will explore the complex histories of Australian lesbian periodicals, analysing what was discussed and how this impacted Australian communities.

## **Declaration**

This is to certify that:

- i. This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.
- ii. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.
- iii. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

.....

Harriet Steele

[February 2024]

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## Notes on Sources, Names and Language

One of the magazines detailed within this thesis, *Lesbian Network*, was designated as ‘women-only,’ limiting access to the periodical. To support this position direct quotes from the magazine will not be included in this thesis. Instead, references will be based on secondary accounts.

Many people referred to in this thesis have changed their names for a variety of reasons, either during the period under study or after. A name change has been indicated in parentheses at first instance in each chapter, with the preferred name used throughout the thesis. When referencing articles from the magazines themselves I have kept the originally published name for ease tracing footnotes. In the case of gender transition, previous names have not been included.

I have attributed the term ‘lesbian’ to the readers of the magazines broadly, however, this did not reflect all the identities of all readers. When someone specifies an identity aside from lesbian, that is what I use to describe them. I feel this is appropriate as reader surveys indicate majority lesbian identification and the magazines’ themselves use lesbian to define themselves.

Acceptable language for diverse sexualities and genders has changed over time. Notably, the word ‘queer’ has been reclaimed to refer to a broad spectrum of experiences outside of the heterosexual and cisgender norms. Further, ‘queer’ has been used to describe a politics and a field of academic study which focuses on diverse sexualities and genders.

Similarly, within the lesbian community, the use of 'dyke' to refer to oneself has developed and was used by the women detailed within this thesis. I have included 'dyke' when directly referencing the magazines. Finally, this thesis discusses transphobia and includes references to article titles with slurs, such as 'trany'. However, in analysis of this transphobia, I avoid using this word other than in citations or direct quotes.

## **List of Acronyms**

ALD – *Australian Lesbian Diary*

ALM - Australasian Lesbian Movement

AGLTA – Australian Gay and Lesbian Travel Association

AQuA – Australian Queer Archives

ART – Assisted Reproductive Technology

CAMP – Campaign Against Moral Persecution

CWA – CAMP Women’s Association

GLRL – Gay and Lesbian Legal Rights Lobby of New South Wales

GALAWA – Gay and Lesbian Archives of Western Australia

ICA – Intercountry Adoption

IVF – In Vitro Fertilisation

LESY – Lesbian Exchange System

LGBT (QI) – Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (Queer Intersex)

LOTL – *Lesbians on the Loose*

LSP and LSI – Lesbian Space Project and Lesbian Space Incorporated

SDA – *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*

SOW – Sexually Outrageous Women

SSO – *Sydney Star Observer*

VWLLFA – Victorian Women’s Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive

WACKIT – Women and Children in Transition

## **Introduction**

A group of women sit around a table in a crowded inner-city bar. It's the mid-1990s, so some might be dressed in casual corporate wear, while others may be influenced the leather scene, incorporating the material into their style. Others might just be wearing a T-shirt and jeans with some political slogan printed on the front. To a keen eye, they might be understood to be lesbians. Passers-by can hear their conversation, not attempting to hide what they are planning. The women are disgruntled, noting the lack of accessible information on lesbian events in their city. The thought of centralising this information, and making the lesbian community of their city visible, is exciting. Plans are made to develop a newsletter. Perhaps it's distributed through word of mouth, private but evolving networks. Maybe they organise for it to be picked up at the many gay venues in their city. Besides bars and restaurants, bookshops are also named as a place of community making. Someone knows someone who owns a printing business, primarily women focused. Another has a permissive boss that allows them to use the office printer. The group might be small, so fake names are generated to exaggerate community interest. Or names aren't used at all, articles and content attributed instead to the collective. The newsletter might grow to national distribution, requiring substantial revenue to support the new glossy magazine. Advertisers are contacted, primarily lesbian and women's businesses initially, but increasing mainstream interest in the lavender dollar prompts new partnerships. The newsletter might never grow, the collective becoming weary of the arduous production process. It folds, ending its run,

but for a while, it was a focal point of the lesbian community of the newsletter's city, such as the life cycle of many Australian lesbian periodicals.

From the 1970s onwards, there was at least one lesbian periodical published somewhere in Australia. In the 1970s and 80s, there were a limited number of periodicals, with *Lesbian Newsletter* spanning this period. However, there was a boom of smaller magazines in the 1990s, many reflecting the lesbian community of their city. These newsletters were not just a space for community event information but for articles detailing legal rights activism, an astrology column, and potentially a lesbian fashion spread. Letters to the editor and vox pops allowed readers to interact directly and respond to the material presented, actively shaping the discourses that evolved. This thesis argues that periodicals were lesbian spaces, maintained lesbian communities, and shaped lesbian public cultures. They facilitated Australian lesbians to explore important topics related to their lives, including motherhood and intimate relationships. The medium of the magazines also allowed for the articulation of tension between conflicting groups and opinions. The magazines archived the vibrant Australian lesbian public cultures of the 1970s to the 1990s, representing a distinct period in Australian lesbian history.

This thesis argues that Australian lesbian publications created networks of connection, maintaining Australian lesbian communities from the local to the national level.

Alongside this work, the magazines also acted as a medium for the articulation of Australian lesbian identities and subcultures, allowing for their expression and documentation. This thesis also contends that the 1990s was a significant transitional

moment for Australian lesbian publications, representing both the boom in periodical numbers and their downfall by the end of the decade, with new production styles developed in-between. The magazines serve as an archive of Australian lesbian public cultures. This thesis is driven by questions of this archive, asking what do the magazines tell us about Australian lesbian community and identity construction? What was discussed and how did this impact conceptions of lesbian identity? How did this change over time? How did the medium of the magazine facilitate continued community discussions, including when conflict erupted? How did the periodicals connect and change over time and place? This thesis will explore these questions, delving into the complex histories of Australian lesbian periodicals. To do this, significant literature on related topics such as histories of Australian feminism and Australian LGBT communities, will be detailed, showcasing an original intervention into Australian lesbian histories.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Australian Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Histories**

Largely, Australian LGBT histories have explored political movements and activism. This perspective is seen in Graham Willett's *Living Out Loud*.<sup>1</sup> Barbara Baird has questioned the depiction of lesbians within this book, noting how lesbian narratives were absent outside of coalition politics.<sup>2</sup> Baird noted the various engagements of

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Willett, *Living out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Baird, "Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism by Graham Willett – AHR," March 2001, <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2001/03/01/living-out-loud-a-history-of-gay-and-lesbian-activismby-graham-willett/>.

Australian lesbians, from community-oriented women's and lesbian events to the political involvement in anti-war and Indigenous rights activism. These elements were heavily present within Australian lesbian publications, often the space for organising and detailing these many events. The magazine focus differentiates this thesis from narratives focused on political movements, detailing an Australian lesbian cultural history through a discourse analysis of the periodicals. The lesbian focus also defines the research, highlighting an understudied community with complex histories.

Some work has addressed Australian lesbian histories. Ruth Ford has explored lesbian experiences within the armed services post-war.<sup>3</sup> Lucy Chesser documented early lesbian groups, such as the Australasian Lesbian Movement, which predated Gay Liberation.<sup>4</sup> Both Rebecca Jennings and Sophie Robinson have completed oral histories focusing on post-war Sydney experiences.<sup>5</sup> Further, both explored the bar scene before and during the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Jennings and Robinson have also discussed lesbian feminist politics and experiences, including intimacy and separatism.<sup>7</sup> Robinson has

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Ford, "Disciplined, Punished and Resisting Bodies: Lesbian Women and the Australian Armed Services, 1950s-60s," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 9 (January 1996) 53-77, <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.495803176435041>.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx: 'Non-Political' Lesbian Organisation in Melbourne, 1969-1980," *Hecate* 22, no. 1 (1996): 69-92.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History*, Australian History (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2015); S. C. Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s" (PhD, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Jennings, "A Room Full of Women: Lesbian Bars and Social Spaces in Postwar Sydney," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 5 (2012): 813-29; Sophie Robinson, "Bar Dykes and Lesbian Feminists: Lesbian Encounters in 1970s Australian Feminism," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 22 (2016): 52-65.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin: Lesbian Feminist Theories of Intimacy," in *Intimacy, Violence and Activism: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives on Australasian History and Society*, ed. Graham Willett and Yorick Smaal (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2013), 133-46; Rebecca Jennings, "Creating Feminist Culture: Australian Rural Lesbian-Separatist Communities in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of Women's History* 30, no. 2 (2018): 88-111,



explored lesbian sex radicalism, arguing against the discrete distinction between this subculture and lesbian feminism, noting overlapping participants.<sup>8</sup>

Barbara Baird and Rebecca Jennings have investigated lesbian motherhood. Jennings has detailed experiences of lesbian mothers in the 1970s, noting interactions with the Family Court system and the feminist politics of the time.<sup>9</sup> Baird detailed depictions of lesbian mothers in the 1980s and the late 1990s, including a discussion of lesbian publications.<sup>10</sup> Lesbian Motherhood will be explored in Chapter Three. Further, Baird has explored the long history of lesbian marriage in Australia, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>11</sup> The sexual citizenship of Australian lesbians has been explored by Baird, focusing on the late 1990s and early 2000s with the election of the Howard federal government.<sup>12</sup>

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<https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0015>; Sophie Robinson, “Eggs, O’Wheels, Hexagons, Repairs: Lesbian Feminist Utopias in Australia, 1970s–1980s,” *Women’s History Review* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 107–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2021.1954337>.

<sup>8</sup> Sophie Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’: Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s,” *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 441–56.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Jennings, “Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 2 (August 2012): 502–17; Rebecca Jennings, “‘The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life’: Lesbian Motherhood in Australia 1945–1990,” in *Australian Mothering*, ed. Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 179–200, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20267-5\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20267-5_8); Rebecca Jennings, “The Boy-Child in Australian Lesbian Feminist Discourse and Community,” *Cultural and Social History* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 63–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2015.1093283>.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Baird, “An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers: Two Points of Emergence,” *Women’s History Review* 21, no. 5 (November 2012): 849–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2012.658179>.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Baird, “‘Kerryn and Jackie’: Thinking Historically about Lesbian Marriages,” *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 126 (2005): 253–71; Barbara Baird, “Before the Bride Really Wore Pink,” *M/C Journal* 15, no. 6 (December 2012): 2–2, <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.584>.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Baird, “Contexts for Lesbian Citizenships across Australian Public Spheres,” *Social Semiotics* 14, no. 1 (April 2004): 67–84; Barbara Baird, “The Politics of Homosexuality in Howard’s Australia,” in *Acts of Love and Lust: Sexuality in Australia from 1945-2010*, ed. Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings, and Robert Reynolds (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 130–50.

Further research in Australian LGBT histories was explored through *Homophobia: an Australian history*.<sup>13</sup> The work of Shirleene Robinson and Robert Reynolds, including material drawn from their National Oral History project documenting Australian Lesbian and Gay Life Stories, provided contextual details and generational differences of experience. <sup>14</sup> Alongside national projects, state-based histories provided insight into differing experiences. Shirleene Robinson has researched experiences in Queensland, which were unique due to the homophobia of the Joh Bjelke-Petersen state government of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>15</sup> Barbara Baird has explored law reform in Tasmania.<sup>16</sup> Further, Judith Ion's thesis explores lesbian history in Canberra.<sup>17</sup> To gain insight into Western

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<sup>13</sup> Shirleene Robinson, ed., *Homophobia: An Australian History* (Annandale, N.S.W: The Federation Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Reynolds and Shirleene Robinson, "Australian Lesbian and Gay Life Stories: A National Oral History Project," *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 89 (July 2, 2016): 363–76; Scott McKinnon, Robert Reynolds, and Shirleene Robinson, "Negotiating Difference Across Time: The Temporal Meanings of the Sydney Mardi Gras in Lesbian and Gay Life Narratives," *Journal of Australian Studies* 42, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 314–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2018.1499670>; Robert Reynolds and Shirleene Robinson, "Marriage as a Marker of Secular Inclusion? Oral History and Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Marriage in Contemporary Australia," *Journal of Religious History* 43, no. 2 (2019): 269–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12591>; Scott McKinnon, Shirleene Robinson, and Robert Reynolds, "'I Could Tell I Wasn't like Everybody Else': Toward a History of Queer Childhoods in Australia," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 13, no. 2 (2020): 268–87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcy.2020.0038>; Robert Reynolds and Shirleene Robinson, *Gay and Lesbian, Then and Now: Australian Stories from a Social Revolution* (Melbourne, AUSTRALIA: Black Inc., 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Shirleene Robinson, "Homophobia as Party Politics: The Construction of the 'Homosexual Deviant' in Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland," *Queensland Review* 17, no. 1 (2010): 29–45; Shirleene Robinson, "Responding to Homophobia: HIV/AIDS, Homosexual Community Formation and Identity in Queensland, 1983–1990," *Australian Historical Studies* 41, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 181–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314611003716879>.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Baird, "Sexual Citizenship in 'the New Tasmania,'" *Political Geography*, Geographies as sexual citizenship, 25, no. 8 (November 1, 2006): 964–87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.08.008>.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Ion, "'She Gave Me That Look': A History of Lesbian (Feminist) Community in Canberra 1965-1984" (Canberra, Australian National University, 2003), <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/10875>.

Australian perspectives, I went outside of the history discipline, including museum studies and semiotic analyses.<sup>18</sup> Jean Taylor's books provide significant insight into lesbian feminist entanglements in Victoria from the 1970s to the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> Although this thesis did look into magazines across Australia, like many histories of LGBT Australia, there is an emphasis on Melbourne and Sydney experiences. However, further work could detail the specific histories of other states and cities in Australia.

Although there are significant Australian lesbian histories, often lesbian experiences have been folded into broader gay political movements. The work of Rebecca Jennings has established the significant lesbian histories of Sydney post the Second World War, largely relying on oral histories to articulate lesbian lifestyles of this period. Baird similarly has analysed Australian lesbian histories in relation to shifting political ideologies and the community's connection to the state. This thesis differs, by exploring the histories of Australian lesbian magazines as a way of examining Australian lesbian communities and their cultural practices. Further, while some work has explored the 1990s, this thesis offers a more detailed examination, arguing that it was a significant transitional moment for Australian lesbian magazines, reflecting changes in the broader lesbian communities.

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<sup>18</sup> "The Gay Museum - 2003 | Jo Darbyshire," accessed May 3, 2022, <https://www.jodarbyshire.com/other-projects/curatorial-work/the-gay-museum-2003>; Reece Plunkett, "Making Things Otherwise: An Ethnogenealogy of Lesbian and Gay Social Change in Western Australia" (PhD, Perth, W.A., Murdoch University, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Jean Taylor, *Brazen Hussies: A Herstory of Radical Activism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria 1970-1979* (Brunswick East, Vic.: Dyke Books, 2009); Jean Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes: Radical Lesbian Feminist Activism in Victoria during the 1980s* (Brunswick East, Vic.: Dyke Books, 2012); Jean Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!: In Victoria in the 1990s*, (Brunswick East, Vic.: Dyke Books, 2016).

## **Histories of the Australian Gay Press**

Histories of the Australian gay press are part of general histories of gay culture but have rarely received direct attention on their own. Bill Calder's analysis of the 'Golden Age' of Australian gay print media has laid the foundations for further exploration of the topic.<sup>20</sup> Although Calder paid attention to lesbian publications, dedicating a chapter to the topic, the research completed within this thesis complicates his conclusions.

Calder divides Australian lesbian periodicals into three categories which are broadly chronological. Calder begins with the 'liberation influenced' periodicals dominant during the 1970s and into the 1980s, these publications evolved from Women's and Gay Liberation through collective publishing, staking a claim to lesbian space in Australian gay print culture.<sup>21</sup> The next category Calder defined was lesbian erotica exploring sex radicalism with the publication of *Wicked Women* in 1988.<sup>22</sup> This magazine marked a significant departure in content, pushing the boundaries of lesbian sexuality through the exploration of sadomasochism.<sup>23</sup> Its production style aligns, however, with Calder's next category, only its content separating it from later magazines. Calder's final category is represented by 'private publishers who aimed to build the lesbian community in all its diversity'.<sup>24</sup> This publishing style embraced commercial opportunities, notably

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<sup>20</sup> William (Bill) Francis Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era: Australian Magazines and Newspapers 1970-2000" (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2015); Bill Calder, *Pink Ink: The Golden Era for Gay and Lesbian Magazines* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); Bill Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners: Both Used Media to Advance Lesbian Goals," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 413–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1105842>; Bill Calder, "Free Gay Community Newspapers: Advertising Synergies Led To Expansion," *Media History* 22, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 232–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2015.1108841>.

<sup>21</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 115.

<sup>22</sup> Calder, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Calder, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Calder, 115.

advertising, to build the magazines' base, with their content aligning with lifestyle material, dominating in the 1990s. Calder argued that, unlike previous publications, they did not adhere to 'any strict feminist or lesbian separatist agenda'.<sup>25</sup> Like previous magazines, I would argue that they wished to maintain lesbian space. These magazines were grounded in the lesbian feminism of the 1970s, however, this did not limit them from questioning these politics, with the emergence of queer politics influencing critiques.

These categories are not as distinct as Calder has presented—notably, private ownership dominated from the 1980s onwards with the emergence of *Wicked Women*. A throughline of the maintenance and sometimes the creation of lesbian communities can be seen in all lesbian publications. This thesis delves deeper into this aspect of the magazines, exploring the shifting lesbian identities and communities represented by the magazines. Compared to Calder, greater attention is paid to content, this thesis analyses discourses over time. I also wish to question an emphasis on a certain kind of politics as uniquely political, especially concerning the perceived apolitical nature of 1990s publications.

### **Histories of Feminist and Lesbian Publications**

This research sits alongside histories of the feminist press, particularly in Australia, and lesbian publications internationally. Australia's long-running *Lesbian Newsletter* evolved from the *Women's Liberation Newsletter* in the mid-1970s. Trish Luker has

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<sup>25</sup> Calder, 115.

written on the politics of feminist presses, noting the ‘belief that the printed word could incite social change’.<sup>26</sup> Women lacked production skills initially, but following a do-it-yourself ethos, they soon taught themselves printing.<sup>27</sup> This effort was reflected in Sybylla Press, beginning in 1975.<sup>28</sup> There was a crossover between *Lesbian Newsletter*’s production collective and members of the Sybylla co-operative, with the Press taking on debts to help the financially struggling *Newsletter* in 1980.<sup>29</sup> Both practised volunteer labour, dedicated to feminist principles which were critical of patriarchal capitalism.<sup>30</sup> This perspective differs from the contemporaneous British feminist magazine *Spare Rib*, which Lucy Delap noted ‘initially adopted commercial strategies and prioritized economic viability’.<sup>31</sup> Balancing financial stability and lesbian feminist political practices remained an issue for *Lesbian Newsletter*. Continued use of volunteer labour into the 1990s raised significant questions about lesbian publishing practices, political beliefs and the need for revenue. These topics will be explored in Chapter Two of this thesis. Louise Poland noted that ‘in the 1970s and 80s, Australia’s feminist presses were politically – culturally-led rather than market-driven’.<sup>32</sup> Lesbian publications of this time followed a similar focus, developing lesbian politics, cultural practices and

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<sup>26</sup> Trish Luker, “Women into Print: Feminist Presses in Australia,” in *Everyday Revolutions: Remaking Gender, Sexuality and Culture in 1970s Australia*, ed. Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott (ANU Press, 2019), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Luker, “Women into Print,” 127.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret McCormack, “A History of Sybylla Press,” *Publishing Studies*, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 18.

<sup>29</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 130.

<sup>30</sup> Luker, “Women into Print,” 129.

<sup>31</sup> Lucy Delap, “Feminist Business Praxis and Spare Rib Magazine,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 32, no. 3–4 (October 2, 2021): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2021.1972657>.

<sup>32</sup> Louise Poland, “The Devil and the Angel? Australia’s Feminist Presses and the Multinational Agenda,” *Hecate* 29, no. 2 (2003): 123.

communities. This thesis highlights lesbian publications, noting connections to the broader feminist movements while emphasising the creation of distinct lesbian spaces.

Research has been completed on lesbian publications and media representations internationally. Georgina Turner researched the first decade of the British lesbian magazine, *Diva* from 1994 to 2004.<sup>33</sup> Jan Whitt has covered smaller lesbian publications in the United States.<sup>34</sup> Aside from lesbian publications, research into lesbian representations in the mainstream press has also been completed. Sherrie Inness discussed representations of lesbians in American mainstream media from the 1960s to the 1990s.<sup>35</sup> Similar work has been completed in Australia by Kate Farhall, looking at depictions of intimate relationships between women in *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* from 1973 to 2013.<sup>36</sup> Barbara Freeman has discussed lesbian representations within the Canadian women's magazine, *Chatelaine*.<sup>37</sup> Other magazine studies have analysed the role of different subjectivities in reading and interpreting representations, with a particular focus on lesbian and, more broadly, gay identities' responses to advertising.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Georgina Turner, "CATCHING THE WAVE: Britain's Lesbian Publishing Goes Commercial," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 6 (2009): 769–88.

<sup>34</sup> Jan Whitt, "A 'Labor from the Heart': Lesbian Magazines from 1947-1994," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (2001): 229–51.

<sup>35</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, "'They're Here, They're Flouncy, Don't Worry about Them': Depicting Lesbian in Popular Magazines, 1965-1995," in *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, USA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 52–97.

<sup>36</sup> Kate Farhall, "'Girl-on-Girl Confessions!' Changing Representations of Female-Female Sexuality in Two Australian Women's Magazines," *Sexualities* 21, no. 1–2 (February 2018): 212–32.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Freeman, "From No Go to No Logo: Lesbian Lives and Rights in *Chatelaine*," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 4 (2006): 815–41.

<sup>38</sup> Katherine Sender, "Gay Readers, Consumers and a Dominant Gay Habitus: 25 Years of the Advocate Magazine," *Journal of Communication*, March 2001, 73–99; Katherine Sender, "Sex

## **(Lesbian) Feminist Historiography**

The interplay between Australian lesbian identities and feminism within the periodicals under study cannot be disentangled. Since the 1970s, a grounding for Australian lesbian identities has been some understanding of feminism, from the deep involvement in Women's Liberation in the 1970s to the changes in 1990s feminism. Reading the periodicals required knowledge of these changes in Australian feminism. Significant work has been done on histories of feminist movements in Australia. These include Marilyn Lake's *Getting Equal*, Gisela Kaplan's *The Meagre Harvest*, Chilla Bulbeck's *Living Feminism*, and Michelle Arrow's *The Seventies*.<sup>39</sup> The place of lesbianism within these narratives is largely uneasy. Kaplan notes that lesbians were understood to be 'either a threat or an embarrassment' for the Women's movement.<sup>40</sup> Arrow's inclusion of Gay Liberation in her account allowed for more exploration of lesbianism in Australia, however, the unsteady place of lesbians between Women's and Gay Liberation left the

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Sells: Sex, Class and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, no. 3 (2003): 331–65; Tom Reichert, "Lesbian Chic' Imagery in Advertising: Interpretations and Insights of Female Same-Sex Eroticism," *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 9–22; Margaret E. Gonsoulin, "Liberated and Inclusive? An Analysis of Self-Representation in a Popular Lesbian Magazine," *Journal of Homosexuality* 57, no. 9 (2010): 1158–73; Diana Milillo, "Sexuality Sells: A Content Analysis of Lesbian and Heterosexual Women's Bodies in Magazine Advertisements," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 12, no. 4 (2008): 381–92; Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley, "Ad(Dressing) the Dyke: Lesbian Looks and Lesbians Looking," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. Peter Horne (1996: Routledge, n.d.), 178–90; Reina Lewis, "Looking Good: The Lesbian Gaze and Fashion Imagery," *Feminist Review*, no. 55 (Spring 1997): 92–109.

<sup>39</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 1999); Gisela T. Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest: The Australian Women's Movement, 1950s-1990s* (St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1996); Chilla Bulbeck, *Living Feminism: The Impact of the Women's Movement on Three Generations of Australian Women, Reshaping Australian Institutions* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political, and the Making of Modern Australia* (Sydney, NSW, Australia: NewSouth, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest*, 98.



articulation of lesbian experiences limited between the exploration of these two political movements.

However, many lesbian activists believed they had been marginalised from the broader Women's Liberation Movement and Gay Liberation, which led to the emergence of lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminism is often attributed to a particular form of cultural feminism. Taylor and Rupp define lesbian feminism as 'a variety of beliefs and practices based on the core assumption that a connection exists between an erotic and/or emotional commitment to women and political resistance to patriarchal domination'.<sup>41</sup> The legacy of lesbian feminism continues to be debated and discussed. Taylor and Rupp note that critiques of cultural feminism have attached themselves to lesbian feminism.<sup>42</sup> In particular, arguments over biological essentialism leading to trans-exclusionary practices are linked to lesbian feminists.<sup>43</sup> Further, the viability of separatism and building an alternative culture as a feminist political practice have been criticised as part of questioning cultural feminism.<sup>44</sup> Alongside these pertinent criticisms, was a sense that lesbian feminism was tired and dated, explicitly tying the practices to the 1970s as new feminist sensibilities emerged in the 1990s. However, some have argued for a return to lesbian feminism, including Sara Ahmed in *Living a Feminist Life*.<sup>45</sup> She

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<sup>41</sup> Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 33.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor and Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism," 33.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor and Rupp, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor and Rupp, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Kath Browne, Marta Olsak, and Julie Podmore, "Reclaiming Lesbian Feminisms: Beginning Discussions on Communities, Geographies and Politics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 56 (May 1, 2016): 113–23, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.01.007>; Sara Ahmed, "Lesbian Feminism," in *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 213-234.

constructs lesbian feminism ‘as a politics of wilfulness’ while arguing for a renewed intersectional perspective alongside these politics.<sup>46</sup> Lesbian feminism propelled the Australian magazines under study, documenting lesbian identities and cultural practices. Further, divisions were often based on changing politics of lesbian feminism, debated within the magazines.

A significant feature of Australian feminism is the intent of state institutionalisation to grant equality. As feminism was brought into the Australian state by the 1980s, funding arrangements formalised women’s services.<sup>47</sup> This funding developed the professionalisation of this previously informal workforce. Notably, the ‘femocrat’ evolved, referring to women who had entered public service to achieve feminist goals. It is challenging to assess the lesbian presence within femocrats accurately, however, lesbians’ early heavy connection to women’s services indicates that some may have continued as these areas professionalised. Australian feminism, moving into the 1990s, was challenged by the rise of neoliberalism and waning visibility.<sup>48</sup> Significantly with the Howard federal government elected in 1997, the place of the femocrat was declining, connected to cuts to the public service apparatus sustaining state feminism.<sup>49</sup> This changing landscape of Australian feminism was reflected within the Australian lesbian media, with evolving experiences and beliefs grounding the politics of the periodicals, including calls for and against state engagement to achieve equality. This thesis reflects

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<sup>46</sup> Ahmed, “Lesbian Feminism,” 223.

<sup>47</sup> Marian Sawyer and Gwendolyn Gray Jamieson, “The Women’s Movement and Government,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 29, no. 82 (October 2, 2014): 405, 407, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.971695>.

<sup>48</sup> Marian Sawyer, “Australia: The Fall of the Femocrat,” in *Changing State Feminism*, ed. Joyce Outshoorn and Johanna Kantola (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 20.

<sup>49</sup> Sawyer, “Australia: The Fall of the Femocrat,” 29.

on changing understandings of Australian feminism as represented within the magazines. This focus highlights Australian lesbian experiences, often overlooked and undervalued in narratives of Australian feminism.

### **Lesbian (Feminist) Historiography**

This thesis examines how lesbian identities were constructed, communicated, and maintained by the periodicals. Reading these constructions, I am influenced by Nan Alamilla Boyd's argument that 'lesbian history is actually the history of an idea rather than a group of people.'<sup>50</sup> In this sense this thesis explores lesbian identity as a constructed idea, rather than an innate sexuality. Even sexual practices were maintained discursively within the magazines, as will be examined in Chapter Four. As Martha Vicinus stated, 'lesbians are a social construct produced in the process of relating to others'.<sup>51</sup> The periodicals are spaces for the discursive creation of Australian lesbian identities, with readers and writers constructing and maintaining communities. Throughout this thesis, community is used to define readership connections across and within publications, representing local and national networks of Australian lesbians. Further, lesbian communities will be used to represent subcultural groups, connected to specific lifestyle practices, politics and dress, with one example being the lesbian sex radicalism community. Vicinus states of scholarship, 'we lack any general agreement about what constitutes a lesbian'.<sup>52</sup> This lack of agreement is seen in the publications

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<sup>50</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, "The History of the Idea of the Lesbian as Kind of Person," *Feminist Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 362.

<sup>51</sup> Martha Vicinus, "Lesbian History: All Theory and No Facts or All Facts and No Theory?," *Radical History Review*, no. 60 (1994): 62.

<sup>52</sup> Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 468.

under examination, this thesis tracing some of the tensions around Australian lesbian identities and community boundaries. As neither lesbian identity and community is understood as innate and natural, this thesis will investigate who was included and excluded in the discursive creation of Australian lesbianism within the magazines. This demarcation of lesbian identity and community is the theme of Chapter Six, noting the place of race, ethnicity and gender identity within Australian lesbian periodicals.

This thesis is influenced by previous historical work on lesbian histories. Australian lesbian histories, as explored earlier, are significant to this thesis and its research goal of expanding existing research in the Australian context. Turning internationally, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis's book, *Boots of Leather, Slipper of Gold*, influenced this thesis.<sup>53</sup> Although my research focus is very distinct from 1940s and 50s Buffalo, New York, I recognise the respect for their subjects and the serious examination of lesbian cultural practices. Lesbian histories have often been dismissed or incorporated into broader narratives. Vicinus described the 1970s political project of retracing lesbian histories, in which 'the past was raided to find heroines, or better yet, lesbian communities.'<sup>54</sup> This project attempted to validate and make visible a lesbian kinship throughout time, however, it revealed the complexity of intimacy between women and the construction of lesbian identities as determined by historical context. This thesis aims to bring a new perspective to Australian lesbian histories by examining

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, 20th anniversary edition (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Martha Vicinus, "The History of Lesbian History," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 568.

lesbian publications, charting transitions in discourses and practices over time, and acknowledging the complicated nature of lesbian identities.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Reading the Magazines**

This thesis is based on a reading of magazines. Before exploring the theoretical framework underpinning this work, I will define the multiple terms describing the materials under study. The term periodical refers to material published regularly, including newsletters and magazines. The difference between newsletters and magazines themselves is related to the inclusion of covers, photographs and illustrations, and the length of the publication. All material under study within this thesis include such features, usually published monthly with early publications printing black/white illustrations before periodicals evolved to include colour photographs by the mid-1990s. For this reason, I use these terms fairly interchangeably, making note of production differences, such as the introduction of colour in the pages to highlight the technological development and increased revenue of Australian lesbian periodicals.

The task of reading the magazines was not simple, requiring a framework for interpreting and analysing the publications. Drawing from magazine studies, influential to this thesis was the work of Elizabeth Groeneveld. Groeneveld studied the American lesbian erotica magazine, *On Our Backs*, particularly considering its letters to the editor.<sup>55</sup> Groeneveld utilised Ann Cvetkovitch's concept of 'archives of feelings' to

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Letters to the Editor as 'Archives of Feeling': On Our Backs Magazine and the Sex Wars," *American Periodicals* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 153–67.

conceptualise the letters, seeing them as direct links between the production team behind the magazines and the readers.<sup>56</sup> She stated, 'letters to the editor can provide access to the narratives that people used to construct, understand, and analyze social and political phenomena'.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Megan Le Masurier argued that the letters to the editor section provided an insight into readers' responses, despite some limitations. Disrupting the popular notion that letters were written by staff, reducing their use as sources, Le Masurier emphasised the role of letters to specific magazine genres.<sup>58</sup> In her research on *Cleo*, she stated 'reader involvement is critical to the identity of the magazine'.<sup>59</sup> Further, the letters page 'helped *constitute* membership of an imagined community of popular feminism' tied to the magazine.<sup>60</sup> I believe this is true of Australian lesbian magazines, with the letters section allowing for connection and responses to the imagined community built around the periodicals, constituting a sense of lesbian public cultures. This conceptualisation does not mean that the letters are direct links to the emotions and understandings of the reader. Le Masurier noted that the letters are 'the spillage of readers' critical thinking onto the page'.<sup>61</sup> Producing the letters is 'an act of conscious writerly construction, a narrativisation of a moment's reflection penned with the hope of being selected for publication'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Groeneveld, "Letters to the Editor as 'Archives of Feeling'," 158.

<sup>57</sup> Groeneveld, 158.

<sup>58</sup> Megan Le Masurier, "Desiring the (Popular Feminist) Reader: Letters to *Cleo* during the Second Wave," *Media International Australia*, no. 131 (May 2009): 109.

<sup>59</sup> Le Masurier, "Desiring the (Popular Feminist) Reader," 109.

<sup>60</sup> Megan Le Masurier, "FAIR GO. *Cleo* Magazine as Popular Feminism in 1970s Australia" (PhD, Sydney, Australia, University of Sydney, 2007), 154.

<sup>61</sup> Le Masurier, "FAIR GO," 160.

<sup>62</sup> Le Masurier, 160.

This thesis draws on material outside of the letters to the editor section, though they feature heavily as a site of discussion. Returning to Groeneveld, she stated that ‘magazines also provide readers with a sense of multifaceted conversation that is unfolding between editors and readers, authors and readers, as well as among readers and among authors across articles, images, and advertisements’.<sup>63</sup> This conversation is significant to conceptualising Australian lesbian magazines, reflecting the communities producing and reading the publications, often overlapping groups. Groeneveld of *On Our Backs* stated, ‘the magazine asserted that there *was* such a thing as lesbian culture, and it provided readers access to the representation of that culture’.<sup>64</sup> For isolated Australian women, the magazines allowed for the public declaration of Australian lesbian culture and communities. In particular, the city-based magazines of the 1990s connected women in the capital cities to local events. Even if women could not access the events in person, articles recounting them allowed for a look into that community. Groeneveld noted, ‘public cultures are lifeworlds cultivated through discursive relationships’.<sup>65</sup> Further, the creation of lesbian identities was intimately tied to the magazines, imagined and maintained through the discursive properties of publications. ‘The act of reading a magazine, therefore, is about far more than simply consuming information or entertainment: it is a personal and intimate activity closely tied to individual and collective identity formation’.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Groeneveld, “Letters to the Editor as ‘Archives of Feeling’,” 160.

<sup>64</sup> Groeneveld, 161.

<sup>65</sup> Groeneveld, “Letters to the Editor as ‘Archives of Feeling’,” 161.

<sup>66</sup> Groeneveld, 165.

Alongside reading the magazines for identity formation, recognising repeated narratives is another method to reveal issues of significance in these magazines. Australian lesbians noted ongoing invisibility as an issue, as well as changing feminist engagements. In particular, the influence of lesbian feminism over the decades was relayed. To conceptualise how this operated, Clare Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter* provides a framework.<sup>67</sup> Hemmings' analysis of feminist academic journals noted the establishment of three key narratives. These are progress, loss and return. Progress narratives highlight renewed diversity within feminism, accounting for the limitations of previous forms, particularly 1970s Second Wave politics. Loss instead proposes a lost multiplicity of feminism, particularly feminist activism, which has been diluted by institutions such as academia.<sup>68</sup> Both progress and loss narratives feature heavily in 1990s Australian lesbian magazines, highlighting tensions between different feminist camps within lesbian communities. Return narratives were present in the magazines, featured in repeated claims of a loss of lesbian feminism that women must return to. These narratives will be explored further, in particular in Chapter 6, which highlights ongoing tensions within Australian lesbian magazines.

Further, I acknowledge my personal reading of the magazines derives from a social and cultural perspective. I took a contextual approach to draw out meaning and historicise the magazines, following the various threads connected within the periodicals. As detailed, I have read significant histories of Australian lesbians and feminism while also

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<sup>67</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 87.



engaging with work from the period under study. My own feminist background further inflects my reading of material, having engaged with feminist work and theory throughout my youth and university studies. Having grown up in Perth and now living in Melbourne, my background influenced how I read periodicals from each city, with some geographical familiarity. I have been researching these magazines for several years, beginning in 2018 with my third-year capstone project, evolving into my Honours thesis in 2019.<sup>69</sup> This long-term interest in Australian queer histories has been maintained since high school, using any chance for independent research to explore lesbian pasts. This accumulated knowledge has influenced how I read the magazines, paying close attention to their social and cultural contexts.

### **The Magazines and their Archives**

Detailed histories of the major magazines identified will be provided within Chapter One. This section will briefly detail some smaller publications outside the Melbourne/Sydney focus. However, before I delve into these numerous magazines, I will highlight the archives I utilised to view the material.

This research was completed following the COVID-19 pandemic declared in early 2020, including the Melbourne lockdowns of 2021 during which I was unable to leave my apartment for archival visits. Primarily I visited the Australian Queer Archives (AQuA) through their digitised collection accessible through the State Library of Victoria. Any magazines not digitised I was able to view at AQuA at the Victorian Pride Centre when

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<sup>69</sup> Harriet Steele, “On Being Seen: Visibility and Representation in 1990s Australian Lesbian Magazines” (Honours, Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 2019).

restrictions were lifted. Alongside this archive, some state archives were considered. I looked at the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives (VWLLFA) at the University of Melbourne. Finally, I also visited WestPride Archives, formerly the Gay and Lesbian Archives of Western Australia (GALAWA) at Murdoch University when the state's borders were reopened. All three of these archives were developed by volunteers to build their collections. Notably, both AQuA and the VWLLFA feature in some magazines, calling for material.<sup>70</sup>

Much archival scholarship focuses on the power of such institutions. Schwartz and Cook state, 'Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies'.<sup>71</sup> These archives represent marginal identities that have been ignored and criminalised. However, this does not discount the power of these minority archives to select material. This appraisal can protect the archives' mission, such as women-only restrictions at the VWLLFA. 'Archives appraise, collect, and preserve the props with which notions of identity are built'.<sup>72</sup>

Although I utilised digitised archives, the materiality of the publications was significant to handle and conceptualise. These magazines would have been read differently to me viewing my computer screen. They would have been leafed through, left in communal

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<sup>70</sup> Examples include ALGA, "...FROM THE LESBIAN AND GAY ARCHIVES," *Lesbiana*, February 1994, 7; Jean Taylor, "An Open Letter to the Lesbian Community," *Lesbiana*, August 1996, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science*, no. 2 (1-19): 2.

<sup>72</sup> Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records and Power," 16.

spaces for others, and passed around between friends. The digitised archives were significant to undertaking research in a period of limited accessibility. However, this combined approach allowed for the appreciation of both methods. Further, my initial reading was completed by viewing each magazine, using word searches of digitised records to aid specific topic focus when writing. By reading the magazines thoroughly, I built ‘the contextual knowledge necessary to the partiality of primary sources into insight rather than misinformation’.<sup>73</sup>

For the most part, smaller city-based publications emerged in the 1990s. However, earlier examples can be seen in Perth. These include *Lesbianon* from 1974 to 1975 and *Grapevine*, which began in 1980 and has primarily been understood as a feminist magazine with significant lesbian content.<sup>74</sup> Also of the 1980s was the *Australian Lesbian Diary*, which published largely erotica short stories in 1987. Moving into the 1990s, multiple city-based magazines popped up across Australia. These included Adelaide’s *Lesbian Times* (1992-1994), Darwin’s *Lesbian Territory* (1993-1994), beginning in Launceston, then Hobart *Lilac* (1993-1996), Queensland’s *Dykewise* (1995-1998) and Perth’s *Hot Gos* (1994 to presumably 1996) and *Women Out West* (1999-2008). Similar goals of representing and connecting lesbians across their cities guided these magazines, although production styles and editorial voices differed slightly depending on context.

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<sup>73</sup> Lara Putnam, “The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and Shadows They Cast,” *American Historical Review*, no. 121 (April 2016): 394.

<sup>74</sup> Plunkett, “Making Things Otherwise,” 291.

Alongside the material archive, I also completed four oral history interviews. The interviews are not directly cited within thesis, however, they provide insight into overlooked aspects of the magazines and the lived experience of producing them. Initially, I set out to interview those involved with the VWLLFA, considering the significant investment in lesbian history present within the magazines. However, more about the magazines' production was discussed through the snowballing method of contacting participants. Before embarking on these oral histories, I consulted feminist and queer oral history literature. Significantly, the work of Jeska Rees and Claire Bond Potter guided the process. Rees and Bond Potter interviewed feminist and lesbian subjects who retain radical politics. Jeska Rees, in her interviews with British lesbian feminists, noted that feminist historians must evaluate the Women's Liberation Movement 'in a way that recognizes the centrality of the personal, the private and the precious to the ideas, achievements and failures of Women's Liberation'.<sup>75</sup> This perspective is significant to analysing lesbian magazines as they are deeply tied to identity and community. Rees described her process as 'I recorded and transcribed each interview, which was then edited by the interviewee herself, a process that drew upon the feminist oral history methodologies covering all stages of the oral history process: interview, transcription, editing and interpretation'.<sup>76</sup> Bond Potter described a similar three-layered shaping of her interviews, from the initial interview, transcript editing and finally, interpretation.<sup>77</sup> I approached my interviews likewise, allowing participants to

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<sup>75</sup> Jeska Rees, "'Are You a Lesbian?' Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 69 (Spring 2010): 182.

<sup>76</sup> Rees, "'Are You a Lesbian?'" 183.

<sup>77</sup> Claire Bond Potter, "When Radical Feminism Talks Back: Taking an Ethnographic Turn in the Living Past," in *Doing Recent History: On Privacy, Copyright, Video Games, Institutional Review Boards, Activist Scholarship, and History That Talks Back*, ed. Claire Bond Potter and Renee C. Romano (University of Georgia Press, 2012), 155–82.

edit the transcript and providing additional thoughts and context to the initial interview. Although material from the interviews does not define this thesis, my discussions shaped my interpretation of the magazines and their production.

## **CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. The first two chapters provide significant context to both the broader time period in which the periodicals were published and how they were produced. Chapter One highlights the many entanglements of the magazines to the multiple social movements of the 1970s onwards. Beginning with an exploration of gay public cultures before CAMP and Gay Liberation, I noted the social connections of lesbians existed outside of textual bounds, forming private networks and a limited bar scene. The first lesbian publication in Australia, the 1969 newsletter of the Australian branch of the Daughters of Bilitis, connects to this context. Similarly, the lesbian presence within Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation will be detailed, noting the influence of these politics on the development of lesbian feminism and the marginalisation faced by lesbians prompting the need for lesbian space in the form of periodicals. Further context around shifting political movements in the 1980s and 1990s will be provided, shaping the evolution of lesbian media. Several lesbian magazines will be highlighted, interspersed within these broader contextual details, detailing their impact. Significantly, this chapter showcases the inability to distinctly periodise lesbian media, instead flowing and evolving, with earlier politics having a lasting influence.

Chapter Two takes a closer look at the production of the magazines and the lesbian economies they supported. The production of the magazines, particularly the costs, reveals the significance of ownership styles, from collective to private ownership. This chapter explores how lesbian feminist politics inflected the magazines' production. These politics notably influenced advertising standards. The need for revenue pushed magazines to adopt advertising. In turn, this allowed lesbian businesses to grow. By the 1990s, a significant lesbian advertising economy existed. This chapter examines these advertising standards, noting how they changed over time, including the advertising of mainstream businesses, such as Telstra. Further, lesbian economies involved lesbian spaces, such as bookshops, clubs and adult stores. Over time business networks developed to support lesbian entrepreneurs. However, the complete give-over to capitalism was not finalised, as alternative networks developed across Australia with limited success. This chapter details the conflicting politics and emotions tied to the changing business practices that produced Australian lesbian periodicals.

Chapter Three explores how lesbian motherhood was represented and constructed by the magazines. Through this examination, we see experiences of lesbian motherhood and the court system in the 1970s. The rise of assisted reproduction technologies (ART) and artificial insemination will be explored, reshaping lesbian families. How the magazines expressed the political desires of lesbians to access ART will be explored, noting how governmental discourses were repurposed. Significantly, the making of lesbian motherhood within the magazines will be detailed, from alternative arrangements in the 1980s to homonormative models of lesbian families. Lesbian

motherhood had to be invented as an identity. The magazines aided this conceptualising by providing space for women to discuss and formulate the lesbian mother.

Chapter Four examines the depictions of intimate relationships within the magazines. Significantly, lesbian intimacy and significant relationships have been represented in numerous ways, connecting with the politics of the day. Lesbian feminism imagined new models of relationships, however, this sometimes came at a cost for women. Articles on relationships from this time, particularly in the 1980s, began to question lesbian feminist modes of relationships. By the 1990s, increasing calls for relationship recognition led to de facto reforms in the early 2000s. This chapter explores how this activism was understood and presented to lesbian readers. Further, expressions of lesbian sexuality and sexual practices will be explored, noting the disruption of sex radicalism through *Wicked Women*. This chapter reveals how lesbianism was understood as a sexual identity within the periodicals and how this changed over time.

Chapter Five examines expressions of lesbian identity through fashion and dress. Looking recognisably lesbian has been significant to community building. This chapter traces lesbian fashion over the several decades defining this thesis and how lesbian fashion was discussed and represented within the periodicals. The 1970s uniform and androgynous dress were questioned heavily in the 1980s publications, leading to a revival in more feminine modes of dress. This change represented a significant political shift as more individual expression became accepted. The emergence of lesbian sex radicalism in the 1980s developed a new visible subculture, highlighted by dress. This visibility was reflected in *Wicked Women's* production. By the 1990s, women were

encouraged to individualise their fashion and lesbian expression. Further, this chapter explores the visual aspect of representing fashion with the magazines with one magazine having developed the lesbian fashion spread by the 1990s. Connecting fashion to class and evolving production values of the magazines, this chapter explores the adoption of lesbian chic and similar styles. Lesbian fashion within the periodicals tells a story of shifting lesbian politics and emerging identities.

The final chapter considers the magazines as spaces of inclusion and exclusion. As examined throughout the thesis, lesbian identities and communities were developed and explored through lesbian media. However, this thesis also asks who was included and who was excluded. To begin with, the ongoing Anglo-centricity of the magazines will be detailed, representative of Australia's broader Women's movement. Emerging support groups in the 1990s represent a disruption of the assumed same ethnicity of lesbian readers. This chapter also explores the place of men within the magazines. This topic is detailed within the magazines through various connections, including the reinvigoration of coalition politics, bisexuality and queer politics. The place of inclusivity will be explored through the Lesbian Space Project, highlighting the division that transphobic policies enacted on Australian lesbian communities. Although based in Sydney, this project was imagined as a space for Australian lesbians. However, by excluding some, the project fell apart, exposing the ongoing tensions within the broader community as documented by the periodicals. This example revealed the changing understandings of lesbian identity by the 1990s and the impact this had on Australian lesbian communities and the lesbian publications themselves.



## **CONCLUSION**

While significant work has been on the topic, often lesbian histories are packaged alongside broader movements, such as the Women's Movement and Gay Liberation. Bill Calder's chapter on lesbian publications represents a section of the larger story of gay media in Australia. However, this thesis aims to expand this research, representing a sustained history of Australian lesbian periodicals. In particular, this thesis explores the role of lesbian periodicals in community maintenance and identity formation. With an emphasis on lesbian magazines as sites of lesbian space, this thesis will note how this space was utilised for communicating and representing different Australian lesbian communities and identities. Further, the medium of the magazines will be examined in facilitating discussions across issues and periodicals, allowing for the articulation of tensions within lesbian communities. Although the thesis considers magazines from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the 1990s will be highlighted as a period of magazine proliferation and decline. Further, the transition of political beliefs inflecting ownership and production will be explored, noting how these changes reverberated in several lesbian-focused topics. This thesis will take the complexity of Australian lesbian periodicals seriously, tracing changes in conceptualisations of lesbian identities and cultural practices and examining how the magazines maintained their communities.

## **Chapter 1 – “Welcome!”: Contextualising the Entanglements of Australian Lesbian Magazines**

This chapter charts the changing social and political movements over the course of several decades, beginning with the post-Second World War period to the end of the 1990s. The place of the periodicals within these various ideological movements, activist groups and community networks will be detailed, exploring how they were influenced by evolving understandings of lesbian space and identity. This chapter will describe critical connections with Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation and note how magazines developed within these movements, changing over several decades. I will illustrate how the magazines unfolded from these movements, building on community and knowledge developed, archived within the publications. Further, the magazines themselves built upon one another, highlighted by the various Melbourne based magazines created through the passing of collective responsibility and mailing lists. This chapter examines the historical context out of which the magazines evolved, framing the discourses around the multiple topics to be discussed within this thesis.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

The first Australian lesbian periodicals defined the format that would continue over the next several decades. The publications represented the burgeoning lesbian community, evolving from Women’s and Gay Liberation but staking a claim to their own space. While previous subcultures existed, notably the bar culture will be highlighted, these print documents represent an attempt to transpose and discuss lesbian issues and

lifestyle into an accessible format.<sup>1</sup> In addition, these periodicals represent the diversity of thought and opinion within the lesbian community, mediating the ongoing negotiations and understandings of lesbian public cultures.

### **Early Gay Public Cultures**

The publications under study within this thesis represent the growing possibility of being open in public. Previous to the 1970s, Australian lesbians and gay men kept hidden in public, instead, socialising between people was maintained in underground networks of relations. Without the paper trail that the magazines explicitly provide, Rebecca Jennings notes the difficulty in obtaining evidence of such circles.<sup>2</sup> In her study of the post-war Sydney scene, Jennings described the limitations, especially for women, who were made to drink in saloon bars separate from men, due to restrictive licensing laws.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Sydney lesbians primarily operated in smaller private networks organised around different sports, occupations and artistic interests.<sup>4</sup> However, by the 1960s, a growing commercial bar scene was localised on Oxford Street in Sydney, with venues such as Chez Ivy.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that these venues were mixed spaces with women not always ‘welcome,’ so-called bar lesbians developing a reputation as being ‘tough’ or ‘rough’ during this period.<sup>6</sup> Although it is argued that butch/femme cultures were not as strong in Australia as the US, there was still this dynamic present,

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Jennings, “A Room Full of Women: Lesbian Bars and Social Spaces in Postwar Sydney,” *Women’s History Review* 21, no. 5 (2012): 813-829; Rebecca Jennings, “Lesbians in Sydney,” *Sydney Journal* 2, no. 1 (June 2009): 29–38.

<sup>2</sup> Jennings, “A Room Full of Women,” 814.

<sup>3</sup> Jennings, 816.

<sup>4</sup> Jennings, “A Room Full of Women,” 814, 817; Jennings, “Lesbians in Sydney,” 32.

<sup>5</sup> Jennings, “Lesbians in Sydney,” 32.

<sup>6</sup> Jennings, “A Room Full of Women,” 819.

causing difficulties when women would fight and argue, intimidating women new to the scene.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the bar scene, there were also more formalised lesbian and gay networks. In Sydney, this included The Chameleons and the Pollynesians, or Pollys, both groups organising dances, the latter holding an annual sporting event.<sup>8</sup> Similar social dances were organised in Melbourne. The 1964 dance for Jan Hillier's birthday, a prominent member of queer social circles at the time, was noted as a significant event.<sup>9</sup> The success of this party prompted Hillier to continue to organise Friday night dances.<sup>10</sup> Although there were substantial social and organised networks during this period, prior to the 1970s, none produced lasting documents in the form of newsletters and publications. Instead, their legacy has been preserved due to the oral history work of scholars such as Rebecca Jennings. However, it is not the politics of the evolving Women's or Gay Liberation movements that prompted the documenting of group activities. Rather a new conservative network of lesbians in Melbourne, developed as a branch of the international lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis, were willing to open the door, if only a little bit.

While this chapter will detail the many entanglements of Australian lesbian magazines to Women's Liberation, it is significant that the first Australian lesbian newsletter grew out of transnational connections and the lesbian and gay social networks of the 1960s. The internal newsletters of what began as the Australian branch of the Daughters of

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<sup>7</sup> Jennings, "A Room Full of Women," 819.

<sup>8</sup> Jennings, 818.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Taylor, *Brazen Hussies: A Herstory of Radical Activism in the Women's Liberation Movement in Victoria 1970-1979* (Brunswick East, Vic.: Dyke Books, 2009), 40.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *Brazen Hussies*, 40.

Bilitis represent some of the earliest gay print media in the country, dating to 1969.<sup>11</sup> The format utilised, including a social calendar and organisational discussions, is reflected in continuing publications.<sup>12</sup> Although the organisation began as a branch of the Daughters of Bilitis, it quickly developed into its own network, renaming as the Australasian Lesbian Movement (ALM) in July 1970.<sup>13</sup> ALM represents an interesting counterpoint to narratives that present lesbian political consciousness as only tied to Women's Liberation. The group described itself as a public face for more hidden social networks and an alternative to the bar and hotel scene.<sup>14</sup> It further distinguished itself from the evolving Women's and Gay Liberation, comparatively conservative.<sup>15</sup> Notably, it limited membership to those over the age of 21 and required married women to present written consent of their husbands to join.<sup>16</sup> It upheld an educational, political perspective, informing the public to break down stereotypes and connect with lesbians themselves, 'enabling her to understand herself'.<sup>17</sup> Over time the political element left the group, evolving with name changes to Claudia's Group to Lynx in the mid-1970s, focusing on providing social networks for women who were unsure of the radical politics of Women's and Gay Liberation.<sup>18</sup> As Lucy Chesser noted, while the organisation did not connect with the liberation movements, individuals would participate in social and

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<sup>11</sup> Bill Calder, *Pink Ink: The Golden Era for Gay and Lesbian Magazines* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx: 'Non-Political' Lesbian Organisation in Melbourne, 1969-1980," *Hecate* 22, no. 1 (1996): 69–92.

<sup>14</sup> Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx."

<sup>15</sup> Chesser.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Willett, *Living out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 31.

<sup>17</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx."

political events.<sup>19</sup> Both Claudia's Group and Lynx continued to produce newsletters and organisational publications, providing examples of discussions and debates of these organisations, from coming out stories, monogamy and political actions of other groups.<sup>20</sup> ALM and its subsequent iterations represent a parallel narrative to the Women's Liberation to lesbian feminist pipeline and the different social networks that defined the post-war period of Australian gay communities.<sup>21</sup>

### **Gay Activism and Liberation in Australia**

While these closed social networks remained significant for lesbian and gay Australians, there was a growing interest in political activism. The beginning of the gay movement in Australia is attributed to founding and reporting on CAMP, or Campaign Against Moral Persecution.<sup>22</sup> CAMP was supported early on by civil liberties groups, who maintained an interest in challenging religious modes of morality enshrined within legislation, arguing for secular ethics to define reform on sexuality.<sup>23</sup> John Ware, one of the founding members of CAMP, sent a letter to the press as part of CAMP's first actions, announcing the group's existence and outlined its goals.<sup>24</sup> CAMP wished to represent 'the interests [of homosexuals and] to promote homosexual law reform and greater public tolerance of homosexuality'.<sup>25</sup> This second aim is not unlike the Australasian Lesbian Movement's goals, but what separated CAMP was that the founding members,

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<sup>19</sup> Chesser, "Australasian Lesbian Movement, 'Claudia's Group' and Lynx."

<sup>20</sup> Chesser.

<sup>21</sup> Chesser.

<sup>22</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political, and the Making of Modern Australia* (Sydney, NSW, Australia: NewSouth, 2019), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> Willett, 35.

John Ware and Christabel Poll, publicly identified as homosexual.<sup>26</sup> Within the first year, CAMP branches sprung up across Australia, its membership growing to 1500 nationwide.<sup>27</sup> The size of the organisation and the diversity of political views did create tension amongst members.<sup>28</sup> The group's ties to civil liberties groups influenced the outlook of CAMP. The focus was on decriminalisation, with the notion of 'consenting adults in private' framing ideas for law reform.<sup>29</sup> Further, the organisation also challenged the pathologising of homosexuality through anti-psychiatry activism against 'aversion' therapies used against men, though some lesbians also faced harsh treatments.<sup>30</sup> CAMP also produced their own newsletter, keeping members up to date and presenting debates on various topics, from law reform, promiscuity and the role of beats.<sup>31</sup> By being public with their homosexuality, Ware and Poll had tapped into a need in lesbian and gay Australians to see themselves as political activists, upholding an evolving identity.

As described, CAMP branches proliferated, producing tensions between members. Part of this was due to political outlook, Gay Liberation emerging with 'further revolutionary critique against the repressive systems of patriarchy, sex roles, classism, racism and capitalism'.<sup>32</sup> Although Gay Liberation attempted to distance itself from CAMP, part of

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<sup>26</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Willett, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Willett, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Willett, 45.

<sup>30</sup> S. C. Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s" (PhD, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2018), 68.

<sup>31</sup> William (Bill) Francis Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era: Australian Magazines and Newspapers 1970-2000" (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2015), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 77.

its formation is due to greater consciousness-raising efforts, prompted by John Ware, with members of Gay Lib connecting through these meetings.<sup>33</sup> This group officially split from CAMP, when Dennis Altman, author of the significant text *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, announced its existence at a Forum on Sexual Liberation at the University of Sydney in January 1972.<sup>34</sup> Several members left CAMP for this new group.<sup>35</sup> This division was further solidified by the adaptation and redistribution of the London Gay Liberation Front Manifesto in Sydney in May 1972, titled an 'Australian Gay Liberation Manifesto'.<sup>36</sup> Sophie Robinson noted that her informants emphasised off the record that Gay Liberation was a fluid movement, interested in 'decentralising power, destabilising hierarchy and embracing ambivalence'.<sup>37</sup> Part of this position was questioning identity and sexuality, seeing restrictive roles as limitations on human experience for both heterosexuals and homosexuals.<sup>38</sup> This revolutionary and utopic thinking defined Gay Liberation, critiquing oppressive systems and structures. It also produced a high turnover rate for members, divided on understandings. Further, like CAMP, its coalitionist position could not be upheld with ongoing misogyny still present amongst male members.

The growing discontent with lesbian members of both CAMP and Gay Liberation manifested differently and was rife in its own divisions. CAMP members were spurred

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<sup>33</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 55.

<sup>35</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 77.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson, 78.

<sup>38</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 59; Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 78.



on to create separate women's groups between 1971 and 1974.<sup>39</sup> While coalition politics was significant to CAMP, lesbian members became frustrated with the sexism of some CAMP men, connecting more to the growing Women's Liberation movement.<sup>40</sup> In 1972, the creation of CAMP Women's Association, or CWA, defined the agenda for its members, part of a developing Women's Liberation consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, women involved in Gay Liberation found the movement increasingly alienating, with some men proving to be limited in their investment in true liberation from patriarchy.<sup>42</sup> In June 1972, Gay Liberation held a session at the Women's Liberation conference in Sydney, hoping to address the growing rift.<sup>43</sup> Robinson recounted that this session deepened the division, exposing the chauvinist attitudes held by the male speakers.<sup>44</sup> Robinson stated that 'between 1972 and 1973, lesbians in Women's Liberation, CAMP and Gay Liberation were increasingly grouping together to consider issues of gay male sexism and lesbian invisibility, separately from their original networks'.<sup>45</sup> This connection manifested growing lesbian separatist thought, prompted by the continued ostracising and limiting of lesbian political organising within these broader movements. Coalition movements struggled to retain a lesbian presence, though some women continued to work within these organisations.<sup>46</sup> However, this splitting did not return a unified front, as lesbians involved in these groups had their own prejudices against each other.<sup>47</sup> These positions

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<sup>39</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 67.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson, 70.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, 80, 81.

<sup>45</sup> Robinson, 81.

<sup>46</sup> Willett, *Living out Loud*, 64.

<sup>47</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 72.

prompted the formation of differing modes of understanding and lifestyles, documented in the emergence of different lesbian publications over the coming two decades.

### **Women's Liberation in Australia**

Women's Liberation was influential to lesbians within the gay movement, giving women a language to articulate their issues in coalition spaces and the connections to move beyond when necessary. As will be further discussed, this does not mean that the Women's Liberation movement as a whole was welcoming of lesbians and their issues. Instead, it provided the space for women to come into themselves and imagine new lives. Women's Liberation grew out of the late 1960s social actions, particularly the student movement against the Vietnam War. Notably, these New Left groups sidelined the women in their ranks, who were made to complete secretarial tasks, such as making coffee and preparing envelopes.<sup>48</sup> Kate Jennings' speech at an anti-war Moratorium in Sydney, May 1970, highlighted this aspect, criticising the movement's inability to consider women, both domestically and in connection to the war.<sup>49</sup> She stated, "Many women are beginning to feel the necessity to speak for themselves, for their sisters."<sup>50</sup> Before this speech, Women's Liberation groups had begun to meet and discuss issues, beginning in Adelaide first, and then Sydney.<sup>51</sup> Consciousness-raising grew as women met to talk out issues and experiences, building on the belief that 'sharing personal

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<sup>48</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 52.

<sup>49</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 15; Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 52.

<sup>50</sup> "Moratorium: Front Lawn: 1970 - Australian Poetry Library," accessed May 24, 2021, <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/jennings-kate/poems/moratorium-front-lawn-1970-0124024>.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 53.

stories gave them power,' seeing the meetings as a way to strengthen 'solidarity and sisterhood'.<sup>52</sup> An agenda emerged with 'the rights to abortion, free contraception and childcare' central to the 'libertarian vision of equality'.<sup>53</sup> Anne Summers noted that for many the term 'liberation' was preferred and that references to one as a feminist was always qualified by another word, as seen in 'lesbian feminist'. This practice was done to differentiate themselves from earlier expressions of feminism, particularly the First Wave with their focus on liberal reform and temperance.<sup>54</sup> A significant disjuncture from earlier feminist activism is the place of sexuality and sexual desire, with sexual empowerment fore fronted in the so-called Second Wave, while controlled sexuality was required for respectability in the First.<sup>55</sup> Women's Liberation in Australia drew influence from US actions and British formations, with women, ideas, and materials transnationally exchanged.<sup>56</sup> Robinson and her informants emphasised the place of welfare, in particular the unemployment payment, known as the dole, in allowing women to follow feminist experiments, seen in separatists modes of living like feminist share houses.<sup>57</sup> By the mid-1970s, the focus had opened to further issues, including domestic violence. A significant step in dealing with this issue was the refuge movement,

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<sup>52</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 223.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 53; Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*. (University of New South Wales Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>55</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 11, 15, 199.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 54; Rebecca Jennings and Liz Millward, "A Fully Formed Blast from Abroad? Australasian Lesbian Circuits of Mobility and the Transnational Exchange of Ideas in the 1960s and 1970s.," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 3 (2016): 463.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 40, 137.

with the first, Elsie's refuge, established in Sydney in 1974.<sup>58</sup> Other institutions included women's health and crisis centres, often with a mixture of staff and volunteers running the spaces.<sup>59</sup> With the election of the Whitlam Labor federal government, women used this opportunity to institutionalise the changes they wanted and that they had created for themselves. Connected to the growing power of Women's Liberation was the establishment of an advisor on Women's Affairs, with Elizabeth Reid's appointment in April 1973.<sup>60</sup> Along with these changes was the adoption of state feminism and the creation of the feminist bureaucrat, or femocrat.<sup>61</sup> As described by Marilyn Lake, the achievement of femocrats was the funding of services that had been volunteer-run by Women's Liberation.<sup>62</sup> This funding would increasingly be limited with the adoption of neoliberalism, affecting future policy outlooks.<sup>63</sup> This insight into Women's Liberation is limited, tracing a line of change over the 1970s. What is significant is the number of lesbians who became involved, intersecting with Gay Liberation and helping to form ideas around lesbian feminism and separatism.

## **Lesbian Feminism**

Although not the only avenue for women to explore both their sexuality and politics, the evolving Women's Liberation movement of the 1970s represented a starting point for many to define themselves. While heavily tied to Women's Liberation, the exploration of

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<sup>58</sup> Robinson, 135.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 166.

<sup>60</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 92.

<sup>61</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 166.

<sup>62</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 257.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 166.

lesbian feminism highlighted the divergence of lesbian communities and the determination to achieve the necessary space to imagine new possibilities in lifestyles and public cultures. Lesbian feminism conceptually can be challenging to define, affected by decades of cultural memory deriding both the politics and personal aesthetic of the movement.<sup>64</sup> This difficulty partly aligned with lesbianism's sometimes tenuous connection to broader Women's Liberation movements. As Victoria Hesford noted, the lesbian feminist 'has had a defining effect on the way on which women's liberation in particular and feminism in general has been remembered and represented'.<sup>65</sup> I draw on Sophie Robinson's understanding of lesbian feminism when considering the phenomenon in the magazines. Her thesis argues that lesbian feminism did not end with the 1970s, as popularly narrativized, evolving with the differing contexts of the 1980s and 90s.<sup>66</sup> Robinson defined lesbian feminism as 'the ideological basis and environment for exploring sexuality and revolutionising femininity in creative, bold, and occasionally forceful ways'.<sup>67</sup> I employ Robinson's conceptualisation of lesbian feminism as she acknowledges the imaginative ways that women challenged patriarchal systems and attempted to build feminist utopias.<sup>68</sup> This understanding is reflected in the magazines, the publications themselves the space for such imagination to be discussed and realised.

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<sup>64</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 6.

<sup>65</sup> Victoria Hesford, "Around 1970: The Feminist-as-Lesbian and a Movement in the Making," in *Feeling Women's Liberation* (Duke University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s."

<sup>67</sup> Sophie Robinson, "Bar Dykes and Lesbian Feminists: Lesbian Encounters in 1970s Australian Feminism," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 22 (2016): 53.

<sup>68</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 160.

The Women's Liberation movement drew on print material to help elaborate and represent their ideas, utilising various formats. In particular, the newsletter or feminist periodical was integral to informing others while providing a space to discuss critical issues. In Australia, driven women's liberationists were not only interested in writing publications but materially learning the process of production.<sup>69</sup> Compared to the US, Australian women were outsiders in the publishing industry, effectively learning the skills on the job.<sup>70</sup> Many worked from home or voluntarily, reflecting a commitment to the 'principle of the personal as political through alternative, non-patriarchal and anti-capitalist ways of working'.<sup>71</sup> The oldest continuing feminist press in Australia was Sybylla Press, formed from open meetings in Melbourne at the end of 1975.<sup>72</sup> Run as a co-operative with fluctuating collective members, Sybylla survived the 1970s through fundraising efforts, supplying print materials to various causes.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, it published the *Women's Liberation Newsletter*, and later, *Lesbian Newsletter*.

### ***Lesbian Newsletter***

The first *Lesbian Newsletter* was mailed out with the March 1976 *Women's Liberation Newsletter*.<sup>74</sup> It included four pages; its cover featured a group of women raising their

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<sup>69</sup> Margaret McCormack, "A History of Sybylla Press," *Publishing Studies*, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 18.

<sup>70</sup> Trish Luker, "Women into Print: Feminist Presses in Australia," in *Everyday Revolutions: Remaking Gender, Sexuality and Culture in 1970s Australia*, ed. Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott (ANU Press, 2019), 127.

<sup>71</sup> Luker, "Women into Print," 129.

<sup>72</sup> McCormack, "A History of Sybylla Press," 18.

<sup>73</sup> McCormack, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 126.

fists and a list of demands.<sup>75</sup> The demands included ‘an end to heterosexism, the right to live openly as lesbians without discrimination at work or as mothers, the end to treatment of lesbians as sexual deviants and the right to accurate information’.<sup>76</sup> Periodicals, such as *Lesbian Newsletter*, provided avenues for the continued fight and discussion of such demands. This first insert of *Lesbian Newsletter* was produced by a small collective, with reports on lesbian activist groups and a short music review.<sup>77</sup> Liz Ross was key to its production, orchestrating its inclusion as an insert.<sup>78</sup> *Lesbian Newsletter* challenged the broader Women’s Liberation movement to discuss lesbian issues and to other lesbians to speak up. This provocation is highlighted in the second insert, a mostly blank page, “a tribute to the lack of contributions” to lesbian politics since the first printing.<sup>79</sup> The agitation of *Lesbian Newsletter* faced criticism. Notably, Zelda D’Aprano, a key figure in Australia’s Women’s Liberation movement, expressed concerns that lesbian content would deter new members from participating.<sup>80</sup> This ongoing tension would continue until *Lesbian Newsletter* began publishing as a bimonthly standalone in 1978.<sup>81</sup> As with many lesbian periodicals, *Lesbian Newsletter* struggled to balance commitment to radical ideology and the financial and personal toll of production. *Lesbian Newsletter* struggled to match production costs, especially at the beginning when it did not feature commercial advertising and was free for readers.<sup>82</sup> Advertisements were accepted by the collective in 1985, managed under strict guidelines

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<sup>75</sup> Calder, 126.

<sup>76</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 126.

<sup>77</sup> Calder, 126.

<sup>78</sup> Calder, 127.

<sup>79</sup> Calder, 126.

<sup>80</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 93.

<sup>81</sup> Calder, 94.

<sup>82</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 130.

that they “comply with our feminist philosophy” and do not “exploit women and/or lesbians”.<sup>83</sup> However, debts again grew, cleared by a return to the cheaper format and cutting print run to subscribers only.<sup>84</sup> From the end of 1988 a new collective in Daylesford, Victoria, took over production until the membership dwindled to two by late 1990.<sup>85</sup> The subscriber list was then handed to a Melbourne collective which began a new lesbian magazine, *Labrys*.<sup>86</sup> Although the collective efforts to produce *Lesbian Newsletter* had faltered due to ongoing financial difficulties, it lasted a considerable length of time for such a project, adapting from the fervour of the 1970s, remaining true enough to its politics through the 1980s. The legacy of the project was ensured by the passing of the torch in the 1990s.

*Lesbian Newsletter* represented a claiming of lesbian space, maintaining its specificity, rather than be subsumed into either the Women’s or Gay Liberation movements. It helped mediate ongoing discussions on lesbianism as an identity, what it meant to be a lesbian and what a lesbian lifestyle might look like.<sup>87</sup> Content ranged throughout its span. Early on, poetry allowed women to voice lesbian desire.<sup>88</sup> It remained true to a slogan included in the first issue, “Lesbian is a political definition not just a sexual one.”<sup>89</sup> *Lesbian Newsletter* tested formats from the cheaper newsletter to the magazine with its pictorial cover and included sections such as international news and a comic,

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<sup>83</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 131.

<sup>84</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>85</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>86</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 97

<sup>88</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 127.

<sup>89</sup> Calder, 128.



*The Adventures of Superdyke*.<sup>90</sup> These elements are featured among various lesbian periodicals, broadening community understanding from just domestic conceptions and using multiple mediums to express lesbian identity. In the articles themselves, utopic visions were rebutted with more realistic perspectives, slowly building community ideals of lesbianism. *Lesbian Newsletter* provides an avenue for understanding lesbian communities and identities during the 1970s and 1980s, essential topics continually discussed throughout the decades.

### **Lesbian Separatism**

*Lesbian Newsletter* illustrated how lesbians involved in both Women's and Gay Liberation came to define themselves separately, creating their own spaces to discuss and create lesbian communities. These ideals can be connected to ideas around separatism, layered distance 'from relationships with men, political coalition with men, and engaging with male culture'.<sup>91</sup> The magazines examined within this thesis each have their own relationship to the concept as part of their own definitions of lesbianism and lesbian lifestyles, some excluding access to their material on the basis of identity.<sup>92</sup> Further, editorial policies were questioned over the inclusion of material that has limited lesbian focus. When *Lesbian on the Loose (LOTL)* reporters were asked if the magazine was separatist or not in an interview for the magazine's second anniversary, they gave contrary answers.<sup>93</sup> Two members agreed it was separatist, one stating it's a

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<sup>90</sup> Both new elements were added in 1980. Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 129.

<sup>91</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 129.

<sup>92</sup> "The Laughing Medusa Policy," *The Laughing Medusa*, June 1991, inside cover; *Lesbian Network*, December 1994, 20-21; Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 123 author describes how he couldn't read the material.

<sup>93</sup> Susan Harben, "LOTL - The Dyke Women's Weekly," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1992, 7.

“Lesbian paper, it’s for us,” however, another member disagreed as *LOTL* reported on coalition politics and organisations.<sup>94</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose* had a tenuous relationship with the concept ‘separatist,’ continually maintaining its right to exist as a solely lesbian publication, supporting lesbian businesses, while also trying to distance itself from lesbian feminist politics and the strict separatism imagined of the 1970s.<sup>95</sup> Sophie Robinson detailed her informants’ relationship with separatism, indicating that many women considered it ‘the continuum of the women’s movement,’ prompting significant questioning around gender, relationships with men, and how to integrate ideas of separatism into daily life.<sup>96</sup> The magazines under study provided space for debating and discussing these questions. The medium of magazines especially encourages this, with articles reflecting editorial policy rebutted by letters to the editor.

By the 1990s, ideas of separatism were assumed knowledge with readers, referenced with little need for definition within the magazines. This knowledge was built over several decades and was adapted to the needs of writers and readers, negotiated over time. Both Rebecca Jennings and Sophie Robinson link the introduction of radical feminism to the evolution of separatism in Australia.<sup>97</sup> In particular, the transition from the Melbourne Gay Women’s Group to a branch of Radicalesbians and the subsequent publication of their manifesto, different to their American counterparts, is highlighted

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<sup>94</sup> Harben, “LOTL - The Dyke Women’s Weekly,” 7.

<sup>95</sup> Chris Sitka, “Lesbian Separatists or Lesbian Specialists?,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1993, 14–15; Frances Rand, “Giving Lip: Marginal Notes,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1993, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 129.

<sup>97</sup> Rebecca Jennings, “Creating Feminist Culture: Australian Rural Lesbian-Separatist Communities in the 1970s and 1980s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 30, no. 2 (2018): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0015>; Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 132.

by both accounts.<sup>98</sup> Notably, the manifesto stated, “We want a distinct feminist community where we can learn to be /act ourselves... no point in conquering male culture when we can create our own”.<sup>99</sup> Robinson notes that a form of separatism operated in the form of women-only Consciousness Raising groups and women’s refuges and centres, practices defining the Women’s Liberation movement.<sup>100</sup> Further, lesbian feminist collectives and share houses formed, though not all were ideologically cohesive, but rather connected to broader experiments in countercultural lifestyles.<sup>101</sup> Finally, the separatism undertaken by urban lesbian feminists of this period was about building their own culture, indicated in the proliferation of lesbian and women-centric music, art, and theatre.<sup>102</sup>

Aside from urban spaces and cultural forms, there were rural women-only communities. Jennings argued that these women’s lands formed a central symbolic place in Australian lesbian feminist culture. Many women visited the lands, participating in the large gatherings held, helping to define lesbian feminist identity for visitors. Across Australia, several communities were set up in the mid-to-late 1970s, Amazon Acres in northern NSW being the first in early 1974.<sup>103</sup> Using her connection to various radical lesbian and Women’s Liberation groups in both Sydney and Melbourne, Kerry Higgs rallied women to her idea of self-sufficiency.<sup>104</sup> Higgs’ dedication extended to using her grant

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<sup>98</sup> Jennings, “Creating Feminist Culture,” 90; Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 131, 132.

<sup>99</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 132.

<sup>100</sup> Robinson, 129.

<sup>101</sup> Robinson, 139.

<sup>102</sup> Robinson, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Jennings, “Creating Feminist Culture,” 92.

<sup>104</sup> Jennings, 92.

money from her lesbian novel, *All That False Instruction*, to fund part of the project.<sup>105</sup> As discussed with Robinson, Higgs' radical feminism aligned with her growing concern of looming ecological crises.<sup>106</sup> Amazon Acres, mainly known as the Mountain, allowed the physical space to explore ideas around separatism, debates raging between participants about what was achievable in practice.<sup>107</sup> As Jennings noted, the funding framework to purchase the land utilised women who had not even seen the site, contributing to the sense of collective women's ownership, reinforcing the symbolic value of the lands as a community resource for lesbian feminists.<sup>108</sup> The separatism of the women's lands replicated similar ideas in more urban environments, individual women negotiating their own contact with men in their lives. By the late 1970s, several issues had proved contentious both on the Mountain and in broader lesbian feminist communities. They included the permission for men to visit the lands and the living arrangements of boy children.<sup>109</sup> Amazon Acres eventually allowed male visitors and children, with the women devoted to exclusive separatist culture moved to The Valley and Herland.<sup>110</sup> Amazon Acres continues to be a site for the collective to gather, with a 2017 launch of a book of women's writing on their experience on the lands. Robinson noted that 'there was palpable appreciation for this complicated experiment in sisterhood, separatism and sustainability'.<sup>111</sup> Knowledge of Amazon Acres, and similar women's lands, is assumed amongst lesbian readers, forming part of the imagined

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<sup>105</sup> Jennings, "Creating Feminist Culture," 92.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 142.

<sup>107</sup> Robinson, 146.

<sup>108</sup> Jennings, "Creating Feminist Culture," 93.

<sup>109</sup> Jennings, 100.

<sup>110</sup> Jennings, 101.

<sup>111</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 148.

lesbian space and culture that readers belonged to.<sup>112</sup> They continued to inform further lesbian space initiatives, including the Lesbian Space Project in Sydney, operating in the mid-to-late 1990s, before being mired in controversy around its exclusionary admission practices.

## **EVOLUTION**

### **The Hawke Government and Neoliberalism**

The 1980s in Australian society was a time of transition. In the afterword of his popular history, *The Eighties*, Frank Bongiorno noted that the decade has been framed differently depending on hindsight and perspective.<sup>113</sup> Notably, the newly elected Hawke Labor federal government, in power from 1983 to 1991, had to contend with difficult economic circumstances under which both the Whitlam and Fraser federal governments had struggled to move beyond. It would take a new approach, adopted by Treasurer Paul Keating, to affect change. Although neoliberal policies are often connected to the conservative governments of Reagan and Thatcher, in the US and the UK respectively, in Australia it was the Labor government who took elements of this ideology into practice.<sup>114</sup> Increased allowance to the market by cutting protections and floating the dollar marked a disjuncture from previous economic paradigms.<sup>115</sup> Further, changes in

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<sup>112</sup> Chia Moan, "Beyond the Ghetto: Travelling through Lesbian Space," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1994, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Frank Bongiorno, *The Eighties: The Decade That Transformed Australia* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc. Books, 2015), 344.

<sup>114</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 165.

<sup>115</sup> Paul Kelly, *The End of Uncertainty* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 2; Lindy Edwards, *The Passion of Politics: The Role of Ideology and Political Theory in Australia* (Sydney, AUSTRALIA: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 159.

wage arbitration were marked by the adoption of the Accords.<sup>116</sup> These economic policies had far-reaching effects, setting up long term changes in economic responses to issues. As mentioned, these changes affected funding to social programs, in particular the Women's Liberation successes of women's refuges, health, and crisis centres. As a result, uncertainty would linger with the provision of these services. The 1980s marked a transition point in terms of Australian economic policy, with the adoption of neoliberal perspectives by the Hawke-Keating federal government.

Aside from economic policy, the 1980s saw some of the results of the previous decades push for social change, though limited by perceived political ability. In terms of instituting Australian feminist goals, the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* can be seen as a 'major practical and symbolic achievement,' attempting to remove practices that limited women's access to employment, education, housing and the provision of services, such as credit.<sup>117</sup> There was greater social permissiveness around premarital sex, de facto couples and shared living arrangements before marriage.<sup>118</sup> This tolerant attitude did extend to lesbians and gay men to an extent.<sup>119</sup> The emergence of HIV/AIDS may have tested this acceptance in Australia. The Australian government's response to the epidemic was notable compared to the US and the UK, reliant on the interaction between the government, medical professionals and, importantly, the gay community.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 16.

<sup>117</sup> Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 74, 72.

<sup>118</sup> Bongiorno, 219, 220.

<sup>119</sup> Bongiorno, 230.

<sup>120</sup> Shirleene Robinson and Haylee Ward, "Beyond Tombstones and Grim Reapers: The Gay Community's Challenge Official HIV/AIDS Campaigns in 1980s Australia and Britain," in *Acts of Love and Lust: Sexuality in Australia from 1945-2010*, ed. Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings, and Robert Reynolds (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 100.

Part of the framework to responding to the growing epidemic was public education programs focused on combatting discrimination.<sup>121</sup> This approach would be limited by the much critiqued Grim Reaper campaign, which attempted to reach the broader public, increase awareness of susceptibility amongst heterosexuals and drug users. However, it arguably attached greater fear-based imagery to the disease.<sup>122</sup>

Other political activism movements evolved in the 1980s. Despite the considerable push from Aboriginal activists towards land rights, highlighted by the Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in 1972, the Hawke government retreated from any commitments over the issue.<sup>123</sup> The celebration of the Australian Bicentennial continued this step away from engaging with Indigenous activism, with great emphasis placed on the contested histories of the First Fleet and Australian settlement, enlivened by Indigenous protests over the celebration.<sup>124</sup> Environmental and nuclear policies were questioned, with protests posed over the future of uranium mining in Australia, falling in favour of pro-mining interests.<sup>125</sup> This tension between environmental activists is notable due to the success of the Franklin Dam protest in Tasmania aligning with the election of Hawke in 1983, part of his ascent.<sup>126</sup> This cause also connects to anti-war movements, with

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<sup>121</sup> Robinson and Ward, "Beyond Tombstones and Grim Reapers," 100.

<sup>122</sup> Robinson and Ward, 104.

<sup>123</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 82; Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 74.

<sup>124</sup> Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 279, 280.

<sup>125</sup> Bongiorno, 111–12.

<sup>126</sup> Craig McGregor, "The Bandwagon," in *Time of Testing: The Bob Hawke Victory* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1983), 130.

lesbians heavily involved in this area of activism, seen in the protest against Pine Gap in the Northern Territory.<sup>127</sup>

The uneasy connection between social movements and the Hawke government represents some of the transitioning elements of the 1980s. The ongoing push of movements, borne of the 1970s, seen in Women's and Gay Liberation, Indigenous Australian activism and growing environmental and anti-nuclear protests, saw some successes in the 1980s. However, they were limited by perceived political ability on specific actions, with Indigenous activism particularly facing a loss of commitment from the government. Lesbians maintained a connection with the various social movements highlighted through decades, part of their lifestyle as lesbian feminists, illustrating the ongoing relevance of this ideology and cultural practices in the 1980s.

### **Lesbian Feminism in the 1980s**

The 1980s are often framed as the disintegration of the Women's Liberation movement, blame levelled at disunity promoted by lesbian feminism and the alienation of women from non-English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous women.<sup>128</sup> However, there are questions to be asked about this framing. Both Sophie Robinson and Barbara Baird have illustrated that the 1980s were a productive time for feminist activism, deeply rooted within lesbian communities and cultures. Some scholars have critiqued the conflation of

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<sup>127</sup> Alison Bartlett, "Feminist Protest in the Desert: Researching the 1983 Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp," *Gender, Place & Culture* 20, no. 7 (November 2013): 922, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2012.753585>.

<sup>128</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 164; Adele Murdolo, "Warmth and Unity with All Women? Historicizing Racism in the Australian Women's Movement," *Feminist Review*, no. 52 (1996): 78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395774>.



cultural feminism to lesbian feminism and the complete rejection of lifestyle politics.<sup>129</sup> However, as Robinson showed in the Australian context, lesbian feminists of the 1980s combined elements of lifestyle politics, drawing on experiments of the 1970s and completed direct actions for various causes.<sup>130</sup> Significantly, the combining ideologies of feminism, environmental activism, and anti-war activism was highlighted in the lesbian attendance at international peace camps, including the 1983 Pine Gap and 1984 Cockburn Sound military protests.<sup>131</sup> This political mix was influenced by earlier anti-military feminist protests of Women Against Rape in War in the early 1980s.<sup>132</sup> By the mid-1970s, Australian feminist activists were reckoning with gendered violence against women, considering domestic violence, incest, prostitution and pornography. As lesbian feminists were integrated with women's refuges and other women's services, they were involved with the theorising action against such violence.<sup>133</sup> This work was connected to the continual insistence of developing a women's culture, separate from patriarchal systems. Part of this was adopting alternative spellings of women, often wimmin or womin, to distance focus from men and reclaim space for women.<sup>134</sup> Some lesbian magazines adopted this practice, continuing into the early 1990s, though not without

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<sup>129</sup>Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 33; Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 164; Sara Ahmed, "Lesbian Feminism," in *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), 213.

<sup>130</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 164.

<sup>131</sup> Robinson, 190–91; Bartlett, "Feminist Protest in the Desert," 922.

<sup>132</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 188–90.

<sup>133</sup> Robinson, 186.

<sup>134</sup> Robinson, 187.

some detractors.<sup>135</sup> More lesbian focused events included the Bridge the Gap lesbian mothers conference of 1984 and the development of lesbian conferences in the late 1980s, which would continue into the 1990s as significant lesbian gathering points.<sup>136</sup> Lesbian dances that had sprung up in the 1970s continued with the growth of lesbian bands and music.<sup>137</sup> These more social activities represent the cultural practices adopted by lesbian feminists in the 1980s, part of a broader commitment to lesbian feminist lifestyles. As Robinson noted, ‘lesbian feminism was both a fun *and* serious business’.<sup>138</sup> This period was a productive time for lesbian feminism, though it is often mischaracterised as a downturn in feminist action.

### ***Lesbian Network***

Alongside this politically, culturally, and socially active period was the development of another national lesbian magazine, *Lesbian Network*. This publication intended to develop a national quarterly magazine, as opposed to the Melbourne focused *Lesbian News*. First proposed at the 1984 Women and Labour Conference in Brisbane, the first issue was published in Sydney later that year.<sup>139</sup> Lavender, the magazine’s co-founder, emphasises the ‘network’ part of the title, the newsletter to ‘continue Lesbian feminist

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<sup>135</sup> Frances Rand and Jackie Scherer, “Welcome!,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1990, 1; Example of letter to the editor against the alternative spellings of women: Michelle Reiner, “Letter,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1990, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Barbara Baird, “Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism by Graham Willett – AHR,” accessed February 19, 2021, <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2001/03/01/living-out-loud-a-history-of-gay-and-lesbian-activism-by-graham-willett/>.

<sup>137</sup> Kathy Sport, “Below the Belt and Bleeding Fingertips,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (July 1, 2007): 343–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640701364703>.

<sup>138</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 199.

<sup>139</sup> Jean Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes: Radical Lesbian Feminist Activism in Victoria during the 1980s* (Brunswick East, Vic.: Dyke Books, 2012), 166, 415.

focused networking, promote autonomous Lesbian feminism and help overcome the tyranny of distance between Lesbian communities and isolated and country dykes'.<sup>140</sup> Inspiration was drawn from international examples, *Lesbian Feminist Circle* from New Zealand and *Lesbian Connection* in the US.<sup>141</sup> The collective operated out of Rozelle, Sydney, until 1994, when a call was put out for a new collective to takeover.<sup>142</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose* reported on this change, noting that the Lesbian Space Project collective's bid to produce the magazine was ignored in favour of a group in Adelaide.<sup>143</sup> This switch began a few changes of hands through the early 2000s, with first a change in format and editorial policy when a Melbourne collective took control in 2000, and later another Victorian group produced delayed issues from 2002.<sup>144</sup> *Lesbian Network* strongly believed in the lesbian and women-only spaces, dictating who could access the publication, sometimes misunderstood by broader coalition politics.<sup>145</sup> Notably, liaisons were utilised by the publication in more regional areas, where coalition spaces could not be avoided.<sup>146</sup> The magazine's slogan sums up this position, stating: 'Lesbian Network, by for and about Lesbians. Visibility, Information, Support and Access'.<sup>147</sup> *Lesbian Network* provided an important avenue for lesbian connection and communication, maintaining its lesbian space for those who needed it. Aligned with their lesbian feminist politics, the publication represents the continuing significance of a lesbian feminist position for women well into the early 2000s. It was part of the continuing

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<sup>140</sup> Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes*, 166.

<sup>141</sup> Taylor, 166.

<sup>142</sup> Taylor, 416.

<sup>143</sup> Taylor, 416; "Network Set for SA," *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1994.

<sup>144</sup> Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes*, 417.

<sup>145</sup> Barbara Farrelly, "The Lavender Connection," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 16–17; Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes*, 167.

<sup>146</sup> Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes*, 167.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor, 167.

flourishing of lesbian feminist culture and politics in the 1980s, defining one aspect of this decade for lesbian public cultures.

### **Lesbian Sex Radicalism**

Another significant aspect of 1980s lesbian public cultures were the development of lesbian sex radicalism and the subsequent questioning of the role of sex in politics. With the emergence of the Women's and Gay liberation movements in the 1970s, many lesbians were questioning how to express their sexuality and live to their ideals, scrutinising accepted practices of intimacy.<sup>148</sup> Part of this emphasised mutuality and equality within lesbian relationships, with 'ideal sex as equal, tender and non-penetrative'.<sup>149</sup> Further, as Rebecca Jennings details, many embraced non-monogamy as part of an imagined supportive sisterhood, with varying results for individuals.<sup>150</sup> Many subscribed to some notion of ideological clean sex, prompted by various discussions and debates. The so-called Sex Wars were a set of debates over feminist sexual practices, considering the place of sado/masochism (S/M), leather cultures and pornography.<sup>151</sup> Featherstone and Ward argued that the broader Australian feminist movement never fell into the simple dichotomies of American feminisms.<sup>152</sup> Instead, debates around sex radical practices were articulated in lesbian communities, documented within different

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<sup>148</sup>Rebecca Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin: Lesbian Feminist Theories of Intimacy," in *Intimacy, Violence and Activism: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives on Australasian History and Society*, ed. Graham Willett and Yorick Smaal (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2013), 135.

<sup>149</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 137.

<sup>150</sup> Jennings, 138.

<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Letters to the Editor as 'Archives of Feeling': On Our Backs Magazine and the Sex Wars," *American Periodicals* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 153.

<sup>152</sup> Lisa Featherstone and Haylee Ward, "Pleasure, Pain, Power and Politics: Australian Feminist Responses to Pornography, 1970-89," in *Acts of Love and Lust: Sexuality in Australia from 1945-2010*, ed. Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings, and Robert Reynolds (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 58.

lesbian publications well into the 1990s. Robinson argued that lesbian sex radicalism was not disjointed from lesbian feminism, as oft-presented by the sex wars framework. Notably, Kimberly O'Sullivan, later editor of erotica publication *Wicked Women*, herself was a separatist in the 1970s, before adopting sex radicalism in the 1980s. Robinson highlighted the interconnectedness of sex radical cultures, noting the involvement of trans men, gay men and lesbians to create the sex radical subculture.<sup>153</sup> This subculture would have lasting impacts on Australian lesbian cultures, integrated into the tacit knowledge and history of the community. Magazines, especially those Sydney-based like *Lesbians on the Loose*, would have to address associated events to the chagrin of some readers. Magazines also served as a space to experiment with sex radicalism. *Wicked Women* served as the Australian publication for sex radicalism and experimental expressions of sexuality, publishing from 1988 to 1996 and will be discussed in detail further in this thesis.

## **TRANSITION**

The 1990s were a decade of adoption, assimilation and appropriation. The ongoing goal of lesbian visibility was achieved, though often at the expense of being commercialised and glamorised. Significant activism for state recognition of partnerships resulted in some adopting nuclear family modes of living, with access to donor insemination defining lesbian family planning for many. There was a desire, especially for younger women, to adopt individual modes of dress and understanding of identity. Further, women looked to the past, the 1950s and 1960s, and re-adopted butch/femme

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<sup>153</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution': Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s," 456.

identities.<sup>154</sup> The magazines of this period reflected these changing times, boasting new glossy front covers and wide distribution. Notably, *Lesbian on the Loose* emerged as a significant national monthly, with a wide range of readers domestically and the occasional international write in. Lingering trails from earlier movements and subcultures were still present, as were earlier magazines. *Wicked Women* ended their run in 1996, their events featured in other publications at the time. *Lesbian Network* continued to publish until 2006. While *Lesbian News* folded in the late 1980s, *Labrys* picked up where they left off, given the previous publications mailing list. When they too failed to thrive, *Lesbiana*, which began as a stop-gap until *Labrys* returned, continued this legacy. Significant questions were posed of the magazines at the time, relating to their production and community identity. However, an issue never wavered on by the lesbian publications during this period was their right to exist as solely lesbian spaces, believing coalition spaces to be limiting to the continued innovation of lesbian communities and public cultures.

### **Keating and Howard Governments**

The political context of the 1990s was inflected with a general sense of malaise around political institutions, partly a rejection of the excesses of the previous decade and a growing sense of disunity. Paul Keating toppled Hawke in late 1991, becoming Prime Minister, serving in this position until 1996.<sup>155</sup> The early 1990s is primarily

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<sup>154</sup> Magazine examples: “Girls Just Wanna Be Boys Just Wanna Be Girls,” *Labrys*, October 1991, 1; Julia Hancock, “From Docs to Stilettos...: Lesbian Fashion Statements,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1993, 16–17; Academic examples: Lillian Faderman, “The Return of Butch and Femme: A Phenomenon in Lesbian Sexuality of The 1980s and 1990s,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 4 (April 1992): 578–96; Described in this video: *Framing Lesbian Fashion* (Frameline, 1992), <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/framing-lesbian-fashion>.

<sup>155</sup> George Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade* (Brunswick, Vic.: Scribe Publications, 2013), 41.

characterised by the recession the nation experienced, resulting in disruptions for many.<sup>156</sup> From the government's perspective, the recession was deemed necessary, positioned as helping to clean up inefficiencies and allow governments to break the issue of inflation.<sup>157</sup> This outlook was not the view from the ground for many, *Lesbians on the Loose* running recession and employment coverage for its readers.<sup>158</sup> As part of the recovery, more women entered the workforce, tied to the growing casualisation of the workforce and employers' utilising the gender pay gap.<sup>159</sup>

Howard's election represented a change in social outlook, growing more conservative, resulting in some anxiety for women's services and lesbian and gay partnerships. While there was an undercurrent of fracturing identity, with a wish to return to a vision of Australia focused on white settlement achievements, it cannot be discounted that a general dislike of Keating rather than a strong preference for Howard influenced the 1996 election.<sup>160</sup> Howard described himself as a 'tolerant conservative', connecting to his views of social policy, which would have an impact on women's services, as well as lesbian and gay partnerships. Marian Sawyer described the dismantling of women's and Human Rights services under Howard, noting the disappearance of several women's units across multiple portfolios.<sup>161</sup> Part of Howard's 'tolerant conservative' spin can be

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<sup>156</sup> Bongiorno, *The Eighties*, 320.

<sup>157</sup> Bongiorno, 320.

<sup>158</sup> Examples include: Jo Arkison, "Recession Tips: Preparing for Change," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1991, 8; Jo Arkison, "Recession Tips: The Resume - Your Selling Document," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1991, 9; Jo Arkison, "Recession Tips: Work Search Strategies," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1992, 9.

<sup>159</sup> Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade*, 138.

<sup>160</sup> Megalogenis, 167.

<sup>161</sup> Marian Sawyer, "Australia: The Fall of the Femocrat," in *Changing State Feminism*, ed. Joyce Outshoorn and Johanna Kantola (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29.

seen in political coverage within *Lesbians on the Loose*. They quoted Howard stating that lesbians 'have the right "to live free and open lives without discrimination and threats of violence,' while noting that he would not commit to introducing Federal anti-discrimination laws.<sup>162</sup> The late 1990s marked the appearance of greater state recognition wanted for lesbian and gay partnerships, with the immigration of partners a significant issue documented within *Lesbians on the Loose*. In 1997, Howard limited the immigration of people under the interdependency category and changed eligibility requirements, adversely affecting lesbian and gay partnerships.<sup>163</sup> This changing cultural landscape was documented within the lesbian magazines under study, expressing the anxieties felt by many to adapt to changing circumstances while also agitating for action from readers.

### **Lesbian Feminism in the 1990s**

The place of feminism remained significant within lesbian communities, defining women's understandings of themselves and their communities. However, there was growing questioning of 1970s style feminism, preferring to pick and choose individual modes of lifestyle aligned to personal political preferences. Lesbian feminism significantly fell trap to narrations that framed this perspective as 'a relic of the past, superseded by decidedly younger, savvier, sexier and 'queer'-identified generation in the 1980s and 1990s'.<sup>164</sup> Verity Burgmann simplistically described a 1990s' hyper-

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<sup>162</sup> Kirsty Machon, "PM Says the 'L' Word but Won't Go All the Way," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1996, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Deborah Singerman, "The Long Goodbye," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1997, 6.

<sup>164</sup> Robinson, "'The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution': Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s," 445.



individualised version of liberal feminism that ‘denounced radical feminism as ‘victim feminism’, which it contrasted unfavourably with its own position of power feminism’.<sup>165</sup> The place of state feminism, neoliberalism and the recession of the early 1990s cannot be ignored in the formulation. Jean Taylor noted the pressure on some lesbians to keep their jobs limited their political activism.<sup>166</sup> Successful lesbians in business were praised, however, many operated women or lesbian-focused businesses, maintaining a dedication to the community and lesbian feminist outlook that promoted lesbian spaces. Debates were featured, and the place of profit from the community was questioned, the magazines allowing spaces for these discussions. This tension was further impacted when larger mainstream companies began to advertise to lesbians directly.<sup>167</sup> Coalition politics were more readily embraced, though with the continual emphasis on maintaining lesbian space as well. This position was highlighted by the place of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, with lesbians achieving high positions of power in Mardi Gras’ operation after years of not being heavily involved.<sup>168</sup> Again, further tension between mainstream visibility and community definitions were tested by the ongoing attention that lesbian celebrities garnered. This concern was pushed by the early 1990s adoption of lesbian chic as a fashionable figure, used in advertising, testing the limits of imagery as separate from lesbian identity. Turner describes the phenomenon as a way to ‘contain, curtail and ultimately destroy the idea of lesbianism as it has been produced by

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<sup>165</sup> Verity Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation* (Sydney, UNITED STATES: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 160.

<sup>166</sup> Jean Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!: In Victoria in the 1990s* (Brunswick East, Vic., 2016), 2.

<sup>167</sup> “Stoli Advertisement,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1995, 44; “Telstra Rings up a First,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1995, 4; “Telstra Advertisement - So Glad You’re Here,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1995, 44.

<sup>168</sup> Kimberley O’Sullivan, “Lesbians in Mardi Gras,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1990, 1; “Mardi Gras AGM,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1992, 4; Kirsty Machon, “The Contest for Our Culture,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1997, 23, 25.

lesbians'.<sup>169</sup> Though some women sought to appropriate femininity and glamour into their style, these evocative images were sometimes reimagined to recreate personal identities.<sup>170</sup> The 1990s were a disparate decade, lesbian communities facing issues around identity in the face of increasing commercialisation, coalition and control. However, magazines thrived during this period, women looking to operate within this changing formulation, and many using these changes to re-invent themselves. This development did not deny past influences, instead, women chose what to take and discard personally in their own political and personal expression.

### ***Labrys***

*Labrys* first published in November 1990, soon after *Lesbian News* had folded.<sup>171</sup>

Receiving the previous periodical's mailing list, *Labrys* reported on the news within the lesbian community, with articles on various topics of interest.<sup>172</sup> Michelle Daw, part of the collective producing *Labrys*, expressed hopes that the magazine would "present innovative and informative information to a diverse lesbian community".<sup>173</sup> Compared to the later 1990s publications, *Labrys* had a unique DIY aesthetic, featuring handwritten ads and headings, representing the look of magazines before the adoption of glossy front covers and more stylised formatting. While *Labrys* did not run for long, folding in early 1992, the periodical exemplifies some of the changes of the 1990s.<sup>174</sup> The

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<sup>169</sup> Georgina Turner, "CATCHING THE WAVE: Britain's Lesbian Publishing Goes Commercial," *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 6 (2009): 774.

<sup>170</sup> Hancock, "From Docs to Stilettos...: Lesbian Fashion Statements," 16–17.

<sup>171</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 67.

<sup>172</sup> Bill Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners: Both Used Media to Advance Lesbian Goals," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 417,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1105842>; Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 67.

<sup>173</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 67.

<sup>174</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 68.

magazines struggled to balance the need for revenue to produce the magazine and its political commitments to the community. *Labrys* attempted to cross the ‘torturous path from collective to private publishing,’ incorporating to B.A.D Press Pty.<sup>175</sup> *Labrys* tried to balance “patriarchal business practices” and those that would not compromise them “politically or personally”.<sup>176</sup> This tension did not resolve, rather the magazine folded after incorporating into a business, dissolving due to legal and personal issues.<sup>177</sup> *Labrys*’ intense downfall highlights the struggles of the early 1990s to adapt to both changing reader expectations and the lessening strength of collective visions of business and community.

### ***Lesbiana***

The explicit purpose of *Lesbiana* was to fill the gap left by *Labrys*. Started by Lillitu Babalu (then Sheril Berkovitch) and Pat Longmore in March 1992, *Lesbiana* was never intended to be a long-term publication.<sup>178</sup> In her opening address, Babalu stated that *Lesbiana* would cease with the return of *Labrys*, the complete breakdown of the latter publication not confirmed until a couple of months later.<sup>179</sup> Babalu privately owned *Lesbiana* from the beginning.<sup>180</sup> Four months into the publication of *Lesbiana*, Pat Longmore’s death left Babalu alone to create the monthly issues with little help.<sup>181</sup> Babalu remained influenced by Longmore’s conception of the magazine, the publication to be a

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<sup>175</sup> Calder, “Feminist Collectives or Private Owners,” 422.

<sup>176</sup> Calder, 422.

<sup>177</sup> Calder, “Feminist Collectives or Private Owners,” 422.

<sup>178</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 124.

<sup>179</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, “Why a New Lesbian Paper?,” *Lesbiana*, March 1992, 1; Michelle Daw and Wendy Dodd, “The *Labrys* Meeting,” *Lesbiana*, May 1992, 13.

<sup>180</sup> Calder, “Feminist Collectives or Private Owners,” 423.

<sup>181</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 124.

‘focal point for networking and linking lesbians’ and a ‘forum for discussion of lesbian issues’.<sup>182</sup> The strain of production influenced Babalu’s decision to sell the magazine in 1995, wishing to focus on other endeavours.<sup>183</sup> The publication was bought by Jan Campbell, co-ordinator of Gay and Lesbian Switchboard and owner of tour company Wandering Women.<sup>184</sup> Campbell laid out her editorial policy, which stated she did not believe that politics was ‘passé’.<sup>185</sup> This position connected to the construction of lessening political interest from readers, *Lesbiana* attempting to distinguish itself as a publication still dedicated to lesbian and feminist ideals. Compared to its Sydney counterpart, *Lesbians on the Loose*, there was more of an edge to commentary, especially around topics of visibility and representation, as well as queer politics. While neither magazine was sure of ‘queer’ identity, Jennifer Rice’s indictment within *Lesbiana* stands out as a particularly negative piece on the growth of queer as both an identity and politics.<sup>186</sup> Further, *Lesbiana* writers were critical of celebrity culture and mainstream advertising targeting lesbians.<sup>187</sup> In contrast, criticism of these types of lesbian visibility was often articulated in letters to the editor within *LOTL*.<sup>188</sup> Jan Campbell maintained the publication, adding to its formatting, including a glossy front cover.<sup>189</sup> By the time she sold the magazine in 2000, she had built it into a small, financially viable business.<sup>190</sup> Similar to the magazines that came before it, *Lesbiana* continued until 2004 before being replaced by several short-

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<sup>182</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, “Pat Longmore 1931-1992,” *Lesbiana*, August 1992, 10–11.

<sup>183</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, “Lesbiana Is for Sale,” *Lesbiana*, May 1995, 16.

<sup>184</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 124.

<sup>185</sup> Jan Campbell, “Lesbiana Charter,” *Lesbiana*, June 1996, 2.

<sup>186</sup> Jennifer Rice, “Queer Becomes You,” *Lesbiana*, September 1999, 5.

<sup>187</sup> Jodie Joyce, “Bring Back the Parrot?,” *Lesbiana*, October 1996, 15; Jodie Joyce, “Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered: Celebrity Lesbians,” *Lesbiana*, November 1998, 35.

<sup>188</sup> “Marketing to Dykes,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1992, 5.

<sup>189</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 185.

<sup>190</sup> Taylor, 185.

lasting projects.<sup>191</sup> *Lesbiana* combined elements of the changing 1990s with its private ownership and continued allegiance to lesbian feminist politics, which can be viewed as part of its legacy connection to *Lesbian Newsletter*. Unlike *Labrys*, it did manage to balance both business and community, creating a publication that weathered the 1990s, spanning the decade.

### ***Lesbians on the Loose***

*Lesbians on the Loose*, or *LOTL*, exponentially grew to become the prominent lesbian magazine of the 1990s, read nationally, with several international write-ins confirming its popularity. Even with this wide distribution, the periodical is rooted in its place of origin, Sydney, owing to its inception. Created by Frances Rand and Jaz Ishtar (previously known as Jackie Scherer), it was to fill the informational gap by providing venue and event updates in the Sydney scene.<sup>192</sup> First published in December 1989, the magazine's title is drawn from Rand's and Ishtar's name for their friendship group, helping cultivate community appeal as readers were drawn into the circle of events, news and gossip.<sup>193</sup> The publication slowly grew to be Rand's work, the early production and distribution a shared effort between Rand and several friends and volunteers.<sup>194</sup> *LOTL* remained free, reliant on advertising revenue to fund production.<sup>195</sup> For this reason, it provides an interesting case study for the growth of mainstream advertising within lesbian magazines, with the mid-1990s a turning point for the inclusion of non-

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<sup>191</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 185.

<sup>192</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 106; Rand and Scherer, "Welcome!," 1.

<sup>193</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 137.

<sup>194</sup> Calder, 138.

<sup>195</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 108.

lesbian businesses within the magazine.<sup>196</sup> In 1993, Rand quit her job with the ABC to work on *LOTL* full-time, and in 1994, her partner, Barbara Farrelly, previous editor of the *Sydney Star Observer*, joined the production.<sup>197</sup> Both Rand and Farrelly upheld journalistic notions for the magazine, attempting to maintain a neutral position on community debates, the publication to serve as ‘the lesbian community’s “journal of record” with professionally written and presented news coverage’.<sup>198</sup> Further, relative to its 1990s counterparts, *LOTL* endeavoured to learn about its readers, collecting surveys every couple of years with ever-increasing questions.<sup>199</sup>

Rand stood firm in her belief that mixed gay press could not ‘adequately serve both lesbian and gay readers’ from the magazine’s inception until she decided to sell the publication.<sup>200</sup> To Rand, the growth of *LOTL* had ‘brought a community together [and allowed] lesbian businesses to develop’.<sup>201</sup> The new publisher exemplified this position, *LOTL* purchased by Silke Bader, owner of women’s travel group Silke’s Travel, and founder of the Sydney chapter of Lezbiz, a lesbian business support group.<sup>202</sup> Both these ventures began in the early 1990s, their growth aided by advertising in *LOTL*.<sup>203</sup> Bader continued to publish *LOTL* until 2015 when production was handed to non-profit media

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<sup>196</sup> “Stoli Advertisement,” 44; “Telstra Advertisement - So Glad You’re Here,” 44.

<sup>197</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “Kiss and Tell Scoop PIX!,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 23; “Star’s First Dyke Editor,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1993, 7.

<sup>198</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 139.

<sup>199</sup> Examples include: “Reader Survey 1990,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1990, 10–11; “Reader Survey,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1992, 8; “1995 Reader Survey,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1995, 25–27.

<sup>200</sup> “LOTL FOR SALE,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1998, 5.

<sup>201</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 138.

<sup>202</sup> “LOTL Changes Hands after 9 Years,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1998, 5.

<sup>203</sup> Details Silke’s Travels: “Doing It for Ourselves,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1995, 16; Details Lezbiz Sydney: “Doing It for Ourselves: These Dykes Mean Business,” *June 1995*, June 1995, 16; More on Bader: “The Accidental Tour Operator,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1997, 14.

company L Media, which continues to publish content online under the *LOTL* masthead.<sup>204</sup> *LOTL* achieved its primary objective, keeping lesbians informed on community events and venues and developing a readership community spanning across Australia. Although *LOTL* continued to publish well after the 1990s, it is this decade that promoted its origin and growth. *LOTL* maintained lesbian space while combining the mainstreaming effects of corporate attention and commercialisation, allowing lesbian businesses to cultivate both a community position and continued viability to several lesbian projects, including itself.

## **CONCLUSION**

The evolving nature of the magazines matches broader contextual changes over the several decades, adapting and innovating to new challenges. This chapter illustrates the deep entanglements the lesbian magazines had with various social, political and economic movements from the 1970s onwards. The historical context discussed inflected and developed the voice of lesbian periodicals, building a shared knowledge of feminist theory and activism that would be continually questioned and evolving. Experiencing marginalisation in both the Women's and Gay Liberation movements, lesbian feminism encouraged women to set up their own organisations, including the lesbian press. These new publications anchored lesbian communities, forming a discursive medium to trial new ideologies and discuss issues significant to formation of lesbian identities and lifestyles. This function of the magazines continued into the 1980s, connecting and documenting women across Australia participating in various

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<sup>204</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 141; "Lesbian News, Bisexuals and Queer Women, *LOTL*," *LOTL*, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.lotl.com/>.

forms of activism and new subcultural identities. The 1990s can be imagined as the culmination of changes from previous decades, with greater lesbian visibility and public acceptance and the growing commercialisation of gay communities. Magazines of this decade had to balance various factors, from maintaining their commitment to community, the financial restrictions of production costs, and the personal tolls on collectives running on a volunteer basis. The continued thread between these different publications is the dedication to lesbian space, providing access to lesbian public cultures. Although what this looked like changed over the decades, the commitment from publishers to mediating lesbian communities was significant, forming part of the archive of lesbian identity in Australia. The next chapter will further contextualise the magazines, delving into the production styles of the major magazines and their ties to lesbian businesses, operating in sense as lesbian economies.



## **Chapter 2 – “Get out of Capitalism”: Lesbian Economies and the Production of Australian Lesbian Periodicals**

The multiplicity of the magazines placed them both in service of and in tension with the lesbian communities they aimed to represent. This difficulty was highlighted in the need for revenue to fund continual production costs, periodicals adapting to rising expectations to publish professional material over several decades. In the 1970s, magazines were defined by their collective, who volunteered time and resources to publish the newsletters and periodicals. The ever-present feminist perspectives limited advertising content and strained connections to the bar scene, restricting gay commercial engagements. This position flows through the 1980s, except for *Wicked Women*, which challenged the normal modes of distribution and fundraising techniques. By the 1990s, the magazines themselves served as business opportunities, with both *Lesbians on the Loose* and *Lesbiana* sold to lesbian entrepreneurs. Established publishers entered the lesbian media scene with *Lip* magazine, with limited success.

Further, with the need for advertising revenue, the magazines themselves helped promote and propel lesbian businesses and services, promoting an alternative lesbian economy. Lesbian publications in the 1990s noted several support services across Australia for lesbians in business, as well as specific experiments in lesbian exchanges. Branches of LezBiz, a lesbian business network, were started in Melbourne and Sydney, supporting lesbian entrepreneurs. The latter service is seen through the promotion of

LESY, a lesbian service exchange network operating in various capital cities. However, it was not always lesbian and gay businesses advertising in the publications. In the 1990s, there was a growth of interest in the perceived gay consumer market, with several large companies advertising in the magazines by the mid-1990s. However, while lesbians were encapsulated in this market, the strained relation with consumerism relating to lesbian feminist perspectives limited mainstream engagement with the market, and lesbian understanding of themselves as consumers. This tension is highlighted by letters to the editor discussing the value of direct advertising to lesbians as identified consumer subjects. Many readers were unsure of the allure of social citizenship through consumption.

In turn, this growth in lesbian business advertising maintained lesbian spaces, magazines promoting businesses such as feminist bookshops, bar nights, and venues. During its first-year publishing in September 1990, *Lesbians on the Loose* proclaimed that Sydney had seven regular lesbian events, which according to the article put them on par with international cities, such as New York and Berlin.<sup>1</sup> These sites operated as distribution points for the magazines and helped develop the lesbian communities in which they were located. By July 1992, *Lesbians on the Loose* distributed across 61 sites nationally, with 40 located in Sydney alone.<sup>2</sup> Many of these sites no longer exist, some even going under during the 1990s, including Shrew Bookshop in Melbourne, closing in 1997.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the magazines serve as an archive for experiences in these spaces,

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<sup>1</sup> "New Bars Open," *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1990, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1992, 2.

<sup>3</sup> "Feminists Mourn the Closure of Shrew Women's Bookshop," *Lesbiana*, February 1997, 6.

eulogised in articles, recommendations and farewell announcements. However, these spaces were contentious, with debates on who counted as ‘lesbian’ or ‘feminist’ in the context of growing queer identification. Although coalition spaces had operated for some time, this did not lessen tension, particularly around perceived controversial businesses, such as sex toy retailers.

As this chapter will show, Australian lesbian magazines had a layered engagement with capitalism, commercialisation and consumption. The magazines were required to raise revenue to stay afloat, affecting production arrangements and editorial choices, advertising and mainstream engagement growth, and the development of lesbian entrepreneurship and spaces. These elements revolve around questions of identity, shifting through changing contexts. How do you be successful and maintain community-oriented perspectives? Who gets to define lesbian businesses? At what point do lesbian businesses become exploitative? What is the place of consumer subjectivity as lesbians, and is it a valid identity to explore?

**“FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...”**

Throughout the decades discussed within this thesis, methods of production and the organisational structures that enabled publication transitioned from collective operations to commercial enterprises. Publishing was not just content, it entailed ‘the need to set up systems for the other elements of the operation: sales and distribution, as

well as an overarching system of administration'.<sup>4</sup> This section will discuss these changes, how these methods of publication were tied to political perspectives and how they were examined within the magazines themselves.

### **Collective Publishing**

Early Australian lesbian magazines were heavily tied to the emerging Women's and Gay Liberation movements of the 1970s as outlined in Chapter 1. This origin is reflected in the production of newsletters, relying on collective efforts which experimented with organisational forms. *Lesbian Newsletter* began with a small collective before changing hands a few times. Collective publishing was not limited to the 1970s, instead it continued into the following decades in new contexts, as *Lesbian Newsletter* rebranded itself in the 1980s and *Labrys* began production in the early 1990s. . Each example practised their version of a functional collective, with teetering responsibilities to themselves, their subscribers and associated production groups. Difficulties presented themselves in remaining accountable to their political beliefs while producing quality newsletters for their readers. This conflict was seen in *Lesbian Newsletter*, which experimented with editorial policies to remain politically beholden to their ideals.

As with many lesbian periodicals, *Lesbian Newsletter* attempted to balance its commitment to radical ideology and its production's financial and personal toll. Even the cheapest formatted publications required continual funding. *Lesbian Newsletter*

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners: Both Used Media to Advance Lesbian Goals," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 422, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2015.1105842>.

struggled to match production costs, especially at the beginning when it did not feature commercial advertising and was free for readers.<sup>5</sup> In an April 1979 editorial, the collective detailed that it cost \$120 each issue to print, with 12 cents per copy to post, and office space rented at the Women's Cultural Palace.<sup>6</sup> Volunteer labour produced the publication using manual typewriters and hand-cranked Gestetner machines, limiting the graphic options of the periodical.<sup>7</sup> A paid subscription was added in October 1977, with over 100 subscribers signing on by the following year.<sup>8</sup> However, this did not sustain production, even when subscription prices were raised from \$6 to \$8.<sup>9</sup> Further, they lost office space when the Women's Cultural Palace closed.<sup>10</sup> A merger was considered in 1980 with the liberationist magazine *Gay Community News*, only to be rejected due to concerns that the distinct lesbian perspective would be lost amongst a gay male publication, limiting its contributor and subscriber interest.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Sybylla Press agreed to carry debts up to \$700 and provide office space, allowing *Lesbian Newsletter* to continue as a standalone for a bit longer.<sup>12</sup>

In 1983, the publication was repackaged as *Lesbian News* magazine alongside a renewed fundraising effort to clear old debts.<sup>13</sup> Advertisements were accepted by the collective in 1985, managed under strict guidelines that they “comply with our feminist

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<sup>5</sup> William (Bill) Francis Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era: Australian Magazines and Newspapers 1970-2000” (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2015), 130.

<sup>6</sup> “Editorial,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, March-April 1979, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 130.

<sup>8</sup> Calder, 130.

<sup>9</sup> Calder, 130.

<sup>10</sup> Calder, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Calder, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Calder, 131.

philosophy” and do not “exploit women and/or lesbians”.<sup>14</sup> However, debts again grew, cleared by a return to the cheaper format and cutting print run to subscribers only.<sup>15</sup> From the end of 1988 to October-November 1990, a new collective in Daylesford, Victoria, took over production until membership dwindled to two.<sup>16</sup> The subscriber list was then handed to a Melbourne collective which began a new lesbian magazine, *Labrys*.<sup>17</sup> Although the collective efforts to produce *Lesbian Newsletter* had faltered due to ongoing financial difficulties, it lasted fourteen years, a considerable length of time for such a project, adapting from the fervour of the 1970s, remaining true enough to the politics through the 1980s. The project’s legacy was ensured by the passing of the torch in the 1990s.

Collective publishing defined early lesbian newsletters and publications, connecting them to the ideological practices of the Women’s and Gay Liberation movements. However, they could be difficult to sustain due to personal disputes, financial responsibilities to subscribers and printers, and overwork. Although by the 1990s, private ownership was more common, reliance on volunteer and unpaid work was still common, representing the legacy that it was almost noble to work for the lesbian community in this capacity. The publications knew their own significance in keeping their communities informed and documenting the debates around identity, politics, and lifestyle. Those who worked on the periodicals were part of something, participating and maintaining their communities. In the face of financial difficulties and responsibilities

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<sup>14</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 131.

<sup>15</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Calder, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Calder, 131.

to subscribers and readers, the balancing act of preserving sustainability was a struggle for many publications not detailed. The long thread of *Lesbian Newsletter* and *Lesbian News* was tied to the commitment of the various collectives to represent their communities within in their pages.

### **Girlcotts and Backlash**

Aside from production costs, broader community responses could affect the publishing run of a magazine. *Wicked Women* had to contend with a sometimes-hostile lesbian media scape. Participation in the lesbian sex radical scene remained contentious well into the 1990s, leading to the continued ostracisation of the women involved. This disjuncture is highlighted in the treatment of *Wicked Women* and its relation to lesbian communities and spaces. In particular, *Wicked Women* had uneasy relations in its production and distribution, further prompting its creators to turn to their own fundraising methods. In the context of creating alternative lesbian economies and lesbian spaces, *Wicked Women's* reliance on both mixed gay spaces and its own events created new modes of expressing lesbianism.

While *Wicked Women* developed the lesbian sex radical scene, especially in Australia, it is predated by a short-lived erotica publication *Australian Lesbian Diary (ALD)*. Running from 1987-88, it was owned by married couple, Vicki and Maggie.<sup>18</sup> In an editor's note in the first issue, the publication was described as 'Our own magazine wholly and solely for the girls'.<sup>19</sup> It published lesbian erotica stories, lewd illustrations,

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<sup>18</sup> *Australian Lesbian Diary*, 1987, 3.

<sup>19</sup> "Editor's Note," *Australian Lesbian Diary*, 1987, 5.

book reviews as well as an advice column. In a section entitled ‘Maggie’s Soap Box’, the backlash towards *ALD* was detailed, with Maggie noting that ‘there are certain bookshops around Australia which act as censors for the Lesbian Feminist Group’.<sup>20</sup> Maggie revealed that the Murphy Sisters bookshop in South Australia had rejected the publication as it was not political enough and might offend some customers.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Maggie stated Shrew Bookshop in Melbourne did not stock *ALD* due to the use of cartoons of naked breasts.<sup>22</sup> This example draws out a potentially hypocritical stance from Shrew as *Lesbian Newsletter* regularly featured illustrations of naked women. However, the sexualised nature of the material may have offended Shrew’s sensibilities, as well as a general dislike of *ALD*. Jodie Joyce contextualised the magazine during a period of questioning around lesbian sexual practices, including the publication of *Wicked Women*, in her column ‘Tales from the Archives’.<sup>23</sup> *ALD* included material from eventual editor of *Wicked Women*, Kimberly O’Sullivan, drawing a line of connection between the publications.<sup>24</sup> Its limited run stymied its impact on the lesbian media landscape overall. However, it should be noted as one of the first publications to push the boundaries of lesbian sexuality and experience the backlash from critical lesbian feminists. *Wicked Women* would develop and grow lesbian sex radicalism, facing similar obstacles.

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<sup>20</sup> “Maggie’s Soap Box,” *Australian Lesbian Diary*, 1987, 11.

<sup>21</sup> “Maggie’s Soap Box,” 11.

<sup>22</sup> “Maggie’s Soap Box,” 11.

<sup>23</sup> Jodie Joyce, “Tales from the Archives: The Australian Lesbian Diary,” *Lesbiana*, May 1997, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Kimberly O’Sullivan, *Australian Lesbian Diary*, 1987, 24–26.



*Wicked Women* began in 1988, founded by Jasper Laybutt and Lisa Salmon, representing Sydney's emerging lesbian sex radical scene with the aim to fill the "gaping hole" in women's erotica.<sup>25</sup> According to C. Moore Hardy, photographer and participant of this subculture, Sydney's scene was unique to the city, unlike anything she had seen overseas.<sup>26</sup> *Wicked Women* remained the primary source of lesbian pornography and erotica in Australia until 1996, broadening expressions of lesbian sexuality and challenging previously held ideas and identities.<sup>27</sup> Over its production, *Wicked Women's* editorial team included Laybutt and Salmon, Kimberly O'Sullivan, writer Kerry Bashford and academic Anna Munster, whose experiences blended writing styles producing a mix of commentary, fiction and porn, maintaining a lesbian focus.<sup>28</sup> The first issue was 28 pages, sold for \$4 and included a black and white pictorial cover and content such as poetry, personal classifieds and articles descriptive of lesbian sex radicalism.<sup>29</sup> O'Sullivan noted in her description of the first five years of *Wicked Women* that Laybutt and Salmon bought an old electric typewriter with a broken 'w' key, forcing them to "manually push the letter against the page".<sup>30</sup> Further, early on Laybutt and Salmon would write the articles under various pseudonyms "to make it appear as though they had lots of contributors".<sup>31</sup> Ninety copies of the first issue were printed on Laybutt's work photocopier with his "very open-minded boss" permission.<sup>32</sup> Issues grew in size,

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<sup>25</sup> Sophie Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution': Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s," *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 452; Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 131.

<sup>26</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution'," 441.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson, 452.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, 452.

<sup>29</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 132.

<sup>30</sup> Calder, 132; Kimberley O'Sullivan, "Five Years of Infamy," *Wicked Women*, January 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 132; O'Sullivan, "Five Years of Infamy."

<sup>32</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 132.

leading to price increases, the peak of which was \$8 for 60 pages with up to 1000 copies printed.<sup>33</sup> *Wicked Women* introduced a new vocabulary for women to describe their sexualities and wants, opening up other magazines of the 1990s to discuss these issues or experiment with the style.<sup>34</sup>

However, several controversies surrounded the published work and the expression of sex radical subcultures. Before creating the magazine, Laybutt and Salmon experienced ostracization, harassment and discrimination when out in their S/M gear in Sydney's lesbian bar scene.<sup>35</sup> This attitude reflected the ideological differences amongst lesbian communities, continuing well into the 1990s. Although *Wicked Women* did much to broaden the range of possibilities for sexual expression, the magazine faced backlash from adherents of 1970s lesbian feminist conceptualisations of lesbian sexuality, to be explored further in Chapter Four. The publication struggled to attain lesbian advertisers early on, relying on leather fetish and sex product shops run by gay men.<sup>36</sup> Further, these businesses were the only venues that stocked *Wicked Women*, subscriptions distributed across Sydney mainly to women and some men.<sup>37</sup> This connection to gay men was seen by those associated with lesbian feminism as a negative, proving S/M and sex radicalism were linked to the patriarchy. Conversely, some gay men found this choice an issue, preferring a separation between gay men and lesbians in the sex radical

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<sup>33</sup> Calder, 132.

<sup>34</sup> An example includes Julie Price, "Sometimes You Rub Me Up the Wrong Way - The Rough and Smooth of Frottaging," *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1991, 18; Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 133.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution," 452.

<sup>36</sup> Bill Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 421.

<sup>37</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 136.

scene.<sup>38</sup> Notably, the Feminist Bookshop in Sydney had a special meeting to decide whether to stock the magazine. When it did, it was often hidden behind issues of *Lesbian Network*, limiting its exposure.<sup>39</sup> In terms of production, the provocative images included pushed boundaries leading to issues with the printers. In 1988, prompted by the inclusion of a photograph of a woman masturbating with a Virgin Mary statue, the magazine's first Catholic-owned commercial printer dumped them.<sup>40</sup> As Bill Calder noted, 'the controversial nature of *Wicked Women* attracted attention but its generally uncompromising stance on content alienated both potential buyers and advertisers and caused significant problems for the venture as a business'.<sup>41</sup> Further, 'each "girlcott" and refusal to display the magazine reduced sales and increased reliance on organising fund-raising events'.<sup>42</sup> These fundraising events differed from the previous examples set by *Lesbian Newsletter*, instead, it embraced the sex radical ideology that defined the magazine to entertain and build up this lesbian subculture, particularly in Sydney.

*Wicked Women* used their fundraisers to define their subculture, embodying the sexual desires expressed within the magazine's pages. As Sophie Robinson described, these events incorporated 'sexually explicit performances by and for a lesbian gaze' and encouraged 'participants to embrace their 'wickedness' to compete for the title of 'Ms

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<sup>38</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution," 453.

<sup>39</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 136; O'Sullivan, "Five Years of Infamy"; Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution," 453.

<sup>40</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 421.

<sup>41</sup> Calder, 421.

<sup>42</sup> Bill Calder, *Pink Ink: The Golden Era for Gay and Lesbian Magazines* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 104.

Wicked”.<sup>43</sup> The use of phallic objects, such as dildos, was seen by some lesbian feminists as taboo and anti-feminist, with bondage and S/M perceived as “violence against women by women”.<sup>44</sup> The production of lesbian space for *Wicked Women* created new avenues for sexual expression through the written word in the magazine and their fundraising events. *Ms Wicked* contests grew popular, with lingering taboos around S/M and bondage adding a transgressive air to the events, invoking curiosity in some attendees.<sup>45</sup> Reporting on these events allowed other magazines to dip into this subculture without completely alienating their readership. This strategy was used by *Lesbians on the Loose*, which described proceedings and updates with the magazine in general.<sup>46</sup>

Aside from the protestations against the phallic and violent nature of the events, many women were concerned with the mixed nature of the scene, with gay men sometimes in attendance. Arguably, part of the experimentation and production of lesbian space completed by *Wicked Women* is that it found a nexus point for mixed audiences. Coalition spaces and events had been shunned within lesbian communities, connecting to conceptions of separatism and feminism. However, coalition spaces and activism had ebbed and flowed since the 1970s, with gay men and lesbians coming together in various circumstances. Part of the 1990s transition was to re-embrace coalition politics as lingering modes of separatism petered out within lesbian communities. *Wicked Women*

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<sup>43</sup> Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’,” 453.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’,” 453.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Henderson, “Pornography in the Service of Lesbians: The Case of *Wicked Women* and *Slit Magazines*,” *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 162, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.2.2.159\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.2.2.159_1).

<sup>46</sup> Jasper Laybutt, “Ms Wicked Contest,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1990, 6; Stevie, “Ms Wicked Final,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1991, 9; “Ms Wicked Warms Up,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1992, 8; “Wicked New Editor,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 5.

helped create lesbian spaces for sexual expressions and shared connections to the broader subculture, aligning with gay men who were open to sharing space. This perspective can be linked to the founding of the magazine, with Jasper Laybutt as a trans man, having operated in both spheres and receiving early support from gay male stockists and advertisers. As Robinson concludes, 'lesbian sex radicals, lesbian feminists, a trans man, and some gay men, together defined a Sydney lesbian sexual revolution in which lesbianism could be both political and sexual'.<sup>47</sup>

Bill Calder categorised *Wicked Women* as separate from the private owned magazines of the 1990s, largely due to its content.<sup>48</sup> However, its production style puts it in league with *Lesbians on the Loose* and *Lesbiana*. Privately owned and under the explicit editorship of a single person, Laybutt then O'Sullivan, the magazine predates the privately owned city-based magazines of the 1990s. Further its visual emphasis pushed the standards of lesbian publishing through the consistent inclusion of photographs and pictorial covers. Its goal to connect and develop the lesbian sex radical subculture reflected similar community maintenance seen in all lesbian publications. Rather than isolate the publication due its content, I locate it as a transition point for lesbian periodicals in its production style, pushing the use of visuals, such as photographs, seen in later Australian lesbian magazines.

Although *Wicked Women* would eventually discontinue publishing in 1996, its impact on the Australian lesbian scene, particularly in Sydney, was significant, helping to define

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<sup>47</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution," 456.

<sup>48</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 115.

new spaces, expressions and ways of being. It combined its business necessities, the fund-raising events, as part of its identity, reinforcing the community it helped to build and maintain, as well as opening new opportunities for other magazines to draw on this subculture.

### **The Growth of the Glossy**

Ownership of the magazines became more defined by the 1990s, with collective organising lingering in the continued volunteer work done but not in the final ownership decision-making process. The evolution of *Labrys* and its failed incorporation will be highlighted to discuss this transition. The following magazine *Lesbiana*, which picked up where *Labrys* left off, will be addressed, representing Victorian-based magazines' settling into the private ownership model. In a similar vein, *Lesbians on the Loose* will be examined, comparative to *Lesbiana* in operation. Their founders sold both to lesbian businesswomen, coincidentally both new owners operating women's travel businesses. There is tension within these privately owned magazines, matching those of broader societal changes. There was a sense of heightened mainstream visibility for lesbians but framed at a cost to lesbians and their communities. The pink dollar and advertising became prominent during this decade, with more options and opportunities for the magazines to raise revenue and support developing lesbian businesses. Calder argued 'that the commercialisation of lesbian media significantly increased its impact and ability to make lesbians more visible, and to build community'.<sup>49</sup> Calder summarised the achievements of the 1990s, noting the

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<sup>49</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 414.

model of private ownership and business-oriented outlook 'led to a range of synergies with advertisers and distribution outlets that helped build and develop community activities and businesses, while allowing the publications to increase advertising revenue and distribution'.<sup>50</sup> However, these changes sometimes felt at odds with the political positions of the magazines and the communities they aimed to represent. By considering the growth, and one case, downfall, of the magazines of this decade, we can examine this transition and its losses and gains.

### *Labrys*

When considering the place of *Labrys* in the histories of Australian lesbian magazines, it is essential to consider its legacy and how this inflected the content and the production of the magazine. Although *Labrys* is credited with replacing *Lesbian News*, this connection was not published until the second issue, announcing that it would receive the latter magazine's mailing list and archive.<sup>51</sup> The title for this announcement read as "Lesbian Herstory in the making," positioning *Labrys* as recipients of a lasting legacy from the growth of Australian lesbian feminism with its connection to *Lesbian Newsletter* and its reiterations. This handover came with an understanding of the politics it was tied to and what was at stake with its publications. As with most Australian lesbian magazines, it tasked itself to combat the "isolation of many lesbian wimmyn" and bring together sections of the lesbian community.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 423.

<sup>51</sup> "Lesbian Herstory in the Making," *Labrys*, December 1990, 1.

<sup>52</sup> "Labrys: About The Collective," *Labrys*, November 1990, 2.

The *Labrys* collective aimed for transparency with their readers by explaining several key editorial policies. The collective stance was reiterated in a couple of articles, one noting that there were seven members.<sup>53</sup> There was a sense of collective decision-making, as illustrated by the explanation of why they attributed articles to the collective rather than an individual writer. Again, a sense of legacy and history is present in the decision, noting that ‘we do not want to repeat herstory by denying lesbians right to be recognised for her work’.<sup>54</sup> However, the group consensus was against signing articles, emphasising the collective effort in producing content, from writing, researching, and editing.<sup>55</sup> A couple of articles were dedicated to explaining the production costs of the magazine. The collective stated that as of February 1991, it took \$1000 per month to produce, with \$850 for printing alone.<sup>56</sup> This act of transparency can be seen as a sense of accountability to their readers and an act of communication to hone in on the message that it takes significant funds to produce a magazine. This point, that the magazine required money to function, was reiterated several times. In response to some readers asking why the magazine was not free, like the *Melbourne Star Observer*, a mixed gay and lesbian publication, the collective explained that they lacked the advertising revenue.<sup>57</sup>

This lack of funding, combined with the drive to achieve growth and develop as a magazine, placed *Labrys* in tension with its ‘herstorical’ legacy and readers’

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<sup>53</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, “FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...,” *Labrys*, February 1991, 10.

<sup>54</sup> L.N.C., “Why Don’t We Sign Our Articles?,” *Labrys*, March 1991, 4.

<sup>55</sup> L.N.C., 4.

<sup>56</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, “FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...,” 10.

<sup>57</sup> LNC, “Why Isn’t It Free?,” *Labrys*, May 1991, 6.



expectations. The need to be financially sustainable was ever-present within articles. The *Labrys* collective noted, ‘if we are not financial there is no paper and this would be a step back in time’.<sup>58</sup> The significance of lesbian media is reiterated, seen as politically empowering and vital for lesbian communities.<sup>59</sup> However, there is recognition that change is required, seen in the statement ‘no longer will nostalgia and herstory ensure our survival and growth’.<sup>60</sup> The issue of money was highlighted by several articles discussing the tension between lesbian businesses, capitalism and the legacy of lesbian feminism and the Women’s Movement. In the first of the series, the collective wrote that ‘it is largely acknowledged that it is immoral for dykes to make money,’ setting up the lingering impression that ‘if you want to become a member of the lesbian community that you are duty bound to an unspoken vow of poverty and altruism.’<sup>61</sup> The collective noted that ‘the question appears to lie in whether you are making money for yourself, your business or your community,’ demarcating acceptable bounds for lesbian enterprises.<sup>62</sup> Lesbian businesses were examined, their creation related to the Women’s Liberation Movement and consciousness-raising groups as a way ‘to put politics into action’ and express lesbianism in a world that silenced them, explicitly disconnected from capitalism.<sup>63</sup> In the next month’s articles on the topic, contributor Wendy Suiter distinguished between a capitalist economy and a lesbian one.<sup>64</sup> Her division between the two was that the capitalist dictates physical survival through the provision of

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<sup>58</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, “FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...,” 10.

<sup>59</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, 10.

<sup>61</sup> L.N, “Is It Immoral for Dykes to Make Money?,” *Labrys*, December 1991, 2.

<sup>62</sup> L.N, “Is It Immoral for Dykes to Make Money?,” 2–3.

<sup>63</sup> L.N, 2–3.

<sup>64</sup> Wendy Suiter, “Get out of Capitalism,” *Labrys*, January 1992, 2.

income, whereas the lesbian economy is tied to cultural survival, almost spiritual in its affirmation of lesbian identity and community.<sup>65</sup> In her positioning, lesbian entrepreneurs straddle this line, betraying the latter to succeed in the former. To Suiter, 'lesbian entrepreneurs, by not plainly stating that it is a business appear to be playing on this "herstory" when they enter these areas of activity'.<sup>66</sup> Suiter concluded 'that the lesbian economy needs to be developed as much as possible,' that 'we need an alternative'.<sup>67</sup> This position is juxtaposed with another article in this issue, parsing out similar themes but noting the changing expectations of the community. In "Dirty Money?" support for lesbian businesses was presented, stating that 'most lesbian businesses are very supportive of community events'.<sup>68</sup> Lesbian publications are invoked in the article, with a reprinted comment from Jasper Laybutt,

Now it seems perfectly acceptable for these groups to run on a profit-making basis, largely off the backs of women. I may dare say that they are respected and supported because of it. And this should be so.<sup>69</sup>

This position represented an opposing view to Suiter, encouraging lesbian businesses to strive for profit. This promotion can be seen as a reflection of changing attitudes and developing more business-oriented approaches to lesbian lifestyles. The *Labrys* collective defended aspects of this vision in the last article of the series. In "Money Money Money", the past is invoked again to emphasise the distance between production costs and reader expectations. The collective stated, 'herstorically, lesbians have always

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<sup>65</sup> Suiter, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Suiter, "Get out of Capitalism," 2.

<sup>67</sup> Suiter, 2.

<sup>68</sup> L.N, "Dirty Money," *Labrys*, January 1992, 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Jasper Laybutt, "Editoria," *Wicked Women*, 1991, 4 reprinted in L.N, "Dirty Money," *Labrys*, January 1992, 1-2.

had events, venues etc publicised for free,' a practice that can no longer be supported.<sup>70</sup> Again, the collective was in the position to explain to readers that advertising fees were necessary to cover publication costs. To further note the severity of production costs, the collective stated, 'rarely, does advertising pay for wages, regardless of whether the publication is a business or not'.<sup>71</sup> Free labour remained a mainstay of lesbian magazines, relying on the generosity of volunteers and contributors. It is unclear as some of the magazines got more successful who got paid for their work, but in their early days, *Labrys*, *Lesbiana* and *Lesbians on the Loose* relied on friends to help produce the publications. Over and over, the *Labrys* collective invoked a sense of herstory, fitting their magazine as part of a legacy significant to their community, driving the production from contributors in a shared project to empower lesbians. This sense of the herstory has also produced tension due to the changes occurring in the late 1980s onwards, which required magazines and community projects to step up financially or risk dissolving. Further, as the *Labrys* collective noted in this last article, expectations had been raised for lesbian publications to produce more professional magazines. The result was that the lesbian publications could not keep up with production costs by relying solely on lesbian businesses if they were going to match reader expectations, especially during this period that *Labrys* was publishing, the early 1990s. Things would change by the mid-to-late 1990s with increased development in lesbian businesses flourishing and broader economic pressures brought on by the national recession.

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<sup>70</sup> L.N, "Money Money Money," *Labrys*, February 1992, 4–5.

<sup>71</sup> L.N, "Money Money Money," 4–5.

Aside from the place of advertising changing during Labrys' publication run, the collective itself attempted to incorporate it under a registered company. However, this decision would bring about the downfall of the publication, the collective folding under disagreements connected to the legal framework utilised. It is interesting to note the placement of the announcement to incorporate, published in the same issue as the last article in the money series previously discussed. The collective had already described in previous articles the struggles they had faced in registering as a newspaper.<sup>72</sup> *Labrys* staff had a vested interest in protecting themselves and the newspaper, influencing their decision to become a registered company under B.A.D. Press PTY. LTD.<sup>73</sup> With the conclusion of a series of articles on money and lesbian business, the article's placement can be framed as an attempt to get readers on side with the change, the newspaper acknowledging the multiple perspectives on the issue. The article includes the subheading "Aren't lesbians supposed to be Anarchists?" reinforcing a sense of humour about the situation. Notably, *Labrys* stated that 'we want to combine lesbian ethics with business ethics'.<sup>74</sup> Neither ethics are defined clearly, rather, the reader can infer from previous articles in *Labrys* what this might mean for the newspaper. as the collective struggled to combine the commercial practices increasingly necessary to run a successful publication and the lesbian feminist community values which disavowed such practices. Internal tensions within the collective, exacerbated by the need to

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<sup>72</sup> Labrys Newspaper Collective, "FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...", 10.

<sup>73</sup> L.N., "Labrys Turns B.A.D.!", *Labrys*, February 1992, 14.

<sup>74</sup> L.N., 14.

commercialise under a formal business framework, led to the magazine to fail, signalling its end and the rise of a new lesbian paper.<sup>75</sup>

*Lesbiana* was the result, creator Lilitu Babalu (then known as Sheril Berkovitch), literally defining the paper's function as 'to fill the void left by *Labrys*'.<sup>76</sup> *Lesbiana* published updates on the *Labrys*' situation, including a meeting in which published letters attempted to explain the conflict.<sup>77</sup> In the letter of Michelle Daw, she names the four full-time members of the *Labrys* collective; herself, Wendy Dodd, Gaye McCulloch and Di Williams. She noted that they had received advice in October 1991 from both an auditor and a solicitor to form a company, and the formal process began.<sup>78</sup> During this process, tensions arose around the legal and financial ownership of *Labrys*, as names were left off company documentation. As Daw recounts in her letter, Williams wished to be left off legal paperwork, while McCulloch's name was not listed.<sup>79</sup> The reason for this was not provided by Daw. Daw emphasised a worsening working relationship between herself and Dodd. Daw and Dodd presented a signed document stating that while their names were on the company documentation, they would not assume legal or financial ownership of *Labrys* and that all four members had equal rights within the company. Daw had been advised that document could constitute a 'trust relationship' between members. Further, it was re-emphasised that McCulloch's name was to be added to company documents. Daw then resigned in January 1992, again noting personal issues

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<sup>75</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, "Why a New Lesbian Paper?," *Lesbiana*, March 1992, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Berkovitch, "Why a New Lesbian Paper?," 1.

<sup>77</sup> Michelle Daw and Wendy Dodd, "The *Labrys* Meeting," *Lesbiana*, May 1992, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Daw and Dodd, "The *Labrys* Meeting," 13.

<sup>79</sup> Daw and Dodd, 14.

with Dodd. Daw recounted a financial meeting in which McCulloch was informed she had no legal rights to the company. A back and forth between solicitors occurred, with Daw learning that Dodd wished to dissolve the company, therefore the magazine. On advice from her solicitor, Daw withdrew her resignation to oversee *Labrys* because Daw believed it was still a successful newspaper. Negotiations between Daw and Dodd occurred with both their solicitors, in which Daw voiced concerns about continuing *Labrys* while in dispute with Dodd, as it was unfair to readers and advertisers as investors in the publication. Dodd pursued financial settlement, which Daw opposed, stating ‘I cannot agree ethically to giving monies to Wendy Dodd or any other member of *Labrys* to settle this dispute and enable the paper to continue’ questioning Dodd’s entitlement to *Labrys*’ financial assets.<sup>80</sup> Daw noted that she did not ‘believe that forming a company was the cause of these difficulties but rather the way in which the company was formed and that *Labrys* did not have established internal structures or policies.’<sup>81</sup>

Wendy Dodd provided a letter from her perspective, stating that Daw refused to negotiate with her regarding the dissolution of *Labrys*. Further, Dodd questioned community involvement in the issue, as seen in the calling of a meeting that Dodd herself was too sick to attend. She asked why the community should weigh in on business.<sup>82</sup> This perspective can be contrasted against the money series published within *Labrys* in which lesbian businesses were judged to be needing to be in good

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<sup>80</sup> Daw and Dodd, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Daw and Dodd, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Daw and Dodd, 15.

standing with the community to be successful and seen to live up to lesbian standards. *Labrys* updates became limited after the publication of these letters, the publication not returning, allowing for the flourishing of *Lesbiana*.

This example highlights the struggles of magazines of this transitional period, unable to balance the collective grassroots founding with the necessary structure of a business and the personal toll this work could take on women and their relationships with others. Daw's conclusion that *Labrys* was missing the internal structure to withstand the changing definition of its operation has weight, exacerbating any issues that arose with no formal responses in place. Although short-lived, *Labrys*' publication history offers insight into the transitional period of the early 1990s, showcasing growing links to lesbian businesses, changing community attitudes toward business operations, and the magazines' need to adapt and structure themselves as a business.

### *Lesbiana and Lesbians on the Loose*

Both *Lesbiana* and *Lesbians on the Loose (LOTL)* operated through private ownership frameworks, adopting more business-oriented outlooks from the mid-1990s onwards. This change represents the end of the transition, securely part of lesbian business structures with little discussion, as seen in *Labrys*. Although a few decisions required justifications, especially for early mainstream advertising featured in *LOTL*, these two magazines did not falter under determined legacies of anti-capitalist lesbian feminisms but instead adopted an unquestioned outlook on their support of growing lesbian entrepreneurship. *Lesbians on the Loose* significantly rose to prominence, reaching significant numbers of readers, an estimated 24 000 in 1995, as well as promoting the

growth of lesbian businesses from a limited number to over 100 by the end of Frances Rand's editorial run in 1998.<sup>83</sup> This development was influenced by several factors, including increased liberal attitudes from mainstream business, established lesbian community infrastructure in the form of bookshops and venues serving as distribution sites, as well as broader structural goals changing for lesbian activism, turning to more equal rights-based discourses with a focus on relationship recognition, instead of the radical restructuring goals of the 1970s.<sup>84</sup> These factors saw the rise of lesbian media in the 1990s, reflecting the changing communities they aimed to represent.

Although *Lesbiana* did not achieve the heights that *Lesbians on the Loose* did, its lineage can be traced to earlier Melbourne lesbian magazines. As described, *Lesbiana* was created to fill the gap left by *Labrys* in Melbourne's lesbian communities. Further, *Labrys* was connected to the earlier *Lesbian News*, forming a line from this 1970s and 80s newsletter to the eventual glossy-covered magazine *Lesbiana* by 1996.<sup>85</sup> *Lesbiana* was privately owned, beginning with Lilitu Babalu, a new-age bookshop owner and activist, and Pat Longmore, lesbian venue owner and co-director of Melbourne's first Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1991.<sup>86</sup> When interviewed, Babalu stated that private ownership meant it was "easier to not have arguments and just get on and do it".<sup>87</sup> Longmore, unknown to Babalu was battling cancer and died in Great Britain four

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<sup>83</sup> "The First Five Years...", *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995; Frances Rand, "At a Loose End," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1998, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 422.

<sup>85</sup> "Lesbian Herstory in the Making," 1.

<sup>86</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 423; Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 123.

<sup>87</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 423.



months into publication.<sup>88</sup> The responsibility for production lay almost solely on Babalu after this, with only one paid worker in 1992, who handled distribution for two hours each month.<sup>89</sup> Under Babalu's editorship, there is little evidence of discontent from readers based on her choices, with limited letters to the editors or articles justifying choices, especially regarding business or advertising policies. The most considerable uproar under Babalu's leadership was her decision to feature an S/M-influenced picture of a woman on the cover; Babalu responded to negative letters for several months afterwards.<sup>90</sup> In 1995, Babalu sold the magazine to Jan Campbell, who owned the tour company Wandering Women and worked as a coordinator of Gay and Lesbian Switchboard.<sup>91</sup> In the advertisements spruiking *Lesbiana*, Babalu emphasised that the publication would be a 'viable business prospect' with little current production costs.<sup>92</sup> Campbell developed the magazine, increasing the price several times to match production changes. In February 1996, the price increased by 50 cents to \$2.50. Campbell explained the decision, noting, "I do believe Victorian lesbians deserve a monthly magazine which can have photos in it and has a coloured and glossy cover".<sup>93</sup> Price increases occurred in June 1996 to \$3, December 1996-January 1997 to \$4 and finally under Campbell, to \$4.95 by May 1999.<sup>94</sup> In June 1996, Campbell published a charter defining *Lesbiana's* goals, including publishing lesbian and lesbian-friendly

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<sup>88</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 124.

<sup>89</sup> Calder, 124.

<sup>90</sup> "About the February Cover," *Lesbiana*, March 1994, 2; "More on That Infamous Front Cover...", *Lesbiana*, April 1994, 6; "The Cover Again," *Lesbiana*, May 1994, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 124.

<sup>92</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, "Lesbiana Is for Sale," *Lesbiana*, May 1995, 16.

<sup>93</sup> Jan Campbell, "Editorial," *Lesbiana*, February 1996, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Jan Campbell, "Editorial," *Lesbiana*, June 1996, 2; Jan Campbell, "Editorial," *Lesbiana*, December 1996, 3; Jan Campbell, "Editorial," *Lesbiana*, May 1999, 2.

businesses whilst running as a viable business.<sup>95</sup> This goal was achieved, with lesbian businesses and services being advertised and utilised by readers. This accomplishment was highlighted in the 1995 readership survey, in which 80% of respondents stated they had sometimes used advertised services.<sup>96</sup> *Lesbiana* can be envisioned as a finishing transition from *Labrys*' confused stance on business and private ownership. In the Melbourne scene, *Lesbiana* helped to build lesbian businesses with vivid connections to lesbian feminism, representing its connection to earlier lesbian publications.

Similar to *Lesbiana*, *Lesbians on the Loose (LOTL)* was privately owned and was not collectively managed. Founded by Frances Rand and Jaz Ishtar (then Jackie Scherer) in Sydney in 1989, the magazine grew exponentially, distributing nationally by 1992.<sup>97</sup> *LOTL*'s origin was to provide a regular source of information to Sydney lesbians on activities, businesses, and resources available.<sup>98</sup> Rand and Ishtar asked for advertising within the welcoming article, noting they wanted to ensure the magazine was free, distributed at local venues, the first lesbian publication to not charge a cover fee.<sup>99</sup> In the beginning, Rand and Ishtar did most of the work themselves, including writing articles, taking photographs and formatting, with limited assistance from friends.<sup>100</sup> As Calder noted, 'initially, no one was paid except the small lesbian business Amazon Publishing that did the typesetting and printing'.<sup>101</sup> Six months into publication, Ishtar

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<sup>95</sup> Jan Campbell, "Lesbiana Charter," *Lesbiana*, June 1996, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Jan Campbell, "And so Say," *Lesbiana*, July 1996, 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1992, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Frances Rand and Jackie Scherer, "Welcome!," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1990, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Rand and Scherer, 1; Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 423.

<sup>100</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 423.

<sup>101</sup> Calder, 424.

left for overseas, leaving Rand to balance production with her job with the ABC.<sup>102</sup> By 1993, Rand had quit her job and worked on *LOTL* full time, intending to make it financially sustainable.<sup>103</sup> Glossy covers were adopted in the same year, and Barbara Farrelly, Rand's journalist partner, joined *LOTL*, helping to boost news and arts coverage.<sup>104</sup> Rand decided to sell the magazine in 1998, proud of the growth of advertising of both community groups, from 30 to over 200, and lesbian businesses, from a few to over 100, during her run as owner.<sup>105</sup> In the initial announcement, Rand noted 'our growing corporate clientele has enjoyed a fantastic response to its advertising and small lesbian businesses have thrived in our niche marketplace, with about 90 percent of our regular advertisers exclusive to *LOTL*'.<sup>106</sup> The magazine was sold to Silke Bader, a former social worker turned lesbian businesswoman who owned Silke's Travel and founded the Sydney branch of LezBiz.<sup>107</sup> She successfully produced the magazine until she handed the publication to non-profit company L Media in 2015, who continue to publish stories on their website under the masthead.<sup>108</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose* represents the full adoption of 1990s developments, leading to the growth of lesbian businesses and support networks, providing an avenue for small businesses to advertise and for women to access services. Its lack of cover charge and wide distribution made it accessible to many across Australia. *LOTL* defined what was possible for lesbian media

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<sup>102</sup> Calder, 424, 423.

<sup>103</sup> Calder, 424; Barbara Farrelly, "Kiss and Tell Scoop PIX!," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 23.

<sup>104</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1993, 1; Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 424.

<sup>105</sup> "LOTL FOR SALE," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1998, 5; Rand, "At a Loose End," 5.

<sup>106</sup> "LOTL FOR SALE," 5.

<sup>107</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 425; "LOTL Changes Hands after 9 Years," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1998, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Calder, "Feminist Collectives or Private Owners," 425; "Lesbian News, Bisexuals and Queer Women, LOTL," LOTL, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.lotl.com/>.

in Australia, capitalising on the changing attitudes of the 1990s to produce a news and lifestyle publication reflecting the diversity and contradictions of Australia's lesbian communities.

### *Lip*

*Lesbians on the Loose* began as a newsletter and utilised business tactics to grow to a national publication, with high production value with its glossy covers. However, it was rooted in the lesbian community of Sydney, beginning with volunteer labour, expanding over time. *Lip* represents an attempt by an established publisher to operate within the lesbian media marketplace, ultimately failing. *Lip* began in 1997, operating as a lesbian lifestyle magazine. It was published by Bluestone Media which produced gay lifestyle media. It only published eight issues.<sup>109</sup>

Compared to community-based magazines, the backing of Bluestone gave *Lip* greater access to mainstream advertising. In a small article in *Lesbians on the Loose*, Rand discussed the arrival of *Lip*, largely dismissive of the magazine. Announced as "Australia's first free full-colour national lesbian magazine," *Lip* was in competition with *Lesbians on the Loose*. It was mainly available in Melbourne and Sydney. Future plans were noted for women to invest in *Lip* to achieve a degree of lesbian ownership. In an *Ad News* article, *Lip* was categorised as aiming to cash in on the growing number of advertisers chasing the gay and lesbian dollar. Kelly Gardiner, *Lip*'s first editor, disputed this. Gardiner noted that lesbians often lacked access to financial backing, so *Lip* was

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<sup>109</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 125.

grateful for Bluestone. She further stated, “more and more women are taking bigger steps in business and they have more capital to spread around”. In the article *LOTL* reaffirmed their dominance in the lesbian publication space, boasting national distribution. It’s unclear why *Lip* stopped publishing. Even with the advertising backing, *Lip* did not capture Australian lesbian readers. The importance of lesbian ownership would be an issue for some, preferring to support lesbian backed businesses, Bluestone’s backing excluding *Lip* from this. Rand’s article on *Lip* in *LOTL* portrays *Lip* as chasing the lesbian dollar, with potential Australian lesbian readers agreeing with this position, seeing it as disconnected from lesbian communities compared to *Lesbians on the Loose* and other city-based magazines. Although *LOTL* became a commercial publication, it was started by friends to inform others on lesbian events in Sydney. To succeed in lesbian publishing space, some element of community connection was required, not only financial backing and significant advertising.

### **“DOING IT FOR OURSELVES: THESE DYKES MEAN BUSINESS”**

Advertising revenue played an essential role in the viability and sustainability of Australian lesbian magazines. By the 1990s, paid advertising was significant to the ongoing production of the publications, marking a departure from the usual free press for lesbian businesses in earlier decades. However, this mutual insurance in each other’s development allowed lesbian businesses to grow and reach their audience. The businesses on offer stretched several services and industries, presenting a wide cross-section of the community. Broader available services included veterinary services,

therapists and psychologists, tradeswomen, and astrologists.<sup>110</sup> In this section, I focus on three key areas of businesses, showcasing the changes in lesbian business advertising and connecting to broader social and political changes. These include the commercial bar scene, adult stores, and feminist bookstores. Each represents the changing nature of lesbian space, as contested over time and areas of growth and downturn. They were entangled in the magazines, connected by advertising, and served as nodes in distribution networks. Significantly, limited access remains to some of these spaces, no longer surviving in the current context. In addition to these services, I discuss the networking support branches that developed in the 1990s, particularly LezBiz, which aimed to support lesbian businesses and entrepreneurs. Finally, alternative economic modes will be discussed through the discussion of LESY, which bypassed traditional monetary exchanges, attempting to realise a lesbian economy disconnected from capitalism. By utilising these examples, I show the transition of these spaces and their significance to Australian lesbian magazines.

### **Relationship to the Commercial Bar Scene**

To define the context of the shifting 1990s, a look back to the 1970s illustrates the deep and sometimes tense relationship Australian lesbian magazines had with the commercial bar scene. Although, before the 1990s, it was uncommon for venue listings to be charged to be published, this connection brought the radical political and

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<sup>110</sup> “Doing It for Ourselves: Inner West Veterinary Hospital,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1994, 15; “Women in Business,” *Lesbiana*, July 1994, 29; “Doing It for Ourselves: Yasmin,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1994, 16; “Doing It for Ourselves: Cabinet Maker of Distinction,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1995, 16; “Doing It for Ourselves: Star Gazing,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1995, 16.

commercial worlds closer. The shared goal to provide space for lesbian readers and patrons provided a link between the two ventures, but there were difficulties in this relationship.

*Lesbian Newsletter* distanced themselves from the commercialised gay male “individualism,” pushing for an idealised lesbian community through collective experience.<sup>111</sup> Promoting the bar scene was suggested in the first issue as a potential topic to cover.<sup>112</sup> There was little discussion of pubs and venues in the following issues, more likely due to a lack of a scene for Melbourne lesbians than tension with the establishments. In the September 1977 issue, “pub scene” notes that ‘we of the Lesbian Newsletter are interested in publicising and/or creating new social scenes for women in Melbourne’.<sup>113</sup> One women’s night at a pub in Prahran was detailed, as well as the suggestion of creating a “scene” at a pub in Fitzroy, asking for anyone interested to help ‘test it out’.<sup>114</sup> This lack of a pub scene indicates the limitations of the early 1970s for venues for women and the potential lack of knowledge of the scene from the collective publishing *Lesbian Newsletter*. In 1979, information on venues was paused.<sup>115</sup> In a notice, the collective explained that they decided to cease publishing venue information due to the belief that other sources were available. Further, they described that the magazine was dedicated to ‘looking at alternative lifestyles and politics,’ the bar scene was not part of this outlook, instead ‘run and profited by the heterosexual “rip off”

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<sup>111</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 129.

<sup>112</sup> “Untitled,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, March 1976, 2.

<sup>113</sup> “Pub Scene,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, September 1977, 2.

<sup>114</sup> “Pub Scene,” 2.

<sup>115</sup> “Bars & Us,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, March-April 1979, 7.

scene,' and that relationships developed in the bar scene were too close to 'heterosexual socialisation'.<sup>116</sup> This attitude can be inferred to allude to the butch/femme dynamics that persisted from the 1960s bar scene, often at odds with radical feminist framings of lesbian relationships.<sup>117</sup> The policy limiting venue guides ended in 1981, after being tipped off to new venues, visiting some and reporting back to readers, beginning a regular guide.<sup>118</sup> The bar scene did not pay to advertise within *Lesbian Newsletter*, rather, the practice was to inform readers of different options, connected to the elucidation of lesbian lifestyles, which defined the newsletter. The tenuous connection between the bar scene and *Lesbian Newsletter* represented broader tensions between politically identified groups and the growing commercial venue scene of the 1970s. These examples bring insight into the scene's early stages compared to later developments in the 1990s.

The transition from the Women's Liberation events of the 1970s to the more commercialised desires of the late 1990s can be defined by the emergence of lesbian sex radicalism and increased lesbian venue operators. During the 1970s, feminists experimented with creating spaces for women to dance and socialise without men, drawing in lesbian audiences. This development included Sydney's Ruby Red's, opened by Dawn O'Donnell, who remained a significant figure to lesbian communities well into the 1990s, profiled by *Lesbians on the Loose* on several occasions.<sup>119</sup> Sophie Robinson

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<sup>116</sup> "Bars & Us," 7.

<sup>117</sup> Sophie Robinson, "Bar Dykes and Lesbian Feminists: Lesbian Encounters in 1970s Australian Feminism," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 22 (2016): 60.

<sup>118</sup> Yolana, "Cloud 9," *Lesbian Newsletter*, April-May 1982, 21; Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 130.

<sup>119</sup> Frances Rand, "Dawn O'Donnell: 'Hard but Fair,'" *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1992, 14; Frances Rand and Barbara Farrelly, "Trailblazer," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 20.



noted that the space was frequented by ‘politicised and non-politicised lesbians,’ with limited male attendance.<sup>120</sup> Further, the Women’s Warehouse in Sydney hosted various events, including ‘women’s dances’.<sup>121</sup> As Louise Mayhew noted, ‘women’s dances were cast as utopian spaces for joyous self-expression, female friendships and lesbian flirtations’.<sup>122</sup> Kathy Sport described the growth of lesbian and women’s bands in Australia during this period, stating that dance events served as spaces to experiment musically, inflected the myriad of genres gaining traction at the time, including folk, punk and reggae.<sup>123</sup> As Finn Enke described, ‘dances invited women to viscerally engage the politics of embodiment and reality of difference’.<sup>124</sup> Part of this reality of difference for Enke is identity formation, from both inclusion and exclusion, for Australian lesbians, creating a sense of women’s culture connected to sexual expression.

As noted in previous sections, *Wicked Women* and the associated sex radicalism movement of the 1980s revolutionised new expressions of sexuality, testing performance expectations and spaces. This development, operating alongside more lesbian feminist-oriented events, helped turn Australian lesbians to more commercial demands for space. In Sydney, an example of this transition is the establishment of ‘Girl

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<sup>120</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 142.

<sup>121</sup> Louise R. Mayhew, “‘Volatile, Feral and Glamorous’: Australia’s Women’s Warehouse,” *Art+Media: Journal of Art and Media Studies*, no. 8 (October 2015): 32.

<sup>122</sup> Mayhew, “‘Volatile, Feral and Glamorous,’” 32.

<sup>123</sup> Kathy Sport, “Below the Belt and Bleeding Fingertips,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 22, no. 53 (July 1, 2007): 343, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640701364703>.

<sup>124</sup> Finn Enke, “Smuggling Sex Through the Gates: Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of Space in Second Wave Feminism,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2003): 651, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2003.0038>.

Bar' at Freezer nightclub on Oxford St in 1987.<sup>125</sup> In an interview with Robinson, founder Gigi Legenhausen noted she wanted a place to dance, and her co-founder Kate Monroe, then an emerging DJ, wanted a place to play music. Robinson noted that there was a lack of space for lesbians to engage in this type of nightlife at the time, but plenty for gay men.<sup>126</sup> Both Legenhausen and Monroe emphasised 'Girl Bar' being a safe space, hiring all-female staff, from DJs and bar staff to security staff, reflecting fears of homophobic and gendered violence which were on the rise during this period.<sup>127</sup> Various venues adopted this model from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, providing a women's night or girl's night aimed at lesbian clientele. What is notable about this model is its precarity. Noted within a profile on Gigi Legenhausen and Girl Bar for *Lesbians on the Loose*, the bar's location shifts four times in five years.<sup>128</sup> This mobility makes the space flexible in terms of business changes but vulnerable with every move. These changes are where the significance of the magazines played a role, keeping readers and attendees updated on their whereabouts.

While many of the 1990s magazines did provide venue information to their readers, *Lesbians on the Loose* linked this function to their original mission statement, embedded in the Sydney bar scene. In *LOTL*'s first article, Rand and Scherer stated, 'ever since we can remember Sydney Lesbians have not had a regular source of information about what activities and resources are available'.<sup>129</sup> Many had previously

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<sup>125</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 217.

<sup>126</sup> Robinson, 217.

<sup>127</sup> Robinson, 219, 218.

<sup>128</sup> "Doing It for Ourselves: On the Other Side," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1994, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Rand and Scherer, "Welcome!," 1.

relied on word of mouth to notify others of upcoming events or the broader gay press, which was male-dominated in the opinion of Rand.<sup>130</sup> In an interview with Bill Calder, Rand noted that the existing Sydney-based magazine, *Lesbian Network*, was published too infrequently to be a useful source and was often not read by young lesbians.<sup>131</sup> A regular column recapping Sydney's lesbian nightlife was introduced in March 1994, featuring photos from the events.<sup>132</sup> In January 1996, the photos were printed in colour, extending the spread to the full page and losing the written element in November 1996.<sup>133</sup> *LOTL* advertised upcoming events and then recapped them in this column, creating a cycle of publicisation for Sydney's lesbian nightlife and documenting it for readers.

### **Adult Stores**

There was a connection between the growth of commercial venues for lesbians and the development of sex radicalism as a movement in Sydney. This intersection is pronounced as a few lesbian venue operators also owned adult sex toy stores. Gigi Legenhausen and her partner Andrea Groemminger ventured into the sex toy field, operating the 'PurrEffect' in Sydney, which sold sex toys, leather, and fetish merchandise to women.<sup>134</sup> By the late 1990s, the shop would co-host 'Girls Only' play parties and performances across venues in Sydney, further consolidating the crossover

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<sup>130</sup> Rand and Scherer, 1.

<sup>131</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 137.

<sup>132</sup> Tom Fairweather, "Scene Out," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1994, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Tom Fairweather, "Girls, Girls, Girls," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1996, 51; Tom Fairweather, "Scene Out," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1996, 49.

<sup>134</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 219.

between the sex radical subculture and the commercial venue scene.<sup>135</sup> Dawn O'Donnell, a long-term lesbian commercial venue operator, was also connected to an adult store, 'The Toolsheds,' with locations in Newtown and Darlinghurst, Sydney.<sup>136</sup> This store was not lesbian-specific, instead a mixed gay and lesbian space. In 1992, in a profile with *LOTL*, Dawn promised to include more lesbian stock at the store, listing several products to be imported from the US, including lesbian erotic magazine, *On Our Backs*.<sup>137</sup> The combined nature of its connection to sex radicalism and coalition with men sometimes caused issues for *LOTL* when it was included in advertising and articles.

Potential hints to this conflict are included in the article, 'Vibrators – A Stimulation Survival Guide,' writer Tom Fairweather utilising the Toolshed's stock and expertise.<sup>138</sup> In the last paragraph, Fairweather thanks a staff member for his help, ending with 'believe me sex shops have come a long way too'.<sup>139</sup> The phrasing suggests that women may have been excluded from sex shop spaces, either discouraged from shopping there or limited stock with women in mind restricting utility and the need to visit. In 1995, a letter to the editor described the shock of one reader at a Toolshed advertisement as 'an explicit phallic graphic'.<sup>140</sup> The letter writer questioned the choice, stating, 'Couldn't they find another more suitable or use the ad in the *Star Observer* or another gay magazine?'<sup>141</sup> *LOTL*'s relationship with Toolshed allowed the advertising manager to

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<sup>135</sup> Robinson, 219.

<sup>136</sup> Rand, "Dawn O'Donnell: 'Hard but Fair,'" 14.

<sup>137</sup> Rand, 14.

<sup>138</sup> Tom Fairweather, "Vibrators - A Stimulation Survival Guide," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1990, 7–8.

<sup>139</sup> Fairweather, 8.

<sup>140</sup> Name and address supplied, "Cock Shock," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1995, 13.

<sup>141</sup> Name and address supplied, 13.

respond to the letter, stating the purpose was to communicate the non-phallic nature of their new products.<sup>142</sup> This interaction indicated that women were watchful of sex stores, looking for slip-ups in catering to lesbians. The lingering image of sex stores' connection to phallic images tied them to men, which established lesbian separatist ideologies could not always abide by, especially in lesbian-centred media. Other magazines in the 1990s also included advertisements from sex stores, though not as integrated as in *LOTL*. The Melbourne-based magazine, *Lesbiana*, included ads for Great Sensations, denoted as a 'safe, private, women's space,' highlighting the need for sex stores to specifically cater to women on their own terms.<sup>143</sup> The intersection between sex stores and growing commercial venues is interesting, tied together to develop businesses creating spaces for women. They are then linked to magazines, especially *Lesbians on the Loose*, as advertising needs increased to support these ventures, mutually reinforcing each other.

## **Bookstores**

The previous businesses served as sites of distribution for many of the magazines discussed. Another important node in the distribution network was the local independent, often feminist, bookstore. Like the bar venues, bookstores that fit under this description increasingly struggled to operate and sometimes disappeared during a publication's run. This downfall is true of Melbourne's Shrew Women's Bookshop, which closed on January 18th, 1997, due to financial hardship.<sup>144</sup> Its significance to the

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<sup>142</sup> Michael Hannah, "Toolshed Replies," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1995, 13.

<sup>143</sup> "Great Sensations," *Lesbiana*, March 1992, 14.

<sup>144</sup> "Feminists Mourn the Closure of Shrew Women's Bookshop," *Lesbiana*, February 1997, 6.

women of *Lesbiana*, a Melbourne-based magazine, is notable as three months after its closure, personal articles eulogised the loss of the space. According to a notice in *Lesbiana*, Shrew was the second feminist bookshop in Australia after Sydney's The Feminist Bookshop, established in 1983 on Gertrude St, Fitzroy.<sup>145</sup> In another article, Jill Carr wrote how Shrew provided a welcoming space for Melbourne's feminist and lesbian community.<sup>146</sup> She wrote 'Shrew was vastly more than just a bookshop. It was a meeting place, a very welcoming one for those just "out"'.<sup>147</sup> Its notice board kept visitors up to date with accommodation listings, events, and various services. Advice was dispensed by the owner Jean Steele, who, according to Carr, would sometimes provide informal counselling to women questioning their sexuality.<sup>148</sup> The store meant a lot to regional women, another article in *Lesbiana*, written by 'country gal' Lorraine Le Plastrier, noted how the store gave the 'threads to sustain and keep us through the months of isolation' when back in their towns.<sup>149</sup> It was the place where you could update yourself on the latest feminist theory through the various books and magazines, music through tapes and gossip and artistic endeavours through conversations. These were all significant to curating a lesbian and feminist lifestyle through community interaction, providing a necessary space. Several other bookstores were serving as distribution points in their cities for lesbian magazines.<sup>150</sup> While the bookshops provided a space for distribution of the magazines, conversely, the magazines provided advertising space.

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<sup>145</sup> "Feminists Mourn the Closure of Shrew Women's Bookshop," 6.

<sup>146</sup> Jill Carr, "Farewell to Shrew Bookshop," *Lesbiana*, March 1997, 17.

<sup>147</sup> Carr, "Farewell to Shrew Bookshop," 17.

<sup>148</sup> Carr, "Farewell to Shrew Bookshop," 17.

<sup>149</sup> Lorraine Le Plastrier, "In Memory of Shrew," *Lesbiana*, April 1997, 9.

<sup>150</sup> "Doing It for Ourselves: The Feminist Bookshop," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1994, 15.

Further, the magazines almost always included a book review section, which referred readers to new arrivals and best sellers at these independent stores. *LOTL* connected back to the Feminist Bookshop in Sydney, while *Lesbiana* had a column dedicated to Hares & Hyenas, Melbourne's gay-owned bookstore, to notify readers of significant titles.<sup>151</sup> Lesbian and feminist bookstores played a substantial role in building community space, not just in Australia but overseas as well. Aside from being community spaces, they were fundamentally commercial in nature, even if they did not serve the mainstream, providing alternative modes of consumption. As Enke noted, in their study of American stores in the Midwest, 'few of the founders' wanted to be businesspersons above all, but most did think that the existence of feminist commercial venues would benefit women, improve their status in the public world, and even change the marketplace itself'.<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately for the Australian stores mentioned, only one remains operating at the time of writing, Hares & Hyenas, which has moved to the state government funded Victorian Pride Centre.<sup>153</sup> Bookstores like these did not attempt to challenge mainstream spaces but provided opportunities and, importantly, physical space for communities to meet and flourish, a place to practice alternative consumption. Their synergy with the magazines was significant; they helped round out the community built within the magazines as a distribution point and advertising partner.

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<sup>151</sup> Examples "Best Sellers," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1994, 24; Lesley Crofts, "Hare & Hyenas," *Lesbiana*, June 1995, 5.

<sup>152</sup> Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, Radical Perspectives (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 151.

<sup>153</sup> "Hares and Hyenas," *Victorian Pride Centre* (blog), accessed July 23, 2021, <https://pridecentre.org.au/tenants/hares-and-hyenas/>.

## **Business Networks**

With the increase in lesbian businesses in the 1990s, many women sought support within their community. With branches in Melbourne and Sydney, Lezbiz allowed lesbian business owners to meet and network with one another. The magazines aided this endeavour in each city, with *Labrys* and *Lesbiana* and *Lesbians on the Loose* highlighting Lezbiz-related businesses through advertising and profiles.. The Melbourne branch began with an inaugural meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990, announced in *Labrys*, describing their aim ‘to be a networking group, and be supportive to **lesbians in business,**’ with a future objective to mentor new businesses.<sup>154</sup> There was a follow-up report in July 1991, in which successful meetings with growing numbers were reported and a trade listing printed as a resource for *Labrys* readers.<sup>155</sup> A profile in *Lesbiana* indicates that solicitor, Rosemary Harris, was a founding member of Lezbiz in Melbourne.<sup>156</sup> Her write-up elucidated the significance of lesbian professionals, noting that her area of the law, mainly conveyancing, wills and probate, and small businesses, allowed women seeking these services to be open about their sexuality, especially their relationships, which could affect outcomes.<sup>157</sup> *Lesbiana* included several other profiles as well as organisational updates.

*Lesbians on the Loose* also advertised Lezbiz, promoting the Sydney branch. The first inclusion of Lezbiz in *LOTL* was a notice included in a ‘Doing it for ourselves’ profile,

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<sup>154</sup> “LESBIZ,” *Labrys*, January 1991, 3. Original emphasis.

<sup>155</sup> “LESBIZ REPORT,” *Labrys*, July 1991, 22.

<sup>156</sup> “LEZBIZ Focus,” *Lesbiana*, June 1993, 13.

<sup>157</sup> “LEZBIZ Focus,” 13.



which detailed lesbian businesses in Sydney in 1995.<sup>158</sup> The Sydney branch was started by Silke Bader, owner of Silke's Travels and future owner of *LOTL*.<sup>159</sup> The group was further detailed in their own profile, with a similar aim to the Melbourne branch, to 'provide support to lesbian businesses and to increase the community's awareness of lesbian businesses'.<sup>160</sup> Bader grew the organisation, establishing a \$1000 'Start Her Up' grant in 1997 to be awarded to a new lesbian business.<sup>161</sup> Further, in a profile on Bader in *LOTL*, it was noted that she was interested in establishing a national LezBiz committee with groups based in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and looking to build links with lesbian businesses in Brisbane, Perth and Alice Springs.<sup>162</sup> In August 1997, *Lesbiana* reported plans for a national gathering linked to Silke Bader and her travel service for organising travel and accommodation.<sup>163</sup> Workshops were planned and an expanded aim, looking to create a stronger voice to influence private and public institutions' decision-making processes.<sup>164</sup> With its beginnings as a small networking group in Melbourne, Lezbiz grew throughout the 1990s, matched with growing lesbian businesses nationally. Lezbiz is notable as its sole focus was lesbian businesses. There were many other industry networking groups for lesbian and gay businesses, especially in travel services with the Australian Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (AGLTA) and its international counterpart. However, Lezbiz and its coverage in the magazines allowed for much smaller, sole lesbian-owned businesses to find support, readers and hopefully customers. Although, as exemplified by Bader, some had ambitious goals to

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<sup>158</sup> "Doing It for Ourselves: The Rockford Files," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1995, 16.

<sup>159</sup> "Doing It for Ourselves: The Rockford Files," 16.

<sup>160</sup> "Doing It for Ourselves: These Dykes Mean Business," 16.

<sup>161</sup> "\$1000 Grant for Lesbian Venture," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1997, 10.

<sup>162</sup> "The Accidental Tour Operator," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1997, 14.

<sup>163</sup> "Lezbiz National Gathering," *Lesbiana*, August 1997, 14.

<sup>164</sup> "Lezbiz National Gathering," 14.

achieve more organised influence for lesbian businesses, smaller operators also found space to reach others. Lezbiz emphasised the growing lesbian businesses of the 1990s, balancing both larger operations with small local businesses. These businesses received advertising and profiles in the magazines, helping to lift the voices of the various business owners and allow lesbian services to grow.

### **Alternative Networks**

Although there was significant growth in the number of lesbian businesses, alongside an increasing acceptance of making profit from said businesses in the 1990s, a burgeoning alternative was proposed. Beginning in Adelaide in 1990, LESY (Lesbian Exchange System) described itself as a ‘non-profit local lesbian economy,’ ‘built on the networks of exchange and sharing that are already part of our lesbian community and aims to maximise the use of our collective resources, skills, time and knowledge’.<sup>165</sup> The idea was that lesbians would share and exchange their skills between each other, whether this was mechanical or home repair skills, baking services, or work advice, all without the exchange of money. By 1991, the idea had been introduced to Sydney through the Lesbian Conference and Festival held in the city that year, with *LOTL* describing it as a reference book for lesbian services.<sup>166</sup> The group got a further profile in *LOTL* in October 1991, noting its recent establishment of a Sydney branch.<sup>167</sup> In this write-up, the goal of LESY was established further, the system described as ‘a move away from the need to improve externally determined values for an individual's time or skills’.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, a

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<sup>165</sup> “LESY: Lesbian Exchange System,” *Lesbian Times*, June 1992, 19.

<sup>166</sup> “Lesbian Conference,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1991, 12–13.

<sup>167</sup> Clare Gallagher, “LESY: New Economic Order,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1991, 7.

<sup>168</sup> Gallagher, 7.

Melbourne branch was established in 1991, advertised in *Labrys*.<sup>169</sup> In each case, sign-up was required to receive the newsletter listing the services available, provided you advertised your own. This system marked a departure from the lesbian business focus, instead more focused on a community-based network of potential services.

The lack of profit motive is in contrast to the increasing acceptance that lesbian-run businesses would chase profit. These early years of the system, the early 1990s, represent the transition from more community-focused services to established lesbian businesses. This change was illustrated in the evolution of *Labrys*' organisational structure and the multiple money-themed articles detailing the changing expectations and allowances for lesbian businesses and services. LESY fell out of mention in the mid-1990s but was revived in *Lesbiana* through LESY-Fair. LESY-Fair organisers distanced themselves from the comparable LETS systems and disparaged them as 'nothing but capitalism wearing jeans and T-shirt rather than a business suit'.<sup>170</sup> There was no monetary exchange within LESY, the later notices in *Lesbiana* stated that the system relied on women to respect boundaries, their own and others, for it to work.<sup>171</sup> This continued emphasis in these later notices on boundaries brings up questions around the previous iteration of LESY, potentially dissolving due to issues around respect and comparable exchanges, but this cannot be confirmed from the magazine sources, only that there was a lull in reporting in the mid-1990s. This revived LESY added a fair day component, allowing women to network, share skills, discuss the system, and make

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<sup>169</sup> "Lesbian Exchange System," *Labrys*, July 1991, 16.

<sup>170</sup> "Lesy-Fair," *Lesbiana*, March 1998, 18.

<sup>171</sup> "Lesy-Fair," 18.

adjustments.<sup>172</sup> LESY-Fair continued to be advertised in *Lesbiana* until June 2000, when it seemed to drop off the community section.<sup>173</sup> LESY and LESY-Fair represent that the new allowances for for-profit lesbian businesses did not sit well with all lesbians, and some continued to develop new modes of economic activity. The magazines still held space for such endeavours, contrasting with notices and advertisements promoting lesbian businesses while notifying readers of an alternative.

### **‘STRAIGHT AD DILEMMA’**

While lesbian businesses were developing and growing, more mainstream companies and enterprises began to look to the gay and lesbian community as an untapped consumer base. To connect to the community, gay and lesbian media was utilised, advertising directly to this potential market without alienating straight consumers unlikely to engage with this format. Australian lesbian publications were implicated in this rush to reach the gay market, particularly in the 1990s, with *Lesbians on the Loose* standing out for their inclusion of mainstream advertising. There was apprehension amongst the lesbian community around these changes, unsure of the place of lesbians specifically in the gay market and broader issues around exploitative business practices. The fear of becoming a new market niche can be seen in the early 1980s, as evidenced through limited discussion in *Lesbian Newsletter*. By the 1990s, the debate was more diverse, with some acknowledging the assimilating factor of consumer citizenship as positive and negative. These developments, the creation of the lesbian consumer market

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<sup>172</sup> “Lesy-Fair,” 18.

<sup>173</sup> “Come out & Play,” *Lesbiana*, June 2000, 24.

and the backlash to it will be examined, considering the place of mainstream businesses within the magazines and in Australian lesbian communities.

### **Predicting the ‘Pink’ Dollar**

The spectre of the developing gay market began to be discussed in *Lesbian Newsletter* in the early 1980s. This was not the first mention of the gay market in Australian media broadly, a 1977 *Australian Financial Review* article detailed the opportunity for companies to target the newly conceived ‘pink dollar’, presenting statistics about the supposed disposable income of gay men in San Francisco.<sup>174</sup> Further reports were published in other outlets promoting the purchasing power of the ‘gay dollar’.<sup>175</sup> In tune with *Lesbian Newsletter*’s tone, the magazine took a different approach to discussing the phenomenon. The articles had a political outlook, anxious about lessening radical activism changing the gay movement to a gay community. This perspective is connected to the context of the articles, the first being a write-up of a Communist Party of Australia meeting, in which various speakers presented papers to an audience of around 30.<sup>176</sup> In the article, Beth Marr describes Phillip Carswell’s paper in which he noted the move away from political influence tactics of rallies and meetings to a focus on lifestyle as a site of struggle, connected to the swing away from a movement mindset to a community one.<sup>177</sup> Marr paraphrased Carswell, stating, ‘this expansion of the gay community is, to some people, the opening up of a large, exploitable market’.<sup>178</sup> A similar theme is picked

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<sup>174</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 156.

<sup>175</sup> Calder, 156.

<sup>176</sup> Beth Marr, “Gays & the Class Struggle,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, October 1980, 6–7.

<sup>177</sup> Marr, “Gays & the Class Struggle,” 6.

<sup>178</sup> Marr, 6.

up in Diane Otto's rumination on the topic, the same sentiment of recognition as 'an untapped market' expressed.<sup>179</sup> Otto focused on lesbian expressions of this issue, stating, 'I feel that the primary energies of lesbian feminists in Melbourne are aimed towards building a relatively self-sufficient lesbian sub-culture within which political discussion and analysis takes a very low profile'.<sup>180</sup> Otto's observation can be connected to a sense of declining political force, expressed in other issues of *Lesbian Newsletter* during this period. In the next issue after Otto's article, the end of the Lesbian Action Group was announced. It was founded two years before to revitalise Women's and Gay Liberation activism in Melbourne but struggled to achieve its goals and maintain the movement.<sup>181</sup> To preface an interview with a lesbian venue operator, Otto noted that the focus of the gay market was on men.<sup>182</sup> Lesbians were considered less lucrative as a market, with unequal pay and job security playing a role in the decreased consumer power of lesbians.<sup>183</sup> These factors and the perspective that lesbians are generally less consumerist than gay men would be used to explain the continuing unequal focus by marketers and larger companies. In these early articles, the lingering influence of liberation and leftist politics can be seen to drive analysis of the issue and its perceived coming impact on the gay movement and community. Further, the disinterest in lesbians as a specific market would cause problems in the 1990s, as discussion debated the pros and cons of this arrangement, especially as gay directed advertising would break through gay media. Through examining these articles, an early thread of

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<sup>179</sup> Diane Otto, "The Gay Movement - Which Way?," *Lesbian Newsletter*, October 1980, 10.

<sup>180</sup> Otto, 11.

<sup>181</sup> Beth and Barb, "Lesbian Action Group - The End.," *Lesbian Newsletter*, December 1980, 6.

<sup>182</sup> Diane Otto, "Another Way?," *Lesbian Newsletter*, February 1981, 5.

<sup>183</sup> Otto, "Another Way?," 5.

discontent can be seen changing treatment as a consumer market, showing how it evolved with the 1990s and how discourse echoes these earlier positions.

### **Consumer Citizenship**

Before continuing the ongoing discussions within Australian lesbian magazines around the growing attention towards the gay market, and to an extent, lesbian one, I will elucidate the complexity of circumstances that led to its emergence. Significantly, drawing on ideas of consumer citizenship, the reasoning behind the perspective is that these new marketing opportunities might positively benefit lesbian communities. Most studies on the rise of the pink dollar centre the United States, but connections can be made to the Australian situation. Further, US talk influenced Australian reporting, from the first article in 1977 to various notices within Australian lesbian magazines on marketing news reprinted from US sources. Katherine Sender discusses the rise of the gay market and how the creation interacts with political activism and lesbian and gay identities. By the mid-1970s, an imagining of the gay market emerged, 'made up of fashionable "young, educated, and affluent" men'.<sup>184</sup> Lesbians did not feature in this conception to the point that any mention of the gay market was implicitly understood as a male market.<sup>185</sup> Sender does note the connection to gay media in helping to reach the so-called gay market, advertisers drawn to publications as mediums to capture the market. Mainstream advertisers were toeing the line with their relationship with the gay press in terms of upholding popular notions of morality and homophobia. This

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<sup>184</sup> Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>185</sup> Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 35.

connection was tested especially during the AIDS epidemic, in which a withdrawal of advertisers followed. There was a return of advertisers by the 1990s, with the growth of glossy magazines. In the Australian context, Calder connects the early 1990s recession to the increase in mainstream advertising in gay media, stating it encouraged businesses to innovate their marketing strategies and seek new markets.<sup>186</sup> An increased social acceptance of homosexuality in Australia meant businesses were 'less likely to reject targeting the gay niche due to morality concerns'.<sup>187</sup>

Although the prospective gay market had been identified earlier, the growth of more professional gay media outlets prompted greater market research, often using magazine surveys as data points to imagine the market. Magazines utilised this interest as 'they frequently highlighted the financial power of the pink dollar, funded surveys to demonstrate its size and redesigned their publications to attract advertisers'.<sup>188</sup> These over-valued market magazine surveys bolstered the appearance of the gay community's affluence. The samples collected present a picture of disposable income predisposed by the purchase of the magazines themselves.<sup>189</sup> These surveys obscured the demographic reality that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are dispersed between income brackets.<sup>190</sup> Further, the supposed drawcard of the gay market is highlighted in the abbreviation DINKs (dual-income-no-kids); however, research shows that children were common

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<sup>186</sup> Calder, *Pink Ink*, 158.

<sup>187</sup> Calder, 158.

<sup>188</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 174.

<sup>189</sup> M.V. Lee Badgett, "The Myth of Gay & Lesbian Affluence," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 7, no. 2 (April 30, 2000): 22.

<sup>190</sup> Badgett, "The Myth of Gay & Lesbian Affluence," 22.



amongst gay and lesbian households, with the economic responsibility that children require.<sup>191</sup>

Lesbians, in particular, slipped through the cracks of this market research. Danae Clark explained this invisibility as due to three key reasons. Lesbians have not been an economically powerful group, have not been easily identifiable as a social group, nor have advertisers had any desire to identify a viable lesbian consumer group.<sup>192</sup> Sender expands this conceptualisation, noting that ‘although lesbians may *want*, identifying the object of their desire is notoriously tricky’.<sup>193</sup> The significance of lesbian feminism has had a lasting impact on the view of consumption and consumerism, as evidenced by previous discussions around the transition of community magazines to business ventures and the profit motive of lesbian businesses.<sup>194</sup> Sender noted, ‘when lesbians consume, they can do so playfully and with pleasure, performing gender as a masquerade, rather than unthinking conforming to normative standards of femininity’.<sup>195</sup> This attitude is especially highlighted in the changing modes of dress and the place of fashion during the 1990s, to be explored further in the thesis in Chapter Five. *Lesbians on the Loose* conducted reader surveys throughout the 1990s, creating demographic and consumer data on its readers.<sup>196</sup> The 1993 survey, completed by Significant Others Marketing Consultants, proclaimed the purchasing power of the

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<sup>191</sup> Badgett, 22.

<sup>192</sup> Danae Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” *Camera Obscura*, no. 25/26 (1991): 182.

<sup>193</sup> Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 174.

<sup>194</sup> Sender, 174.

<sup>195</sup> Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 199.

<sup>196</sup> For example, “Reader Survey 1990,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1990, 10-11; “Reader Survey,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1992, 8; “1995 Reader Survey,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1996, 9.

‘lavender’ dollar.<sup>197</sup> These results created a sense of Australian lesbian consumption habits that would be developed further throughout the decade.

### ‘Marketing to Dykes’

There was a promise to target marketing, allowing some version of acceptance as a consumer and acknowledgement of identity. However, this was balanced against the commodification of image and lessening political action. Calder noted that when gay media successfully gained corporate advertising, its ‘impact on the readership could be significant, giving many readers a “profound sense of social validation and legitimation”’.<sup>198</sup> Peñaloza describes the marketplace as ‘an important domain of social contestation whereby disenfranchised groups engage in ongoing struggles for social and political incorporation’.<sup>199</sup> However, as Peñaloza and Sender discuss, target marketing can have a ‘smoothing’ effect reducing gay and lesbian consumers to sexuality, producing only ‘recognizable – and sellable – definitions of what it means to be gay or lesbian’.<sup>200</sup> Criticism of gay marketing noted the assimilationist bent of the process, reducing communities to particular images and consumer products, ‘normalizing in intent and depoliticizing in effect,’ preserving the gay market as ‘distinct but not in threatening ways’.<sup>201</sup> This line of questioning was repeated within Australian gay media, particularly in lesbian magazines.

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<sup>197</sup> “LOTL Survey Promotes Visibility,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1994, 1, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 180.

<sup>199</sup> Lisa Peñaloza, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re Going Shopping!: A Critical Perspective on the Accommodation of Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Marketplace,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 31, no. 1–2 (June 21, 1996): 16, [https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v31n01\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v31n01_02).

<sup>200</sup> Peñaloza, “We’re Here, We’re Queer, and We’re Going Shopping!,” 22; Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 11.

<sup>201</sup> Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 228, 239.

An example of this questioning was featured in a letter to the editor in *Lesbians on the Loose* in January 1992. Titled ‘Marketing to Dykes,’ the writer, who chose to remain anonymous, noted Toyota’s turn to gay marketing with an ad featuring a male couple.<sup>202</sup> The letter noted an interview describing how Toyota got in touch with Bluestone Media, a prominent gay media company that produced numerous titles, often mixed or gay-male focused, to ascertain the best way to target the gay market.<sup>203</sup> The timing of this letter is before any attempts to advertise directly to lesbians in Australian media, allowing space for the writer to open up questions of implications before the ads eventuated. The writer posed three key questions:

Do we want to become a marketing target for advertisers? Do we want our ability to consume/purchase merchandise researched? Finally, do we care, one way or the other, what happens in the advertising world regarding our image?<sup>204</sup>

Significantly, little research had been done on lesbian consumer power, justifying Toyota’s decision not to target lesbians as well as gay men. The desire for visibility placed Australian lesbians in an awkward position of wishing for commercial representation while also noting the flattening effect such depictions could have, leaving out the multiplicity of their communities, with many never quite satisfied with their portrayal in media. Another letter to the editor reflected this appeal for visibility, responding to ‘Marketing to Dykes’. In ‘Media Visibility,’ the writer, Michelle Reiner, noted her frustration, stating ‘how many times a day do we have image upon image of

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<sup>202</sup> “Marketing to Dykes,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1992, 5.

<sup>203</sup> “Marketing to Dykes,” 5.

<sup>204</sup> “Marketing to Dykes,” 5.

heterosexuality thrust upon us, making us wonder if ours really is a valid form of existence?’<sup>205</sup> Unlike the previous letter, Reiner was willing to weigh up costs and live with them to achieve some form of visibility. This perspective is explicit in her statement, ‘it may be a money-making scam for them, but it spells validation and visibility for us.’<sup>206</sup> While limited advertising existed targeting lesbians, members of *LOTL*’s readership were already questioning its impact, testing the promise of visibility and validation as consumer subjects against the perceived loss of control of image and potential for exploitation.

The suggestion of potential for lesbian targeted advertising did eventuate with limited ads and images utilised. In the 1990s, mainstream advertising was incorporated within Australian lesbian magazines, though not all were lesbian targeted, rather searching for a broader gay audience. Firstly, City Kia car dealership in Melbourne ran a series of ads within *BrotherSister*, which was a mixed gay newsletter. Most of the ads referenced Melbourne gay community parties and venues, leaning more toward gay men than women.<sup>207</sup> There was one that targeted lesbians explicitly, utilising lesbian celebrity references in its copy.<sup>208</sup> The ad stated, ‘the body is as sleek as Martina, the stereo is as loud as Melissa and the ride is as smooth as k.d.’s voice.’<sup>209</sup> Although the ad did not actively run in a lesbian magazine, it was included in *Lesbians on the Loose*’s media

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<sup>205</sup> Michelle Reiner, “Media Visibility,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1992, 4.

<sup>206</sup> Reiner, “Media Visibility,” 4.

<sup>207</sup> “And You Thought All 4wds Were Straight and Boring...,” *BrotherSister*, December 12, 1996, 2; “Imagine What You Could Pick up with This at Red Raw!,” *BrotherSister*, January 23, 1997, 35; “Have a Problem Picking up? You Need a Mentor,” *BrotherSister*, February 20, 1997, 38.

<sup>208</sup> “When ‘butch’ Doesn’t Always Mean Dyke.,” *BrotherSister*, January 9, 1997, 30.

<sup>209</sup> “When ‘butch’ Doesn’t Always Mean Dyke.,” 30. The celebrities referenced are tennis player, Martina Navratilova, and musicians, Melissa Etheridge and k.d. lang.

highlight section, “Great Moments in Media,” which poked fun at any mention of lesbians in Australian media, both positive and negative.<sup>210</sup> In this example we see lesbian target marketing, that was only featured incidentally in the lesbian media of the time.

Another example of direct lesbian target marketing was seen with the telecommunications service, Telstra. With the corporation’s transition from Telecom to Telstra, its attitude to gay and lesbian advertising changed, bolstered by its sponsoring of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. In February 1992, *Labrys* reported on then Telecom’s refusal to advertise the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard in the 0055 section of the White Pages telephone directory.<sup>211</sup> The justification behind this decision was linked to the name of the Switchboard with the inclusion of lesbian and gay considered to have breached guidelines as they were perceived to allude to sexual activity.<sup>212</sup> As *Labrys* detailed, Telecom continued to make money off the leasing of the lines, even if they prevented the Switchboard from advertising with similar lines. *Labrys* reported that Telecom was taking a 40% commission.<sup>213</sup> Within a few years, with the additional restructuring of Telecom to Telstra, the corporation’s position changed to explicitly advertising to the Australian gay community through its press. Telecom, and then Telstra, in the mid-1990s, operated as a corporate business, though it remained government-owned, with its privatisation an election issue.<sup>214</sup> This corporatisation of

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<sup>210</sup> “Great Moments in Media,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1997, 18.

<sup>211</sup> L.N., “Lesbian & Gay - Offensive Words to Telecom ... but They’ll Still Take Your Money!,” *Labrys*, February 1992, 3.

<sup>212</sup> L.N., “Lesbian & Gay - Offensive Words to Telecom ... but They’ll Still Take Your Money!,” 3.

<sup>213</sup> L.N., “Lesbian & Gay - Offensive Words to Telecom ... but They’ll Still Take Your Money!,” 3.

<sup>214</sup> Ian Henderson, “Pragmatism Will Decide Telstra’s Fate,” *The Canberra Times*, May 17, 1995, 15; “Privatisation Losing Appeal to Australia,” *The Canberra Times*, August 21, 1995, 2.

Telstra saw it look for new markets and financial success, leading to its interaction with the Australian gay community.

In 1995, the year that Telstra changed its name from Telecom in Australia, there was a spate of articles in the lesbian media discussing Telstra's advertising turn.<sup>215</sup> *Lesbians on the Loose* reported with 'Telstra rings up a first,' detailing the plans for advertising and connection with the gay community moving forward, but with little analysis.<sup>216</sup> It noted in a niche marketing first, Telstra would be launching advertisements within *LOTL* with a lesbian-specific advertising campaign.<sup>217</sup> The article detailed the market research undertaken by Telstra, which confirmed that both lesbians and gay men were high-volume users of telecom products, resulting in Telstra's pitch for the pink dollar with advertisements in the gay press, as well as discussion of billboards and bus stop posters.<sup>218</sup> Additionally, the article ended by stating that Telstra's objective was to establish a long-term relationship with the gay and lesbian community.<sup>219</sup> *Lesbiana* published their own article detailing this move, similarly without comment. In 'Telstra Targets Lesbians/Gays,' there was more detail on the advertisement launch, stating it would focus on Sydney's lesbian and gay community, reflecting its interest in Mardi Gras.<sup>220</sup> Further, the market research was explained. Occurring in Sydney and Melbourne in 1994, it was noted that lesbians and gay men utilised telecom services at higher numbers as they were said to travel both interstate and internationally and were

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<sup>215</sup> "Telstra - Past - Our Company," accessed August 23, 2021, <https://www.telstra.com.au/aboutus/our-company/past>.

<sup>216</sup> "Telstra Rings up a First," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1995, 4.

<sup>217</sup> "Telstra Rings up a First," 4.

<sup>218</sup> "Telstra Rings up a First," 4.

<sup>219</sup> "Telstra Rings up a First," 4.

<sup>220</sup> "Telstra Targets Lesbians/Gays," *Lesbiana*, August 1995, 5.

more likely to maintain long-distance friendships and relationships than their straight counterparts..<sup>221</sup> These straightforward reports of the advertising launch would attract further comment within the magazines.

By the mid-1990s, with the solidification of lesbian chic, ambiguity featured heavily within advertisements, allowing for lesbian identification and readings of advertisements. Lesbian chic refers to an ‘idealized ‘hyper-feminine, heterosexual vision of “the lesbian”’.<sup>222</sup> Notably, lesbian chic ‘produced images of lesbianism that were fashionable and marketable but ultimately insubstantial and depoliticized, making lesbians into “a novelty, a fad, something to be consumed and played with”’.<sup>223</sup> Danae Clark addresses the use of lesbian chic alongside ambiguous advertising, noting that gay window advertisements ‘avoid explicit references to heterosexuality by depicting only one individual or same-sexed individuals within the representational frame’.<sup>224</sup> This allowed gays and lesbians to read into subtextual elements of the ad ‘that correspond with experiences with or representations of gay/lesbians subculture’.<sup>225</sup> Examples of this reading can be seen in a variety of articles by Jodie Joyce in the ‘Queer Accessories’ column for *Lesbiana*, in which Joyce usually critiqued such representations as shallow and lacking any representational quality.<sup>226</sup> The Telstra advertising campaign was highlighted by Joyce as a positive example, though not without its own limitations. The

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<sup>221</sup> “Telstra Targets Lesbians/Gays,” 5.

<sup>222</sup> Georgina Turner, “CATCHING THE WAVE: Britain’s Lesbian Publishing Goes Commercial,” *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 6 (2009): 774.

<sup>223</sup> Erin Rand, “An Appetite for Activism: The Lesbian Avengers and the Queer Politics of Visibility,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, no. 36 (2013): 122.

<sup>224</sup> Clark, “Commodity Lesbianism,” 183.

<sup>225</sup> Clark, 183.

<sup>226</sup> Jodie Joyce, “Bring Back the Parrot?,” *Lesbiana*, October 1996, 15; Jodie Joyce, “Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered: Celebrity Lesbians,” *Lesbiana*, November 1998, 35.

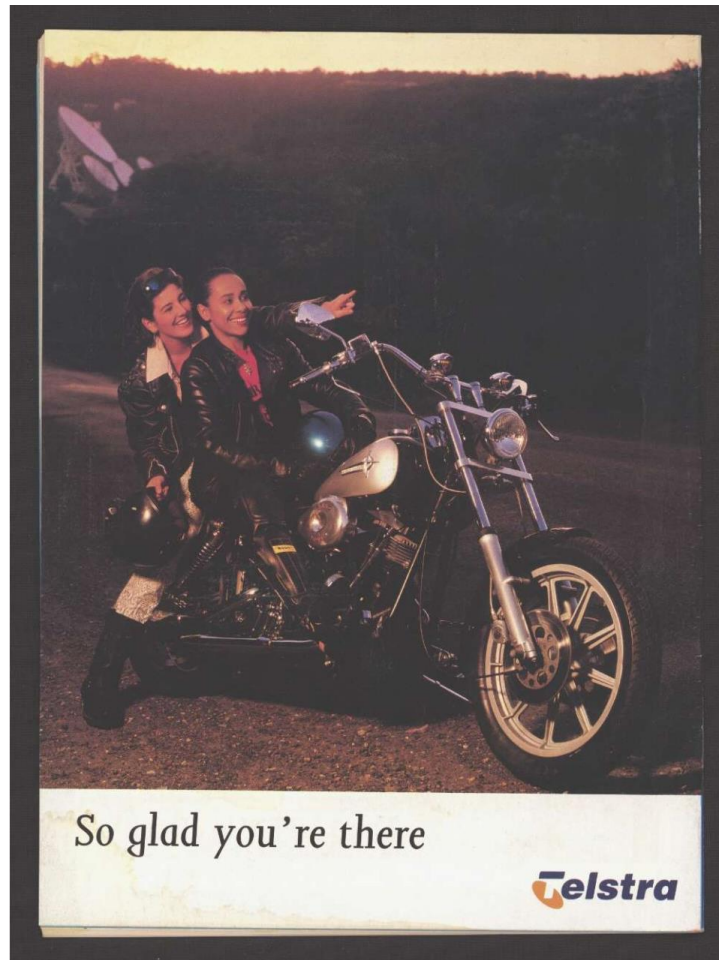
advertisement, published on the back cover of the September 1995 issue of *LOTL*, depicted two women wearing leather jackets on a motorcycle, in an undefined bushland location (as seen in Figure 2.1). Joyce noted, ‘Telstra placed two women on a motorbike and created posters designed to fall out of *Melbourne Star Observer* and into our consciousness’.<sup>227</sup> Joyce did pay some respect to Telstra, stating, ‘Telstra recognises us as a niche market and speaks to us in our forums, whereas other advertisers address us in the general social arena’.<sup>228</sup> This acknowledgement placed Telstra ahead of its counterparts by speaking directly to the Australian gay community through direct advertising, which featured representational codes understood as gay and lesbian.

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<sup>227</sup> Joyce, “Bring Back the Parrot?,” 15.

<sup>228</sup> Joyce, 15.





**Figure 2.1** Telstra Advertisement featured in *Lesbians on the Loose* on the back cover of the September 1995 issue.

Other ads featured in the short-lived magazine, *Lip*, primarily advertising Telstra visa cards.<sup>229</sup> There was a competitive element between the Bluestone-backed *Lip* and *Lesbians on the Loose* over the Telstra advertising campaign. *LOTL* editor Frances Rand was dismissive in a small article, stating that Bluestone proprietor Danny Vadasz had threatened to sue them and excluded them from a Telstra campaign.<sup>230</sup> Barbara Farrelly

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<sup>229</sup> "Let Me Show You How to Score a Few Points," *Lip*, 1997, Back Cover.

<sup>230</sup> "Who's Paying for Lip Service?," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1997, 13.

asserted this exclusion in an interview with Bill Calder.<sup>231</sup> Rand and Farrelly expressed concern as they did not have the corporate backing that *Lip* had as part of the Bluestone Media group. However, *Lesbians on the Loose* promoted itself as larger at the time and continued publishing with Telstra advertising, where *Lip* only lasted eight issues.

Further commentary on Telstra's interactions with the gay and lesbian community was featured, though nominally connected to their partnership with Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras. There was discussion on the increasing commercialisation of Mardi Gras and the implications this had on the political capital of associated pride events. Kirsty Machon for *LOTL* commented that 'the further commercialisation of Mardi Gras could ultimately come at the political expense of lesbians'.<sup>232</sup> Machon described graffiti found in Sydney, which stated, "I'm so normal since Telstra sponsored my sexuality."<sup>233</sup> References to Telstra's connection with the Australian lesbian and gay community can be seen as shorthand for commercialisation and homonormativity in critiques of visibility politics. This perspective is seen in the quip from Heroine Quirke's comment column stating visibility 'has meant coming out, going out, marching, acting up, and even modelling for Telstra'.<sup>234</sup> The place of advertising can be seen as fraught during this period, aligned with swirling questions around identity, community and commodification. Advertising has shifted over time with changes from community-

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<sup>231</sup> Calder, "Gay Print Media's Golden Era," 195.

<sup>232</sup> Kirsty Machon, "Is Mardi Gras More Priscilla than Pride?," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1996, 26.

<sup>233</sup> Machon, "Is Mardi Gras More Priscilla than Pride?," 26.

<sup>234</sup> Heroine Quirke, "Remember Your Roots," *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1998, 6.

based advertisements to paid advertisements from lesbian businesses and the beginning of target advertising from mainstream corporations.

## **CONCLUSION**

As this chapter has shown, Australian lesbian media responded to the challenges of financial sustainability and advertising revenue in multiple ways. This is seen in the organisational structure of the periodical, inflected by the political alignment of the publication, and when this conflicted with raising revenue. The need for financial stability led to engagement with advertising, primarily lesbian businesses. This aided in the maintenance of lesbian spaces, such as bookstores and venues, as distribution sites and advertisers for the publications. Further, the magazines serve as archives for these spaces, documenting and sometimes eulogising the experiences readers had in these lesbian cultural spaces, articulating their importance to Australian lesbian lives through 1970s to the late 1990s, and these relations changed over time. Finally, readers responded to the increasing presence of mainstream advertising through letters to the editor and multiple commentary columns. Similar analysis of the conversations operating within the magazines will be seen in the next chapter, focusing on lesbian motherhood.

## **Chapter 3 – “Non-Nuclear Proliferation”: Representing Lesbian Motherhood**

Motherhood was a significant issue within the periodicals, showcasing a variety of approaches, political perspectives, and opinions. The magazines as historical sources will be highlighted within this chapter, the medium allowing for the exchange of information and experiences. Further, this chapter explores how the magazines helped to discursively create the identity of the lesbian mother, shifting over time. Certain types of motherhood were privileged within the magazines as politically more useful against conservative backlash which sought to restrict access to artificial reproductive technologies and other methods of family creation. This focus on motherhood highlights transitions within the broader Australian lesbian communities around the topic, illustrating moves within lesbian activism and changing conceptualisations of lesbian families. Through the lens of the Australian lesbian periodicals, the multiplicity of experiences will be drawn together, connecting these threads into a historical account encapsulating the transitional periods of Australian lesbian motherhood.

### **LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD AND LESBIAN FEMINISM**

The first section of this chapter will consider the place of lesbian motherhood in the 1970s and 1980s. These two decades represented a significant transitional period in lesbian motherhood, explored within lesbian publications of the time, particularly *Lesbian Newsletter/ News*. To begin with, changes to the Family Court will be explored regarding how they exposed the vulnerability of lesbian mothers' custody rights, leading

the issue to be taken up by lesbian feminists, with advice and help groups promoted in the periodical.. Lesbian motherhood as an identity within lesbian feminism was constructed within *Lesbian News*, including experiments in non-normative modes of reproduction and co-parenting structures aligning with critiques of the patriarchal nuclear family. Further, the complicated place of the boy child will be explored, with reference to the magazine accounts of the Bridge the Gap Conference in 1984, which connected lesbian mothers and discussed issues surrounding their experiences. The section closes with the emergence of the lesbian feminist critique of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and an examination of the place of feminist reproductive choice politics in the growth of self-insemination. These experiments in the lesbian feminist politics of lesbian motherhood will be contrasted with latter section on the 1990s, in which issues of ART access and conservative backlash to lesbian motherhood would see a change in representations of lesbian families within the magazines.

### **Custody Rights**

Issues surrounding the custody rights of lesbian mothers began political activism around lesbian motherhood, building the state understandings of lesbian mothers that would continue to be used against lesbians trying to create and maintain their families. The establishment of the Family Court and associated marriage reforms influenced how non-heterosexuality and motherhood were regulated by the legal system. Additionally, the reforms were enacted at a time of ‘coming out’ for lesbian women. Where previous women had hidden their sexuality within divorce and custody proceedings, for these

newly out lesbians their sexuality would define their engagement with the legal system and the resulting judgements.<sup>1</sup>

The Family Court will be contextualised to help understand its aims and impact on lesbian mothers. Previous to the Family Court, divorce cases and court proceedings ‘were highly adversarial, with divorce judges exercising their role as guardians of community morality’.<sup>2</sup> Elements of this attitude would remain, seen in particular around custody dealings involving lesbian mothers. The *Family Law Act May 1975* was passed by the Federal Parliament by a conscience vote, removing fault considerations from divorce and establishing the Family Court of Australia.<sup>3</sup> The Court was ‘to hear custody, maintenance and property settlement claims privately, rather than publicly’.<sup>4</sup> Swain and Bryant, in their recounting of the early years of the Family Court, noted the growing influence of social sciences within the realm of relationship regulation, tied to reforms made in the establishment of the new Court.<sup>5</sup> These reforms had many critics, including many organisations connected to Women’s Liberation. Concern began with the reduction of maintenance to divorced wives due to the growing female workforce, many expected to return to some form of work to support themselves.<sup>6</sup> This assumption did not consider the ongoing discrimination of women in the workforce, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Jennings, “‘The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life’: Lesbian Motherhood in Australia 1945–1990,” in *Australian Mothering*, ed. Carla Pascoe Leahy and Petra Bueskens (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 190, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20267-5\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20267-5_8).

<sup>2</sup> Shurlee Swain and Diana Bryant, *Born in Hope: The Early Years of the Family Court in Australia* (Sydney, AUSTRALIA: University of New South Wales Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political, and the Making of Modern Australia* (Sydney, NSW, Australia: NewSouth, 2019), 193–94.

<sup>4</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 194.

<sup>5</sup> Swain and Bryant, *Born in Hope*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 195.

older women.<sup>7</sup> Connecting to lesbian mothers, Michelle Arrow noted that Melbourne Women's Liberation suggested 'that custody was being awarded to the most 'respectable' parent and that women who breached traditional norms of femininity, like politically active women or lesbians, were also losing their custody cases'.<sup>8</sup> Swain and Bryant described how a central concern developed, focused on "what's best for the children" connected to a context that recognised 'equal rights and responsibilities of parents, of husband and wife'.<sup>9</sup> This concern limited opportunities for many women, including lesbian mothers. Rebecca Jennings stated that 'the majority of custody cases involving a lesbian mother prior to the mid-1980s resulted in the loss of custody by the mother'.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the 'best interests of the child' at the judges' discretion, the Family Court system privileged acceptable forms of femininity, which necessitated heterosexuality, leaving lesbian mothers restricted from their children.

*Lesbian Newsletter* discussed court practices within several articles detailing the experiences of lesbian mothers and custody proceedings. In a 1978 article, custody issues are framed as a significant lesbian legal issue. This discussion was contextualised by the assumption that lesbians were not subjected to criminal prosecutions, that 'the oppression of lesbians is purely social and not in any way related to law'.<sup>11</sup> However, as writer Whelan asserted, with the absence of discrimination legislation and the restrictive custody system, lesbians faced significant legal discrimination. In the article,

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<sup>7</sup> Arrow, *The Seventies*, 195.

<sup>8</sup> Arrow, 196.

<sup>9</sup> Swain and Bryant, *Born in Hope*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 187.

<sup>11</sup> Dominica Whelan, "Lesbian Mothers and Custody Rights," *Lesbian Newsletter*, July 1978, 11.

Whelan repeated the limitations placed on lesbians: not showing affection to partners in front of the children and not sharing a bed with their partner.<sup>12</sup> Lesbian mothers were often required to limit expressions of their sexuality in front of the courts and their children. This restriction was predicated on homophobic notions of lesbianism in which judges assumed lesbians were emotionally unstable and immature, therefore vulnerable to mental illness.<sup>13</sup> Further, the presence of partners was further evidence of potential detrimental effects on children, seen to threaten the mother's parenting abilities, characterised as jealous and over-sexed.<sup>14</sup> Jennings noted that it was not seen as favourable to force separation in the lesbian relationship in some instances, highlighting the Spry Case of 1977.<sup>15</sup> Justice Murray acknowledged that Mrs Spry 'would suffer such unhappiness that her parenting capacity would suffer' if she were to leave her current partner.<sup>16</sup> However, this decision is based on Mrs Spry's perceived emotional overdependence, ultimately based on harmful assumptions about lesbian relationships in which women prioritised each other over their children.<sup>17</sup>

Jennings also noted the binary conceptualisations of lesbian identity evolving from 1970s custody cases. The paired concepts were juxtaposed as 'the visible, political lesbian, whose sexuality rendered her a 'bad' mother, and the discreet, respectable lesbian, whose maternal instincts triumphed over her sexuality, enabling her to be a

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<sup>12</sup> Whelan, "Lesbian Mothers and Custody Rights," 12.

<sup>13</sup> Jennings, "'The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life'," 187.

<sup>14</sup> Jennings, 187.

<sup>15</sup> Jennings, 188.

<sup>16</sup> Spry, B.A. and Spry, R.W., No. 66 (Family Court of Australia August 22, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> Spry, B.A. and Spry, R.W.; Rebecca Jennings, "Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s," *Gender & History* 24, no. 2 (August 2012): 509.



‘good’ mother’.<sup>18</sup> These understandings of lesbian identity inflected custody judgements and defined conservative backlash against lesbian motherhood. The increasing presence of overt feminist politics on the mother’s part was frowned upon, allowing for the formation of the respectable lesbian in contrast. Further, connection to Women’s Liberation would often confer lesbianism on the mother. This transference was seen in the case of Gemmell, heard in Melbourne in 1977, in which the mother in question was found by the court to have never had a lesbian relationship, but according to Justice Treyvaud, her feminist involvement could lead to future lesbian relationships.<sup>19</sup> This open political and sexual expression would be assessed partly through personal appearance, reinforcing the discreet category of a lesbian who presented in a suitably feminine style.<sup>20</sup>

For those who did not meet judicial standards, falling on the radical side of the judicial lesbian models, custody would not be awarded or would be restricted. Whelan’s *Lesbian Newsletter* article represents an intervention of the lesbian media to hold space for lesbian issues, allowing women to describe the legal discrimination they faced without broader gay community discourses that limited expressions of lesbian grievances.

The following year, *Lesbian Newsletter* reprinted an interview with Marg, a lesbian mother granted custody of her daughter. Marg stressed the significance of supportive counsel as necessary to achieve a custody agreement. She stated, ‘your counsel must

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<sup>18</sup> Jennings, “Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s,” 503.

<sup>19</sup> Jennings, 512.

<sup>20</sup> Jennings, 513.

believe as you do that homosexuality is a valid lifestyle,' must have some feeling of injustice and anger towards the proceedings.<sup>21</sup> However, conversely, Marg stressed that the lesbian mother herself must keep her anger inward, acknowledging the difficulty of this in the face of an opposing counsel who hammered 'derogatory, demeaning and dirty questions and accusations at you'.<sup>22</sup> Marg commented on some lesbian mothers who expressed the discretion many judges sought or imposed. The judicial models of lesbian identity extended to beliefs in an opposing evangelical or crusading lesbian who would push their sexuality as part of their political campaigning.<sup>23</sup> This conceptualisation connected to anxieties around children and their development, especially in terms of their own sexuality and gender identity as they grew older. Jennings highlighted cases where women would address this issue, wishing or hoping their daughters would grow to be heterosexual. In the case of Schmidt 1979, Justice Goldstein stated that 'the mother is not evangelical in her homosexuality and voices the hope that the child should grow up in a heterosexual way,' as it would be 'easier in terms of community acceptance'.<sup>24</sup> However, for Marg, these women came off as 'self-demeaning' and lacking self-acceptance.<sup>25</sup> For Marg, hiding your sexuality from your children was linked to dishonesty and denial, which in her words, would set up 'unresolvable tensions in a relationship between mother and child'.<sup>26</sup> This framing is interesting as lesbian mothers were at judges' discretion, all with varying views of homosexuality, and required different actions. It is difficult to discern if women believed what they were saying to the

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<sup>21</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," *Lesbian Newsletter*, September 1979, 6–9.

<sup>22</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 9.

<sup>23</sup> Jennings, "Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s," 512.

<sup>24</sup> Schmidt, R.G. and Schmidt, M.D., No. 28 (Family Court of Australia April 27, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 8.

<sup>26</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 8.

court or played the role necessary to ensure custody rights of their children. Marg's view around trust within the parental relationship might also represent a departure from other understandings of the parental role assumed by judges, who valued discretion. This description highlighted the duality that lesbians within the custody system lived with, with expectations of themselves, the lesbian community and the legal system weighing on expressions of identity.

Marg highlighted the many support groups working together to adapt and provide advice around custody proceedings within her interview. Several groups evolved with the issue, drawing from existing community groups. CAMP Inc. in many states, including NSW and WA, had support services and formed lobbying groups to address the legal discrimination of lesbian mothers.<sup>27</sup> In Sydney, Robyn Plaister formed a lesbian mothers' group in 1976, connected to her involvement in CAMP NSW's research into the subject.<sup>28</sup> The group had dual aims, serving as a focal point for political campaigning and support and a social group for lesbian mothers, their partners, and children.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, CAMP WA was providing support services, with PhD student at the time, Vivienne Cass, using her status to serve as an expert witness in custody cases.<sup>30</sup> In Melbourne, the group Women and Children in Transition (WACKIT) was formed in the late 1970s to provide similar services to lesbian mothers.<sup>31</sup> *Lesbian Newsletter* list this group at the end of Marg's interview, noting its support for women going through

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<sup>27</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 189.

<sup>28</sup> Jennings, "Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s," 507.

<sup>29</sup> Jennings, 507.

<sup>30</sup> Jennings, 507.

<sup>31</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 189.

divorce and custody cases.<sup>32</sup> Marg's interview indicated that many of these support groups communicated with each other. The groups shared transcripts of custody cases and legal information, and social research pertinent to homosexuality in a correspondence tree.<sup>33</sup>

The Family Court was willing to gain further expert advice, especially from psychiatrists, psychologists and court counsellors, significant in particular to debates on child development.<sup>34</sup> A range of views was presented, linking to changing medical thinking on homosexuality in the 1970s, new models and understandings having emerged.<sup>35</sup> However, this could be difficult, as judges looked to witnesses who confirmed pre-existing views and biases.<sup>36</sup> Further, the continued lack of community acceptance and homophobia was used to explain adverse outcomes for children, shifting the issue onto the lesbian mother for placing children in this situation.<sup>37</sup> The interview ended with Marg further emphasising the significance of information, drawing on the growing place of social science research in judgements. She stated, 'we must keep heaping info on the desks of the people who count over and over again to make them question their position'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 9.

<sup>33</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 9.

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, "Lesbian Mothers and Child Custody: Australian Debates in the 1970s," 510.

<sup>35</sup> Jennings, 510.

<sup>36</sup> Jennings, 511.

<sup>37</sup> Jennings, 511.

<sup>38</sup> "Interview with a Lesbian Mother," 9.

Marg urged other lesbian mothers to publicise their experiences in custody proceedings, hoping that a greater understanding of the system would result in positive outcomes.<sup>39</sup> A feature of the Family Court that differentiated it from previous iterations of divorce proceedings is that it was a closed court. In previous decades divorce cases were open to the public, proceedings sometimes used as fodder for the tabloid press.<sup>40</sup> Marg wished for the court to be opened, focusing on the lack of familiar and supportive faces within the courtroom, which promoted feelings of isolation and intimidation.<sup>41</sup> She also warned against direct protest action, stating a picket could endanger the case and be destructive to the mother.<sup>42</sup> *Lesbian Newsletter* continued to present information on lesbian custody support services, advertising a fund for a lesbian mother in 1981 and the attempts to create a Lesbian Custody Manual.<sup>43</sup> The manual was to be a practical guide ‘on how we as lesbian mothers can gain custody of our children and maintain our lifestyles as lesbians’.<sup>44</sup>

During the 1970s and 80s, the magazines attempted to address issues around lesbian custody struggles, detailing support groups and funds and experiences with the system, highlighting the magazines’ role as a medium for expressing lesbian issues. In the following decades, custody still played a role in legal activism and challenges. Jenni Millbank writing in 2003, noted ‘the sexuality of a parent is still a factor to be taken into account in Family Court decisions on residence and contact with children, to determine

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<sup>39</sup> “Interview with a Lesbian Mother,” 9.

<sup>40</sup> Swain and Bryant, *Born in Hope*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> “Interview with a Lesbian Mother,” 9.

<sup>42</sup> “Interview with a Lesbian Mother,” 9.

<sup>43</sup> “Lesbian Custody Struggle,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, June 1981, 26.

<sup>44</sup> “Lesbian Custody Struggle,” 26.

whether it is harmful'.<sup>45</sup> However, the issue of custody would be incorporated into family rights and relationship recognition activism, tied to the creation of the new family formations. This change is connected to the 1980s and 1990s shift towards emerging reproductive technologies, prompting various responses to the new possibilities. This transition was facilitated by a lesbian feminist reimagining of motherhood, applying their political lens to the evolving identity of the lesbian mother.

### **Creating Lesbian (Feminist) Motherhood**

Articles within the magazines only began to explore lesbian motherhood as an identity from the late 1970s into the 1980s, with significant growth in attention in the 1990s. As Barbara Baird has noted the idea of a lesbian mother is a relatively recent 'discursive phenomenon,' its usage steadily growing and stabilising in meaning over time'.<sup>46</sup> Before these attempts to elucidate the experiences of lesbian mothers, the combination of the two identities was considered taboo or never realised. In her interviews with lesbians born before the 1960s, Rebecca Jennings noted that many women understood 'the decision to accept a lesbian identity as encompassing a recognition that they would not have children'.<sup>47</sup> This experience was not true for all lesbians, as many did have children from previous marriages or relationships. This led to the issues around custody rights. Further, this fear of loss of custody and general societal ostracism meant that many

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<sup>45</sup> Jenni Millbank, "From Here to Maternity: A Review of the Research on Lesbian and Gay Families," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 38, no. 4 (2003): 542, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1839-4655.2003.tb01159.x>.

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Baird, "An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers: Two Points of Emergence," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 5 (November 2012): 849, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2012.658179>.

<sup>47</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 180.

women kept their relationships with women secret, especially from husbands.<sup>48</sup> This silence around desire between women allowed for some women to raise children together without being recognised as a same-sex couple.<sup>49</sup> Only allusions in letters, as well as a comment from a Judge in a later court case, indicate this possibility for lesbian motherhood, however, it is significant that the potential for lesbian families helmed by two lesbian mothers could have existed prior to the 1970s.<sup>50</sup>

With the intervention of emerging Women's and Gay Liberation movements, with increased visibility for lesbians and the creation and expression of new lesbian identities, lesbian motherhood as an issue was discussed further, though often not in support. Lesbian feminists of this period disavowed motherhood as part of feminist analysis. This perceived disjuncture between lesbian identities and motherhood connected to the struggle of custody rights activists to gain support from the gay and feminist communities around the issue. Jennings noted that by the mid to late 1970s and the early 1980s, there was a growing ideological debate within feminist and lesbian feminist circles, critically examining the nuclear family and the place of women as autonomous beings, sometimes resulting in the denigration of women's roles as mothers.<sup>51</sup> Jennings examined an interview in *Scarlet Woman* from 1976 with three lesbian mothers, noting the issues expressed by the women.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, the women were demeaned for expressing affection for their children or expressing a like of

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<sup>48</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 182–83.

<sup>49</sup> Jennings, 183.

<sup>50</sup> Jennings, 183.

<sup>51</sup> Jennings, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Jennings, 190.

children overall, deemed ‘conditioned female’ and ‘mumsy’.<sup>53</sup> This dismissal of lesbian motherhood as a shallow version of patriarchal gender roles imposed on women limited the radical imagining of lesbian mothers as an identity. Further, the sexuality of these women was sometimes dismissed, deemed bisexual or heterosexual instead.<sup>54</sup> This mischaracterisation ignored the women’s own identification, maintaining the distance between the lesbian and mother identities, reinforcing the idea that lesbians did not have children, or had contact or previous relationships with men. Limitations around the full exploration of lesbian motherhood through the disavowal of motherhood in the mid to late 1970s can be seen in the magazines, through the absence of such discussions of this identity. Instead, it would not be until the mid-1980s, when a reevaluation of lesbian motherhood would emerge, that articles described lesbian motherhood, detailing alternative parenting arrangements, and providing space for lesbian mothers to speak directly about their identities.

Shifting attentions in the lesbian feminist movement allowed for women to reconsider their position on motherhood. The growing influence of separatism and the movement looking inwards to build women-only spaces and communities allowed women to be more open about their utopic desires to have children and raise them according to their principles. Further, the younger generation of feminists coming of age in the 1970s had settled by the 1980s to consider their reproductive futures. Sophie Robinson described this attitude through lesbian activist and radical feminist Barbara Wishart’s work from the early 1980s. Wishart noted at the Third Women and Labour conference in 1982 that

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<sup>53</sup> Jennings, 190.

<sup>54</sup> Jennings, “The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life,” 190.



‘questions about motherhood were increasingly topical,’ and that she knew ‘of other feminists who were approaching their thirties and realising their decreasing reproductive potential’.<sup>55</sup> In this formation, the reimagining of lesbian motherhood is tied to the creation of feminist motherhood, in which mothers considered how to commit to their feminist principles fully and disconnect motherhood from patriarchal understandings. Part of this imagining was through the exploration of alternative family models outside of the nuclear family.

### **Separatism and Reproduction**

With the increased focus on lifestyle politics by the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the role of reproduction was re-examined within lesbian feminism. Part of this emerged from separatist thought, which spread through Australian lesbian feminists. The development of women-only spaces, with artistic studios and dances in more urban settings, and the creation of women’s lands, particularly Amazon Acres, led many women to negotiate their experiences and connection to men. While Enke argues that separate spaces and separatism should be delineated, they share a similar goal in which women exist outside of patriarchy and sexism.<sup>56</sup> Separatist politics can be seen as world-building, wishing to permanently separate women rather than the temporary experiments of women-only spaces. Greta Rensenbrink described that ‘separatists embraced prefigurative politics, seeking to live the future in the present and working to

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<sup>55</sup> S. C. Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s” (PhD, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2018), 199.

<sup>56</sup> Finn Enke, “Smuggling Sex Through the Gates: Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of Space in Second Wave Feminism,” *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2003): 637, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2003.0038>.

create cultures that anticipated a utopian dream'.<sup>57</sup> Part of this imagining was the concept of parthenogenesis, reproduction without the involvement of men, producing only daughters.<sup>58</sup> Robinson described Kathleen Mary Fallon's recollection of attending a conference where women from Amazon Acres exalted the concept of parthenogenesis.<sup>59</sup> The method they explained involved a technique called 'pricking,' which stimulated cell division in an egg which they considered the requirement of fertilisation rather than the fusion of sperm and egg.<sup>60</sup> Parthenogenesis was not heavily featured in the magazines.<sup>61</sup> Most content connected to Chris Sitka, a self-described "Professional Lesbian," who presented papers on the topic related to her interest in historical patriarchy and the Amazons.<sup>62</sup> Four responses in a *Lesbian Times* survey on children and parenting did describe wishing to have children by "parthenogenesis if possible," indicating some interest in the concept.<sup>63</sup> Rensenbrink noted that lesbian feminist attraction to parthenogenesis was a balance between competing concerns, 'the desire for daughters and suspicion of the science that could help them produce those daughters'.<sup>64</sup> Robinson stated that the interest in parthenogenesis 'reflected the lack of sufficient and accessible

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<sup>57</sup> Greta Rensenbrink, "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism: Regenerating Women's Community through Virgin Birth in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 2 (2010): 292, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.0.0102>.

<sup>58</sup> Rensenbrink, "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism," 289.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 200.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson, 200; Rensenbrink, "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism," 296.

<sup>61</sup> Examples include "National Lesbian Feminist Conference & Celebration," *Lesbian News*, March-April 1989, 6-8; C. Smith, "Kryptonite," *Lesbiana*, September 1994, 11-15. This latter example is a short story which mentions parthenogenesis in connection to Wonder Woman and some Amazons 'arguing about parthenogenesis'.

<sup>62</sup> Chris Sitka, "Letters," *Lesbian News*, May-June 1989, 26; "Beyond the Boundaries," *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1991, 3; Georgina Abrahams, "Lesbians Allways," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1991, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Jane, "COMING INTO OUR OWN: Continuing the Findings of 'Sisters Survey,'" *Lesbian Times*, April 1993, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Rensenbrink, "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism," 290.

reproductive technology available at the time that could aid lesbians who wanted to remain separate from men to reproduce'.<sup>65</sup> The idea that reproduction could occur without medical intervention, which some saw as patriarchally dominated, was desirable. It represented a lesbian-centred and controlled approach. Further, it only produced daughters. This element connects parthenogenesis to dreams of a separatist society. However, the preference for daughters was not solely a separatist wish. Many women wanted to raise strong feminist daughters. This attitude would result in ongoing tensions around boy children and their place in lesbian communities.

### **The Boy Child**

The boy child was contentious for some Australian lesbians, resulting in their exclusion from events, often through age restrictions. This attitude resulted in the isolation of the lesbian mothers of the children, left feeling cast out due to their child's gender. Jennings has noted how this perspective on boy children had a 'disproportionately significant impact on women who formed part of these networks or wished to participate in lesbian feminist social or political circles' due to Australia's relatively small lesbian communities.<sup>66</sup> Many of the events reported on and described in the lesbian magazines noted various limitations on children's participation, from restricting children altogether to allowing boy children up to a certain age at the discretion of the event organisers. Several letters to the editors attest to how some parents viewed these

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 200.

<sup>66</sup> Rebecca Jennings, "The Boy-Child in Australian Lesbian Feminist Discourse and Community," *Cultural and Social History* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2015.1093283>.

restrictions prohibiting their inclusion.<sup>67</sup> A 1994 survey participant advertisement, published in *Lesbiana* and the Tasmanian lesbian magazine *Lilac*, expressed interest in gauging lesbian community perspectives on the issue, asking subscribers to fill the questionnaire. Although the results were not published in the magazines, the ad itself provides evidence of some arguments for and against the participation of boy children circulating at the time.<sup>68</sup> Listed reasons for restrictions noted that lesbian space was considered ‘wimmin-only space’; that ‘boys internalise patriarchy; boys display aggressive behaviour; boys become men’, and for these reasons, women felt threatened and uncomfortable by their presence.<sup>69</sup> The essentialist thinking evidenced in the belief that boys are inherently aggressive due to their gender can be linked to broader understandings and lesbian feminist thought about gender differentiation. This perspective was connected to the treatment of other groups, particularly trans women, who were also implicated in patriarchy and a biologically essential understanding of boyhood perceived to be inflecting their behaviour.<sup>70</sup>

The survey advertisement also included counter-arguments against the exclusion of boy children. Notably, some mothers of boy children wanted their sons to experience lesbian culture and that it was beneficial for children to meet and participate in the lesbian

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<sup>67</sup> Gillie, “Dear Lilac,” *Lilac*, January-February 1995, 6; Caro Clark, “Dear Editor,” *Lesbiana*, September 1997, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Louise Enders and Jocelyn Wheatley, “Lesbian Gatherings: Should Children, Particularly Boys and Their Lesbian Mothers Attend?,” *Lesbiana*, June 1994, 4; Louise Enders and Jocelyn Wheatley, “Lesbian Gatherings: Should Children, Particularly Boys and Their Lesbian Mothers Attend?,” *Lilac*, July-August 1994, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Enders and Wheatley, “Lesbian Gatherings,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> Alice Petheridge, “Dealing with Conflict in Brisbane: The Transgender Debate,” *Lesbiana*, August 1994, 5–6; “Always a Girl,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 4.

community.<sup>71</sup> Further, lesbian mothers were described as wanting equal access to events, that child care was often difficult to arrange and that some mothers felt discriminated against by the community.<sup>72</sup> This advertisement highlights the positions around including boy children, noting both sides of the issue. Boy children's inclusion was a significant issue for the mothers of boys, with limited access to community events due to the exclusions. The presence of boy children and the division it can prompt is seen at the Bridge the Gap Conference of 1984, representing an early attempt for lesbian mothers to meet and discuss their lives.

The Bridge the Gap Conference aimed to allow lesbian mothers and their children to discuss issues relevant to their experiences, networking and connecting with each other. *Lesbian News* covered the event, beginning with its announcement in the September-October 1984 issue.<sup>73</sup> The full name for the event was "Bridge the Gap – A Feminist Forum for Lesbian Mothers, Lovers, Supporters and Children," indicating the intended audience of the conference.<sup>74</sup> The event was held in September 1984, with initial discussions beginning in 1983.<sup>75</sup> The *Lesbian News* notice included an exhaustive list of the planned small discussion groups, with notable topics including 'custody'; 'the lesbian nuclear family (?)'; the raising of male and female children; and 'the challenges of the lesbian mother's lover'.<sup>76</sup> The article also stated 'there will be opportunities for children to have their own discussion groups'.<sup>77</sup> Boy children are mentioned as a

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<sup>71</sup> Enders and Wheatley, "Lesbian Gatherings," 4.

<sup>72</sup> Enders and Wheatley, 4.

<sup>73</sup> "Bridge the Gap," *Lesbian News*, September-October 1984, 23.

<sup>74</sup> "Bridge the Gap," 23.

<sup>75</sup> "Bridge the Gap," 23.

<sup>76</sup> "Bridge the Gap," 23.

<sup>77</sup> "Bridge the Gap," 23.

discussion topic, and the potential controversy of their inclusion is noted in the Collective's request for billeting, with the presence of some male children highlighted.<sup>78</sup>

Within the next issue, reports from the forum were published alongside opinion pieces from lesbian mothers of boy children. It is difficult to ascertain from the written articles and report what occurred around the boy children issue, but allusions are made. In 'bridge the gap report back', writer Carole Gray ended the piece with 'I was always aware of the explosive undercurrent around the issues surrounding male children'.<sup>79</sup> In a previous article, writer Jean described her perspective on raising her son.<sup>80</sup> In her article, she stated 'I don't think, given this justifiable rage, that it is always up to women to curb their anger in case it offends the sensibilities of a young male (and/or his mother, or other females if they take it upon themselves to respond to the so-called offense on his behalf).'<sup>81</sup> It is difficult to say if this issue, lesbian mothers protecting their sons against perceived slights, was the undercurrent described by Carole Gray in her report, but potentially this played a role in discussions around male children. Jean emphasised the need to educate sons about the necessity of women-only spaces and why it was inappropriate for them to be present as they got older.<sup>82</sup> Jean positioned male children as inheritors of the patriarchy, though not through a personal embrace of misogyny, but rather by acknowledging the systematic nature of oppression.<sup>83</sup> It is a provocative concept, linking to Jean's inferences that other mothers' could not stand the

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<sup>78</sup> "Bridge the Gap," 23.

<sup>79</sup> Carole Gray, "Bridge the Gap Report Back," *Lesbian News*, November-December 1984, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Jean, "Lesbian Motherhood," *Lesbian News*, November-December 1984, 9–10.

<sup>81</sup> Jean, "Lesbian Motherhood," 9.

<sup>82</sup> Jean, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Jean, 9.

criticism of their sons. The pieces ended with Jean drawing up an either/or situation, stating either women are going to 'be critical of women who are critical to our sons', or lesbian mothers need to educate their sons clearly under feminist principles and uphold women-only spaces without being judged for expressing this sentiment.<sup>84</sup>

The place of boy children was not secured in lesbian communities moving into the 1990s. As shown, event descriptions and letters to the editor noted the exclusion of lesbian mothers and often their sons.<sup>85</sup> However, throughout this particular decade, changes in the representations of lesbian families culminated in the lessening presence of this exclusionary rhetoric. This change is connected to responses in the late 1990s and early 2000s to Prime Minister John Howard's restrictive outlook on lesbian and gay families, tied to issues around the growing place of IVF and assisted reproduction.

### **Co-Parenting**

Part of reimagining lesbian motherhood outside of nuclear family models was experimenting with differing parental structures. Examples of these explorations can be found in the article "Co-parenting," published in *Lesbian News* in September-October of 1988.<sup>86</sup> Stepping outside of heterosexuality was often only one element of alternate arrangements, with some mothers not sharing a romantic and sexual relationship but rather connected through co-parenting a child. Melodie explained her family situation, which consisted of one child and two mothers, referred to as the biological mother and

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<sup>84</sup> Jean, "Lesbian Motherhood," 8.

<sup>85</sup> Gillie, "Dear Lilac," 6; Clark, "Dear Editor," 4.

<sup>86</sup> "Co-Parenting," *Lesbian News*, September-October 1988, 5-9.

spiritual mother.<sup>87</sup> Further, Melodie noted, "One thing I feel has been important in making our co-parenting work, is the fact we have never been lovers – we made and affirm that decision having witnessed the co-parenting of lovers'.<sup>88</sup> Embracing motherhood outside of patriarchy, Melodie deemed their arrangement 'matriarchally approved'.<sup>89</sup> Gidja-Lee expressed a similar sentiment that if she were to have another child, it 'would have to be either with someone in a polygamous relationship based on long-term commitment or with someone who was a friend rather than a lover'. Some practised the re-imagining of the family not centred around a romantic relationship, indicating a wish for more communal support, especially seen in Gidja-Lee's preference for polyamory. In Gidja-Lee's description of mothering her child, she noted the wider community support, living at the time in Mount Eliza, with her child sometimes having the opportunity to live with other families in her mother's circle.<sup>90</sup>

In their discussions, many of the mothers featured in the article also noted struggles in co-parenting, especially the relationship and recognition of non-biological parents. As stated, Melodie used her biological mother and spiritual mother as descriptors for her and her co-parent, indicating the difference that pregnancy and birthing can have in the relationship.<sup>91</sup> This belief is a repeated motif in the descriptions provided, with the biological mother seen to be possessive and defensive. This perspective is evident in Morgana's reminder to readers that 'I think that it is important to remember that to

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<sup>87</sup> "Co-Parenting," 5.

<sup>88</sup> "Co-Parenting," 6.

<sup>89</sup> "Co-Parenting," 5.

<sup>90</sup> "Co-Parenting," 7.

<sup>91</sup> "Co-Parenting," 5.



“mother” means to nurture, not to own’.<sup>92</sup> However, even Morgana expressed from her perspective as a biological mother that because spiritual mothers lack the biological tie, they can walk away from the child, unlike biological mothers.<sup>93</sup> This belief is connected to the lack of legal recognition of the non-biological mothers as legal parents, therefore not responsible for the child in the same manner. As the decades progressed, cases around custody arrangements and child support payments would challenge this notion. In 1996, an NSW Supreme Court decision recognised the obligation of a non-biological mother to pay child support.<sup>94</sup> As reported in *Lesbians on the Loose*, ‘the problem with all this is that we may find ourselves with the financial obligations without any of the rights attached to parenthood’.<sup>95</sup> Significantly, alongside the article discussing co-parenting, *Lesbian News* editors included a cut-out from *Gay Community News* about a New York couple. The lesbian co-parent had been denied visitation rights to the child that the couple had agreed to have.<sup>96</sup> This inclusion indicated an international awareness around the issue of parental rights and the recognition of the relationships, learning about international attempts and lobbying for recognition.

Melodie connected the issue, the difference between biological and non-biological mothers, to patriarchy, noting that it can be challenging for women to break free of the ‘patriarch’s concept of the dutiful mother’.<sup>97</sup> In Melodie’s conceptualisation, biological mothers got defensive around spiritual mothers as they have high expectations of their

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<sup>92</sup> “Co-Parenting,” 6.

<sup>93</sup> “Co-Parenting,” 7.

<sup>94</sup> Barbara Guthrie and Andrea Malone, “The Case of the \$150,000 Turkey Baster,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1996, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Guthrie and Malone, 17.

<sup>96</sup> “Co-Parenting,” 9.

<sup>97</sup> “Co-Parenting,” 5.

own mothering influenced by patriarchal standards for mothers. Further, Melodie continued that spiritual mothers feel a similar desire for perfection, lest others judge them. The relationship between the spiritual mother and child was almost contingent on evident and immediate mothering skills.<sup>98</sup> Heron, Melodie's co-parent, reiterated this perspective stating that she was learning not to need 'to be super-mum to prove anything'.<sup>99</sup> This *Lesbian News* article revealed just some of the attempts of lesbian mothers at the time to define their families in new ways and parent according to their principles. The repudiation of patriarchy is significant in connecting to the lesbian feminist revaluation of motherhood and its political and personal potential to live the life defined by feminist principles. This devotion to living a political lifestyle can be seen in some imaginings of utopic possibilities to conceive children, connecting to separatist desires for matriarchy.

### **Assisted Reproductive Technology and Self-Insemination**

Although many lesbian mothers struggled to attain custody of their children into the early 1980s, it was within this decade that shifts in reproductive technology would create a new front for activism. Increased attention began to be paid to reproductive technology, both as an option and a patriarchal transgression to be limited. *Lesbian News* reported on the "Liberation or Less: Women act on the New Reproductive Technology" Conference of May 1986, held in Canberra.<sup>100</sup> Described as the first feminist-organised conference on reproductive technology, it reportedly had 200

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<sup>98</sup> "Co-Parenting," 5.

<sup>99</sup> "Co-Parenting," 8.

<sup>100</sup> Pam Atkins, "Reproductive Technology Conference," *Lesbian News*, August-September 1986, 18.

attendees.<sup>101</sup> Connecting to an international network, Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering, the *Lesbian News* description printed the group's objectives. They wished to monitor developments in reproductive technology, focusing on genetic engineering, embryo transfer and sex selection. They wanted to assess the implications of such practices and others, such as surrogacy and artificial insemination. Finally, they wanted to form extensive international networks, pool information, and educate women on the ongoing issues around reproductive technology.<sup>102</sup> I highlight this conference to note some of the political views forming within the 1980s around reproductive technology. As stated previously in the thesis, the 1980s represented a continued productive period for lesbian feminists in Australia, with reproductive rights activism part of this output. Apprehension remained around these technological developments. Feminists wanted to be part of the decision-making surrounding these issues and evaluate their effect on women. Rather than a complete repudiation of reproductive technology, women involved in networks such as these wanted control over their reproductive choices. This attitude helped inform the lesbian baby boom of the 1990s and 2000s.

The baby boom did not appear without precedence. In her research on the Australian lesbian baby boom, Deborah Dempsey noted that it owed 'a debt to feminist understandings of women's procreative liberty or right-to-choose'.<sup>103</sup> Distinctly, Dempsey differentiated her view from American scholar Arlene Stein, who positioned

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<sup>101</sup> Atkins, "Reproductive Technology Conference," 18.

<sup>102</sup> Atkins, 18.

<sup>103</sup> Deborah Dempsey, "Beyond Choice: Family Kinship in the Australian Lesbian and Gay 'Baby Boom'" (PhD, Bundoora, Victoria, La Trobe University, 2006), 283.

the baby boom internationally as a turn away from lesbian feminism, de-centred from lesbian communities.<sup>104</sup> Dempsey categorised Stein's view as 'a kind of retreat from politicised identities into a sense of identification with the activities and care-giving interests of women beyond lesbian communities'.<sup>105</sup> However, as Dempsey argued, this perspective does not give the lesbian baby boom its feminist dues and fails to factor in the distinctly political goals of some lesbian family planning.<sup>106</sup> The connection between reproductive choice and technology was linked to broader lesbian feminist concerns around women's health, which many thought to be ignored in patriarchal medical systems. This perspective resulted in various health-focused campaigns urging women to take their own health into their hands, including breast and cervical self-examination.<sup>107</sup> Self-insemination guides and materials proliferated internationally from the 1970s onwards.<sup>108</sup> In Australian lesbian periodicals, these sorts of guides would appear extensively in the 1990s, timed with the lesbian baby boom, with almost every major magazine listing the methods available.<sup>109</sup> Self-insemination was located in ideological convictions, which promoted that knowledge and control of reproductive health gave women power that they were denied in their lives, especially in the absence of men.<sup>110</sup> As noted, this material appeared later, with Dempsey highlighting the 1989 radio programs of Prue Borthwick and Barbara Bloch as an early source. Its material

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<sup>104</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 117.

<sup>105</sup> Dempsey, 117.

<sup>106</sup> Dempsey, 117.

<sup>107</sup> Dempsey, 118.

<sup>108</sup> Dempsey, 118.

<sup>109</sup> L.N, "Lesbian Mothers: Getting Pregnant," *Labrys*, November 1991, 8; Doctor on the Loose, "Becoming Pregnant," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1991, 10; Dr Ruth McNair, "A Lesbian's Guide to Getting Pregnant," *Lesbiana*, March 1999, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 118.

was turned into a book in 1993.<sup>111</sup> Further, one of Dempsey's interviewee's described attending a feminist self-insemination group, *Great Expectations*, in Melbourne in the mid-1980s.<sup>112</sup> Heather Joseph found an English booklet entitled *Self-Insemination* and circulated the material between friends she knew who were interested in having children.<sup>113</sup> Taking guidance from the pamphlet, the group met in lounge rooms, discussing the techniques of self-insemination, pooling their resources regarding syringes, and finding men to donate sperm.<sup>114</sup> Instead of representing a letting go of feminist ideals, self-insemination material and groups continued to centre feminist empowerment and knowledge within lesbian family planning, promoting control of fertility outside of patriarchal structures. However, conservative backlash towards lesbian motherhood emphasised the absence of the father, leading to in some states, regulation of self-insemination and ART access overall, re-asserting the place of the patriarchal nuclear family.

### **LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD IN THE FACE OF CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH**

Despite the naturalisation of self-insemination practices and the growing ART industry, lesbian families faced significant conservative push-back against lesbian motherhood, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Family representations settled in those similar to broader mainstream expectations, with two parents in a romantic partnership, and as donor insemination grew in popularity, babies became a

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<sup>111</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 119.

<sup>112</sup> Dempsey, 122.

<sup>113</sup> Dempsey, 123.

<sup>114</sup> Dempsey, 123.

focus.<sup>115</sup> These representations were built from extensive advice columns that described at-home insemination, rarely discussing families with children from previous relationships. Both at the state and federal level, lesbian families were restricted from access to assisted reproductive technologies and recognition in a legal sense as families. This restriction initiated many lobby and support groups to form and advocate for changes in legislation. Significantly, the lesbian media supported this activism through continued discussions of the issues and representing lesbian families within their pages. As Barbara Baird has argued, increased political attention around lesbian families in the early 2000s saw a media explosion of depictions of lesbian families, both in the mainstream press and in lesbian media.<sup>116</sup> Significantly, in Baird's analysis of the images promoted in her case study of *Lesbians on the Loose*, the presentation of lesbian families reflected that of the mainstream. Baird described how 'the representations of lesbian mothers in the mainstream media constituted a liberal assimilationist discourse that stressed the similarity of lesbian mothers and their family arrangements to an imagined mainstream norm'.<sup>117</sup> In Baird's view, this norm was replicated in *LOTL* as similar, focusing on coupled parents, generally white and middle class, with young children born into the relationship rather than from a previous heterosexual relationship.<sup>118</sup> To unpack the context around this developing representation and understanding of lesbian families, the evolution of lesbian motherhood in the 1990s will be recounted considering the various guides and health advice provided in the

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<sup>115</sup> Baird, "An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers," 858.

<sup>116</sup> Baird, "An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers," 853.

<sup>117</sup> Baird, 855.

<sup>118</sup> Baird, 858.

magazines and how they might have reinforced this imagery of the nuclear lesbian family.

### **Getting Pregnant Guides**

Discussions around this type of lesbian motherhood, the two-parent coupled with children born into the relationship, are often portrayed as exploding into discussions and into the community. This perspective is seen in Deborah Dempsey's own comment in her thesis, stating, 'In 1998 – unlike 2005 – it was common for child-free, Australia, inner-urban lesbians like me not to know personally many lesbian mothers who parented within their lesbian relationship'.<sup>119</sup> However, the groundwork to build and promote these families was published in magazines from the early 1990s onwards. While Dempsey and others like her might not have known lesbian mothers at the time, future parents were getting information and advice prior to the late 1990s and early 2000s.

*Lesbians on the Loose* published their first guide to getting pregnant in April 1991, as part of their column for medical advice, Doctor on the Loose.<sup>120</sup> This first article began a three-issue series for the column detailing the steps required for donor insemination. The article noted that 'most lesbians conceive by using the semen of a male friend'.<sup>121</sup> The option of utilising a fertility clinic is described, noting the advantages of this system, especially the checking of sperm for infectious diseases.<sup>122</sup> In the context of the AIDS

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<sup>119</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 1.

<sup>120</sup> Doctor on the Loose, "Becoming Pregnant," 10.

<sup>121</sup> Doctor on the Loose, 10.

<sup>122</sup> Doctor on the Loose, 10.

epidemic, this option was desirable for many to ensure the health of themselves and their future child. In the second article of the series, the author emphasises that sexuality does not dictate whether a person may be HIV positive but that knowing someone's sexual history would help.<sup>123</sup> This advice, getting checked as a mother and any known donor, was repeated in the guides, emphasising understanding one's health and any repercussions for the planned child.<sup>124</sup> Similar articles and guides were published in *Labrys* in 1991 and later in *Lesbiana* in 1999, which repeated the advice described in the *LOTL* guide.<sup>125</sup> These guides built expectations for lesbian family creation, primarily through getting pregnant through self-insemination, side-stepping limited ART accessibility. Other methods of family creation, such as adoption, were largely absent from the magazines' discussion of lesbian motherhood.

### **Adopting and Fostering**

Although adoption and fostering were discussed within the magazines, relative to donor insemination, they were not understood as primary methods of family creation. This limited representation was due to the legal restrictions on adoption, and misunderstandings of the foster system. It was not until the 1990s that adoption featured within the magazines. Adoption for gay and lesbian couples remained illegal in most states until the 2010s, with Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory being the earliest in 2009.<sup>126</sup> There was a loophole, which was utilised by a lesbian

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<sup>123</sup> Dr. on the Loose, "Sperm: The Essential Ingredient," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1991, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Doctor on the Loose, "Becoming Pregnant," 10; Dr. on the Loose, "Sperm: The Essential Ingredient," 12.

<sup>125</sup> L.N, "Lesbian Mothers: Getting Pregnant," 8; McNair, "A Lesbian's Guide to Getting Pregnant," 18.

<sup>126</sup> Ceridwen Spark and Denise Cuthbert, eds., *Other People's Children: Adoption in Australia* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Pub, 2009), 163.



couple in South Australia in 1993. This case was reported on in *Lesbians on the Loose*, in the article “Dyke Couple Adopt Baby”.<sup>127</sup> Frances Rand reported that the couple was likely the first adoption by an Australian lesbian couple, with the adoption made official in March 1993.<sup>128</sup> Legally, only one woman was the parent, utilising the loophole of single adoption. However, staff at the Department of Community Services were aware that they were a couple, with both women interviewed.<sup>129</sup> Further, the couple noted that many birth parents requested that children be placed with a heterosexual family, limiting single parent adoption.<sup>130</sup> This was the reasoning given in a following article about a couple who had been denied their application to adopt.<sup>131</sup> Commenting on the previous story, it was noted that mainstream media was largely supportive of the decision to allow the South Australian couple to adopt, with lesbian families understood as a fact society must accept.<sup>132</sup> Both articles featured as the front covers of their issues, indicating perceived heightened interest in the stories. Most articles detailing adoption featured in 1993 and 1994, interest waning with legal limitations.

In late 1993, the Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service provided recommendations to the NSW Law Reform Commission to extend the eligibility of adoption.<sup>133</sup> In particular, the adoption of children by co-parents was highlighted, connecting to the focus on donor insemination as the primary method of family creation.<sup>134</sup> However, in June 1994,

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<sup>127</sup> Frances Rand, “Dyke Couple Adopt Baby,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1993, 1, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Rand, “Dyke Couple Adopt Baby,” 1.

<sup>129</sup> Rand, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Rand, 1.

<sup>131</sup> “Adoption Knockback,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1993, 1.

<sup>132</sup> “Adoption Knockback,” 1.

<sup>133</sup> Hayley Katzen, “OutLaw,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1993, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Katzen, “OutLaw,” 13.

it was reported that the Commission did not support this view.<sup>135</sup> The legal column, *Outlaw*, featured information on adoption and fostering in the same issue, noting that couples were not allowed to adopt and that single parents were not preferred.<sup>136</sup> In October 1994 *Lesbiana* published survey data on the next Federal election vote, completed by Significant Others Marketing Consultants focusing on gay and lesbian voters.<sup>137</sup> It stated that over 90% of lesbian and gay Australians believe they should have the legal right to adopt children.<sup>138</sup> Adoption featured as an issue for lesbian families, however, it did not have the sustained attention that rights around donor insemination and access to IVF.

In the next issue, a letter written by two mothers who had relinquished children for adoption, one of whom was an adoptee herself, was published. They stated that adoption was not ‘the panacea we might like it to be.’<sup>139</sup> They detailed how the social issues of adoption affected the relationships within families. Further, they stated that since lesbians do not have the outward societal pressure to have children, they did not understand the internal desire for family creation, particularly through adoption rather than through donor insemination and pregnancy.<sup>140</sup> This letter provides insight into the complexity of adoption for both relinquishing mothers and adopted children. This context and experience were largely absent from earlier discussions which focused on the legalities. The absence of adoption from narratives around family creation within the

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<sup>135</sup> Frances Rand, “Lesbian Adoption - Hopes Dashed,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 3.

<sup>136</sup> LGLRS, “Outlaw,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 18.

<sup>137</sup> “HOW DO WE VOTE?,” *Lesbiana*, October 1994, 3.

<sup>138</sup> “HOW DO WE VOTE?,” 3.

<sup>139</sup> Kate Worth and Jenny Neil, “Adoption’s Downside,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1994, 10–11.

<sup>140</sup> Worth and Neil, “Adoption’s Downside,” 10–11.

magazines is notable. Perhaps it was understood as a complex issue, with legal restrictions limiting any hope of adoption. Further, the relative ease of donor insemination without the need for ART and IVF would have made it a more accessible option. Many women wished to experience pregnancy and pursued family creation with a biological link, which was described within the letter.

Although adoption was not discussed heavily within the magazines, fostering featured even less. In the Outlaw column discussing the legality of adoption, the Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service noted that fostering was an option for lesbian couples. In January 1997, it was reported that the Queensland Families, Youth and Community Care Minister Kev Lingard announced he was banning gay couples from becoming foster parents, stating that it was part of his personal agenda.<sup>141</sup> Academic Damien Riggs stated that by 2007, every state allowed gay couples to foster, except for Queensland that had recently amended legislation to disqualify couples.<sup>142</sup> In June 2001, *Lesbiana* published an article promoting fostering, noting the misconception that gay couples could not foster.<sup>143</sup> The piece begins ‘you want to be a parent, but do not wish to go through pregnancy or have given up on the idea of creating your child?’ Positioning fostering as a secondary option is notable. Neither adoption nor fostering are discussed in detail. The place of fostering is unsettled in family creation, as unlike adoption, the children may be reunified with their parents. The focus on family creation obscures the complexity of

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<sup>141</sup> Kat Costigan, “Banned as Foster Parents: ‘Women Who Profess to Be Lesbians,’” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1997, 4.

<sup>142</sup> Damien W. Riggs, *Becoming Parent: Lesbians, Gay Men, and Family* (Post Pressed c/o eContent Management Pty. Ltd, 2007).

<sup>143</sup> “Fostering as an Option,” *Lesbiana*, June 2001, 24.

fostering and adoption. Damien Riggs has discussed debates in Australia around non-heterosexual couples adopting, particularly around intercountry adoption (ICA). In 2007, the Howard government considered legislating against ICA for non-heterosexual couples, the rhetoric similar to that of debates around ART and IVF.<sup>144</sup> Gay couples who wished to adopt were presented as having an unnatural desire to raise children.<sup>145</sup> Riggs critiqued rights discourses during this time, largely filtered through a gay rights context and an overbearing interpretation of 'best interests of the child'.<sup>146</sup> He noted that birth parents and adoptees were largely absent from the debates.<sup>147</sup> Nell Musgrove has detailed the conceptualisation of foster families in the UK and in Australia and the ongoing tension around foster care as family formation in professional literature and carers' experiences.<sup>148</sup> The letter in *Lesbians on the Loose* was the closest the magazines came to discussing adoption outside of family creation and acknowledging the complexity, from the voices of relinquishing mothers and an adoptee. The absence of adoption and fostering indicated that for many family creation and lesbian motherhood was enacted through pregnancy, and that neither adoption nor fostering were seen as accessible for many.

### **State Regulation of ART**

Alongside self-insemination practices, medical practices which assisted in artificial insemination also developed during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Accessibility varied

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<sup>144</sup> Spark and Cuthbert, *Other People's Children*, 163.

<sup>145</sup> Spark and Cuthbert, 165.

<sup>146</sup> Spark and Cuthbert, 165.

<sup>147</sup> Spark and Cuthbert, 173.

<sup>148</sup> Nell Musgrove, "Imagining Foster Families," *Journal of Australian Studies* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 185, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2013.877954>.

across states and depended on the preferences of the clinic and their views of homosexuality and single motherhood.<sup>149</sup> Australia was deeply involved in early research into IVF, home to many of the developments between 1970 to 1985 and the world's fifth IVF baby, born in Melbourne in 1980.<sup>150</sup> The localised development in Victoria particularly prompted the state government to be the first jurisdiction in the world to regulate through comprehensive legislation, defining the use and development of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART).<sup>151</sup> The *Infertility (Medical Procedures) Act 1984* was 'based on the findings of a committee convened to investigate the social, legal and ethical consequences of reproductive technologies'.<sup>152</sup> John Leeton noted that the Act was based on the definition that life begins at conception, reflecting a strong religious bias against IVF.<sup>153</sup> Further, Leeton described a strong radical feminist lobby against IVF, feeling that the process threatened male domination of human reproduction and that women were being used as living laboratories.<sup>154</sup> This group connected to the brief discussion above around reproductive technology and feminist actions, which prioritised women's control of reproduction and fertility, with trepidation around the emerging work in the ART space.

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<sup>149</sup> Jennings, "The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life," 192, 195.

<sup>150</sup> John Leeton, "The Early History of IVF in Australia and Its Contribution to the World (1970–1990)\*," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 44, no. 6 (2004): 495, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1479-828X.2004.00305.x>; Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 53.

<sup>151</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 53.

<sup>152</sup> Dempsey, 53.

<sup>153</sup> Leeton, "The Early History of IVF in Australia and Its Contribution to the World (1970–1990)," 498.

<sup>154</sup> Leeton, 198.

This early legislation had a defining quality for the state, which maintained strict qualifications for access to ART, especially treatment procedures, first for married couples. A December 1997 amendment extended eligibility to heterosexual de facto couples.<sup>155</sup> However, this was not true of all states. Rebecca Jennings noted that ‘some Sydney-based and regional New South Wales clinics offered donor insemination to lesbians and single heterosexual women from at least the mid-1980s’.<sup>156</sup> This accessibility made the state a destination for Victorian lesbians to seek treatment, with some travelling to Sydney and Albury.<sup>157</sup> In her article on access to the ART and perceptions of lesbian fertility, Bronwyn Statham noted that at the time of writing in 2000, only three states had clearly stated eligibility requirements.<sup>158</sup> Victoria has been discussed in relation to their early adoption of regulation. Statham also stated that Western Australia and South Australia had clearly defined boundaries of accessibility. Through the *Reproductive Technology Act 1988*, South Australia limited ART to married couples in which one or both appeared infertile or had a risk of transmitting a genetic defect to a child.<sup>159</sup> Western Australia’s *Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991* (WA) restricted IVF procedures to married couples or heterosexual de facto couples who have lived together for five years.<sup>160</sup> Further, WA required each party to give effective consent, and the welfare of the participants and any child to be born as a

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<sup>155</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice,” 56.

<sup>156</sup> Jennings, “The Most Radical, Most Exciting and Most Challenging Role of My Life,” 195.

<sup>157</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice,” 55.

<sup>158</sup> Bronwyn Statham, “(Re)Producing Lesbian Infertility - Discrimination in Access to Assisted Reproductive Technology,” *Griffith Law Review* 9, no. 1 (2000): 132.

<sup>159</sup> Statham, “(Re)Producing Lesbian Infertility,” 132.

<sup>160</sup> Stella Tarrant, “Western Australia’s Persistent Enforcement of an Invalid Law: Section 23(c) of the Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991 (WA),” *Journal of Law and Medicine* 8 (August 2000): 95.

result was considered.<sup>161</sup> Other states in Australia lacked this definition in eligibility criteria, instead defining parental responsibilities and roles of children born of donations and IVF.<sup>162</sup> This lack of eligibility regulation resulted in several court cases for access rights.

In Queensland, this was highlighted in the case of *JM v QFG & GK 1997*, which was first decided by the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Tribunal, with appeals received by the Supreme Court. Statham analysed this case, describing how the doctor's actions in question, GK, and the ruling reproduced a sense of lesbian infertility through legal manoeuvring.<sup>163</sup> The case centres on JM, a then 23-year-old woman who had been in a relationship with another woman for four years with a child from a previous relationship.<sup>164</sup> She wished to access artificial insemination, telling the doctor she was in a long-term relationship, however, she was stopped short when presented with a consent form requiring both partners' signatures.<sup>165</sup> JM took the case to the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission and then to the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (QADT).<sup>166</sup> Dr GK claimed that there was an unwritten agreement to restrict access to married and de facto couples.<sup>167</sup> However, due to the lack of clear eligibility criteria, the QADT found this position discriminatory, focusing on lawful sexual activity discrimination.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Statham, "(Re)Producing Lesbian Infertility," 133.

<sup>162</sup> Leeton, "The Early History of IVF in Australia and Its Contribution to the World (1970–1990)," 497.

<sup>163</sup> Statham, "(Re)Producing Lesbian Infertility," 141.

<sup>164</sup> Statham, 130.

<sup>165</sup> Statham, 130.

<sup>166</sup> Statham, 131.

<sup>167</sup> Statham, 134.

<sup>168</sup> Statham, 135.

Further, GK constructed a concept of infertility under which JM was not eligible as she was not medically infertile.<sup>169</sup> This understanding of infertility prompted a variety of questions in terms of expectations for lesbian couples. Statham asked, would a woman in an exclusive lesbian relationship with an identifiable fertility issue be in the position that JM was? Further, what distinguishes JM from a heterosexual woman whose male partner is infertile but not herself?<sup>170</sup> Statham stated ‘The telling difference, however, is that infertility is (socially) constructed so as to legitimate and protect the integrity of the exclusive couple relationship in the former case (the heterosexual *couple* is infertile) but not in the latter (the lesbian *woman* is not)’.<sup>171</sup> The QADT outcome decided that the actions of GK were discriminatory based on lesbian relationships being within lawful sexual activity and that the consent form excluded lesbians from accessing the services, not directly addressing the infertility argument.<sup>172</sup> However, the appeal utilised this infertility construction provided by GK and found no discrimination.<sup>173</sup> Statham noted the absurdity of the situation, stating,

One cannot imagine it being suggested that it would be reasonable to require a ‘fertile’ heterosexual woman whose male partner was ‘infertile’ to go beyond the parameters of her relationship and engage in heterosexual activity with a third (fertile, male) party in order to achieve a pregnancy in ‘the ordinary biological way’. Yet this is clearly the imperative that both decisions impose on JM.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Statham, “(Re)Producing Lesbian Infertility,” 135.

<sup>170</sup> Statham, 138.

<sup>171</sup> Statham, 138.

<sup>172</sup> Statham, 140.

<sup>173</sup> Statham, 141.

<sup>174</sup> Statham, 148.



JM's case was featured in lesbian periodicals, notably in *Lesbians on the Loose*. JM is quoted in many, noting she was shocked at the anti-lesbian sentiment expressed in the wake of the case, particularly from official politicians at both the federal and Queensland state levels.<sup>175</sup> Further, JM continually acknowledged that the decisions impacted many women in Queensland and nationally by maintaining pressure on the issue through continued appeals.<sup>176</sup> Significantly, the case was used by opinion writer Andrea Malone, to argue over the lack of support provided by gay men over the issue. She stated, 'I am unable to recall a single issue taken up by coalition political lobby groups, to date, that has had a specifically lesbian focus'.<sup>177</sup> The use of lesbian motherhood in this manner highlights how many women felt the issue was ignored. This perceived invisibility was seen earlier with some commentary on lesbian custody cases and activism around this issue. This absence of solidarity connects to running themes around lesbian feminism and separatism, prompted by the early 1970s evolution of Women's and Gay Liberation, in which lesbians felt isolated from both. The lesbian-centric magazines further emphasised this isolation, which existed to highlight this disconnect and provide space to voice such concerns.

Another notable case on the issue of accessing IVF was *McBain v Victoria 2000*, which challenged the eligibility requirements of the Victorian *Infertility Act 1995*. The Act was

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<sup>175</sup> Kat Costigan, "Lesbian Proves 'Less than Equal' Not Good Enough," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1997, 5.

<sup>176</sup> Kat Costigan, "'Far from over' Vows Lesbian in DI Fight," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1997, 11.

<sup>177</sup> Andrea Malone, "Coalition Fails Pregnancy Test," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1997, 21.

amended in 1997, allowing women in heterosexual de facto relationships to access treatment services, both IVF and donor insemination.<sup>178</sup> This regulation continued the exclusion of single women and lesbian couples. Prominent Melbourne infertility practitioner, Dr John McBain, challenged this exclusion in a Federal Court case.<sup>179</sup> The focus of the case was Leesa Meldrum, a single woman who had received IVF services interstate but wished to lower costs and increase chances of conception by being treated in her home state.<sup>180</sup> McBain claimed that the act was discriminatory due to marital status, which is prohibited under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (SDA)*.<sup>181</sup> The Federal Court agreed, invalidating the Act under s.109 of the Constitution due to the inconsistency between federal and state law.<sup>182</sup> In response to the invalidation, the federal government responded, attempting to pass new legislation in August 2000 to amend the SDA to allow states to discriminate against single women and lesbian couples regarding the provision of assisted reproductive services.<sup>183</sup> The original amendment allowed discrimination against de facto couples, which was further amended to protect their access.<sup>184</sup> In this action, the privileging of the heterosexual nuclear family is highlighted. Then-Prime Minister John Howard was quoted by many newspapers at the time stating, ‘this issue involves overwhelmingly the right of children to have the reasonable expectation of the affection and care of both a mother and a father’.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Kristen L. Walker, “Equal Access to Assisted Reproductive Services: The Effect of McBain v Victoria,” *Alternative Law Journal* 25, no. 6 (December 1, 2000): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1037969X0002500606>.

<sup>179</sup> Walker, “Equal Access to Assisted Reproductive Services,” 288.

<sup>180</sup> Walker, 288.

<sup>181</sup> Walker, 288.

<sup>182</sup> Walker, 288.

<sup>183</sup> Walker, 290.

<sup>184</sup> Walker, 290.

<sup>185</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice,” 51.

However, although this amendment was introduced, it did not pass through Parliament.<sup>186</sup> Dempsey noted the extensive will of Howard around this issue, pushing for the heterosexual two-parent family, even though he did not achieve the amendment he wished.<sup>187</sup>

Following the McBain case, Victorian single women and lesbian couples who strove to access assisted reproductive services were not judged on their eligibility by marital status as the case decided. However, they fell under a similar situation to that seen in Queensland, in which the women were required to fit the ‘clinically infertile’ diagnosis to access such services. This restriction left women with no medically discernible reproductive issues ineligible for donor insemination.<sup>188</sup> Further, the Victorian Act prohibited women from performing inseminations outside of reproductive medical clinics by restricting the process of insemination to registered fertility specialists.<sup>189</sup> Non-registered inseminators faced a legal penalty of four years imprisonment or a fine of up to \$60,000.<sup>190</sup> This aspect of the legislation was practically unenforceable. Ultimately this did not deter lesbian couples from practising self-insemination, serving as the preferred method against the undesirable travel interstate to a sperm bank.<sup>191</sup>

The attempts to allow states to limit assisted reproductive services to heterosexual couples resulted in national discussions around the family constructions and the roles of

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<sup>186</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice,” 58.

<sup>187</sup> Dempsey, 59.

<sup>188</sup> Dempsey, 57.

<sup>189</sup> Dempsey, 56.

<sup>190</sup> Dempsey, 56.

<sup>191</sup> Dempsey, 57.

parents. Jennifer Lynne Smith noted the position of the innocent and voiceless unborn child at the heart of many debates of this time.<sup>192</sup> This understanding connects to Baird's articulation of the child fundamentalism discourse, which 'relies wholly or in part on an insistence on the child as an impermeable category that must be defended and where the child is often iconised or fetishised'.<sup>193</sup> Smith further noted that this IVF debate represented more than just access to medical procedures, 'provoking wide ranging social questions for both individual women and society in general'.<sup>194</sup> Smith argues that debate from this period created a dichotomy between suitable and unsuitable mothers, the latter category rhetorically occupied by lesbian couples and single women.<sup>195</sup> These discussions were situated among several overlapping discourses around the maintenance of the Australian family. Increased social acceptability and lobbying from gay rights groups sought to achieve recognition for gay and lesbian couples and the lesbian baby boom, which challenged the heteronormative expectations for Australian families. Further, the place of fathers was being questioned, as perceived loss in valued relationships between father and child was espoused, with 2001 having the highest number of divorces since 1976 and many divorced men became non-custodial parents.<sup>196</sup> Fears around a racialised other also abounded in the political discourse, with debates over the *Tampa* incident and the early stages of the war in Afghanistan.<sup>197</sup> The

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<sup>192</sup> Jennifer Lynne Smith, "Suitable Mothers: Lesbian and Single Women and the Unborn in Australian Parliamentary Discourse," *Critical Social Policy* 23, no. 1 (2003): 64.

<sup>193</sup> Barbara Baird, "CHILD POLITICS, FEMINIST ANALYSES," *Australian Feminist Studies* 23, no. 57 (September 2008): 293, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640802263440>.

<sup>194</sup> Smith, "Suitable Mothers," 70.

<sup>195</sup> Smith, "Suitable Mothers," 80–81.

<sup>196</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 59; D. A. De Vaus, *Diversity and Change in Australian Families: Statistical Profiles* (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2004), 210.

<sup>197</sup> Catherine Kevin, "Maternity and Freedom: Australian Feminist Encounters with the Reproductive Body," *Australian Feminist Studies* 20, no. 46 (March 2005): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0816464042000334492>.

ties of fertility, the falling birth rate and immigration were drawn further during this period. As Catherine Kevin noted, ‘below-replacement levels of fertility had economists and politicians in a panic about an ageing local population and its long-term economic effects’.<sup>198</sup> This fear called upon acceptable, two-parent heterosexual couples, particularly those married, to have children for the nation. This expectation was explicit in then Federal Treasurer Peter Costello’s May 2004 budget speech, in which he implored couples to have ‘one for your wife, one for your husband and one for the nation’.<sup>199</sup> This fear was the context in which the lesbian baby boom was situated and the fight to access reproductive technologies occurred. Lesbian families were presented as unsuitable to dominant political voices, outside of acceptable bounds. However, as will be discussed further, this perception of outsider lesbian families would be countered, particularly in lesbian media with presentations of normative modes of parenting.

### **Donors/ Fathers**

The complicated place of donors in terms of relationship to the couple is inferred in one *Lesbians on the Loose* article, in which the anonymity of donor sperm is simultaneously understood as an advantage and disadvantage depending on the couple.<sup>200</sup> The ambiguity reflects the general attitude around donorhood. Dempsey explores this topic further in her thesis, interviewing both lesbian mothers and donor fathers and detailing various arrangements.<sup>201</sup> Although the thesis was completed in the early 2000s, it can

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<sup>198</sup> Kevin, “Maternity and Freedom,” 9.

<sup>199</sup> Kevin, 9.

<sup>200</sup> Doctor on the Loose, “Becoming Pregnant,” 10.

<sup>201</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice.”

provide insight into earlier arrangements as Dempsey interviewed families with older children conceived in the 1990s. She noted how ‘donorhood facilitates a re-nuclearized, lesbian-led family and relies on an agreement by the biological father to keep his paternity confidential – that is, unless the women or the child decide to bring him into being or *invent* him as a social father’.<sup>202</sup> This outlook and control contributed to the representations of the lesbian nuclear family, with the donor rarely pictured alongside the family. In a 2002 study, survey data indicated the complexity around donor involvement with some donors described as fathers, alongside fathers from previous relationships. However, regardless of identification, 56% of the men involved indicated that they were both known to the parents and children and were involved in their lives in some way.<sup>203</sup> When isolated to the described donors, 40% of participants recorded being involved.<sup>204</sup> The next highest category for donors was anonymous, indicating a balance between known and unknown donors, reflecting the wishes of the lesbian parents. In the same study, the donors surveyed registered high levels of satisfaction with their arrangement, around 60% very satisfied and 22% quite satisfied.<sup>205</sup> The place of the donors is particularly uncertain in lesbian media in the early to mid-1990s, leaving definitions of the role to individual lesbian parents to decide.

During the 1990s, the practice of creating lesbian families through assisted insemination had become normalised within the magazines, and the experiences of lesbian mothers

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<sup>202</sup> Dempsey, “Beyond Choice,” 285.

<sup>203</sup> Ruth McNair et al., “Lesbian Parenting: Issues, Strengths and Challenges,” *Family Matters*, no. 63 (Spring/Summer 2002): 40.

<sup>204</sup> McNair et al., “Lesbian Parenting,” 40.

<sup>205</sup> McNair et al., 45.

were given space to air their grievances and issues. A thread between different women's experiences was the complexities around identity for lesbian mothers, especially when confronted with the expectations of heteronormativity. This experience is seen in the writings of Prue Borthwick, who also presented and authored the radio series and book, *Mothers and Others*. She wrote several articles for *Lesbians on the Loose* which express the difficulties of lesbian mothers in a system that propagates the two-parent heterosexual nuclear family, with, in her words, increased attention to fathers.<sup>206</sup> In a 1995 article, Borthwick lamented the lack of entertainment and children's media, which explores non-heterosexual families like hers.<sup>207</sup> She described the mediascape of the 1990s, in which, to Borthwick, more attention was being paid to the role of fathers, reminding her children of the absence of such a figure.<sup>208</sup> For Borthwick, older media, such as *The Secret Garden* and the stories of Beatrix Potter, represented opportunities to provide her children with familiar modes outside of the nuclear family.<sup>209</sup> Amid anxieties around parenting, the father's place was being re-emphasised and rehabilitated.<sup>210</sup> For Borthwick, this encouragement of fathers to get involved in their children's lives disrupted her aim to represent her family as valid and display different family arrangements to her children.

The place and role of the 'father' would become more of an issue in the early 2000s, reflecting the broader debate at the time. Arguably, these perspectives were more

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<sup>206</sup> Prue Borthwick, "The Rise & Rise of Daddies," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1995, 18–19.

<sup>207</sup> Borthwick, "The Rise & Rise of Daddies," 18.

<sup>208</sup> Borthwick, 18.

<sup>209</sup> Borthwick, 19.

<sup>210</sup> Dempsey, "Beyond Choice," 51.

connected to issues around fears of anonymous donors than truly the absence of fathers in lesbian families. This was seen in a 2001 article, 'The Great Debate,' in which the opposing views of several lesbians were given on lesbian access to IVF.<sup>211</sup> One speaker, Julie McCrossin, expressed her worry about the lack of father figures in lesbian families and the anonymity of donors in some circumstances, obscuring the child's right to know their heritage.<sup>212</sup> Margie Fischer, in response, detangled McCrossin's perspective from whether lesbian mothers should have access to IVF to general fears around anonymous donors, which in itself was an issue not completely attached to lesbian mothers, but anyone who used anonymous donors.<sup>213</sup> General fears around reproductive technology rebounded onto lesbian mothers due to homophobic views of their parenting. They attempted to construct a deserving subject for reproductive assistance to control the possibilities that reproductive technology opened up.

### **Representing Suitable Lesbian Mothers**

Lesbian media attempted to correct the invisibility and disavowal of lesbian motherhood, publishing representations of lesbian families in their pages. The associated cover of the May 1995 issue of *Lesbians on the Loose* was part of this re-imagining (see Figure 3.1).<sup>214</sup> Entitled 'Non-nuclear proliferation,' the cover depicted two women, Miranda Kuijpers and Belinda Vlotman, and their daughter Jordan, reading the book 'Heather has Two Mommies'.<sup>215</sup> Barbara Baird has analysed post-2000

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<sup>211</sup> "The Great Debate," *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 2000, 6–7.

<sup>212</sup> "The Great Debate," 6.

<sup>213</sup> "The Great Debate," 7.

<sup>214</sup> "Non-Nuclear Proliferation," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1995, Front Cover.

<sup>215</sup> "Non-Nuclear Proliferation," Front Cover; "On the Cover...," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1995, 3.



depictions of lesbian families, noting the replication of nuclear ideals in the two-parent arrangements, often with young children due to planned pregnancies within the relationship.<sup>216</sup> Baird noted, 'I do not read the lesbian mothers in the lesbian media of the 2000s as more authentic than those who appear in the mainstream although the conditions through which they can speak in these respective media spaces are, of course, different'.<sup>217</sup> This framing is significant as analyses have to allow for the mediating process of magazine creation, which selects and publishes an editorial agenda. By following this mediation, the bias of editors is revealed within their creations, the lesbian magazines. This perspective puts lesbian media in an awkward position, representing a marginalised group while reinforcing dominant modes of representation in other aspects. This balance can be seen in the place of lesbian motherhood, which has remained a contested space. Although the image of two mothers and their child was particularly absent from other forms of media, as Borthwick described in her article, the chosen images also represent an appeal to normative family modes in some sense. This cover highlights these dual aspects, with the title 'non-nuclear proliferation' denoting their non-nuclear family by virtue of having two mothers, while the pose of the family is reminiscent of an idealised two-parent engaged parenthood with a small child on the lap of her mothers.<sup>218</sup> The need for representation for lesbian mothers and families was significant in achieving recognition and legitimacy. In a March 2001 article on the legal recognition of lesbian families, especially co-mothers, Katy Sant expressed, 'perhaps the

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<sup>216</sup> Baird, "An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers," 858.

<sup>217</sup> Baird, 856.

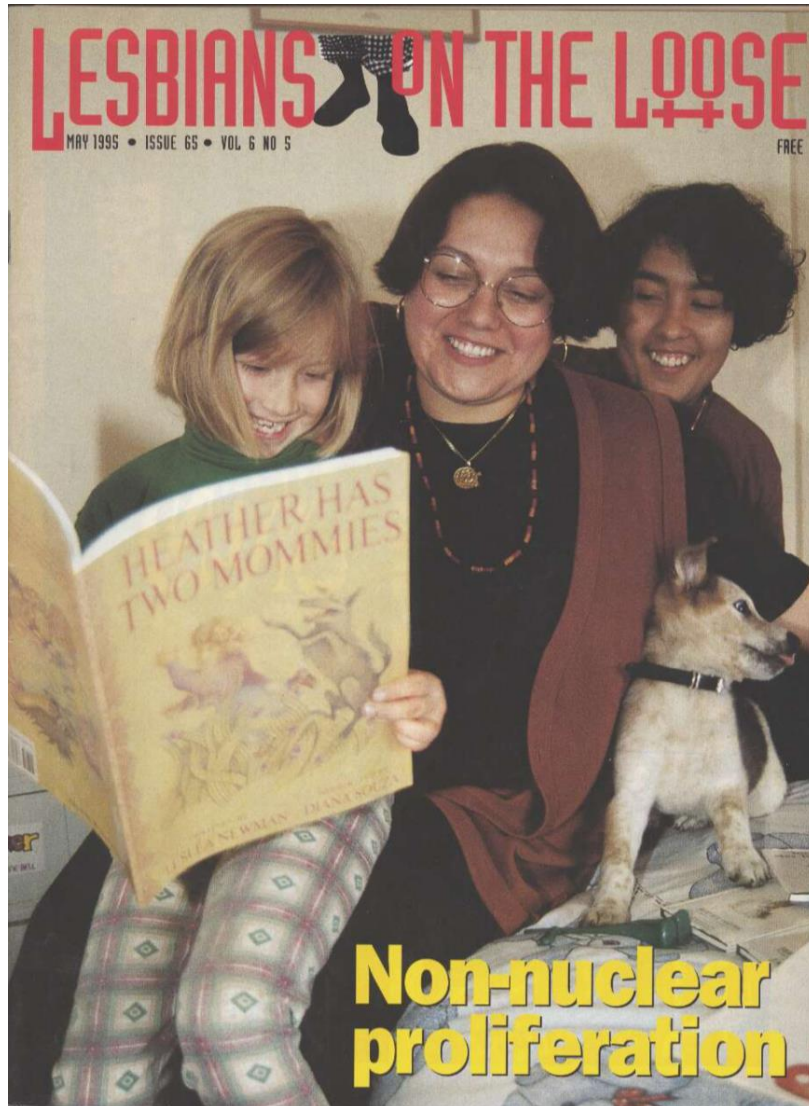
<sup>218</sup> "Non-Nuclear Proliferation," Front Cover.

biggest single issue is not legal at all but the invisibility of our families'.<sup>219</sup> She says, 'positive images like the beautiful picture of baby Ruth and her two mothers on the cover of the Herald did a great job last year in countering prejudice as did interviews, letters to the editor and so on'.<sup>220</sup> Images were seen to have power in opposing hostile political rhetoric, explicitly using poses representative of normative modes of parenting with a couple and a young child.

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<sup>219</sup> Katy Sant, "Hot Issues: Recognising Children's Rights," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 2001, 15.

<sup>220</sup> Sant, "Hot Issues," 15.



**Figure 3.1 – Front cover of *Lesbians on the Loose* May 1995 issue depicting Miranda Kuijpers and Belinda Vlotman, and their daughter Jordan.**

The presentation of lesbian mothers in *LOTL* took on new prescience in the face of challenges from the Howard federal Government. As Barbara Baird has described, lesbian media followed similar patterns to mainstream representations, showcasing an acceptable version of lesbian families.<sup>221</sup> This conceptualisation played into what Lisa Duggan describes as ‘the *new homonormativity*,’ which is a ‘politics that does not

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<sup>221</sup> Baird, “An Australian History of Lesbian Mothers,” 858.

contest heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption'.<sup>222</sup> The representations of lesbian mothers and families played into mainstream expectations of the nuclear family to achieve some form of recognition and legitimacy from the mainstream heterosexual viewers. This imagery limits the possibilities of lesbian family representations to a select few. The lesbian media played into other aspects of Howard's rhetoric to prove their parenting ability. These appeals can be seen in the use of a perceived fertility and population crisis as justifications to allow lesbian mothers to access IVF.<sup>223</sup> In an editorial in *LOTL* from July 2002, Merryn Jones wrote, 'the lack of political and medical support for lesbian mums is astounding in a country with plunging birth rates and alarming child abuse statistics at the hands of heterosexuals'.<sup>224</sup> Further, in a letter to the editor in the next issue, one woman stated, 'Our population is dwindling, and I feel we should stand up for our rights as women and be heard'.<sup>225</sup> In both these comments, lesbian mothers are offered as a solution to a perceived population crisis propagated during this period. However, part of this rhetoric from the federal Howard and other Liberal state governments, is an aspect of population control, deciding who gets to reproduce and who gets to enter the country. Lesbian mothers were not within the acceptable boundaries of reproduction, as constructed by the Liberal party at this time, no matter how they appealed to respectability.

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<sup>222</sup> Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Towards a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Casrtonovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 179.

<sup>223</sup> Kevin, "Maternity and Freedom"; Maryanne Dever, "Baby Talk: The Howard Government, Families, and the Politics of Difference," *Hecate* 31, no. 2 (November 2005): 45–61.

<sup>224</sup> Merryn Jones, "Editorial," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 2002, 3.

<sup>225</sup> Catherine, "Pleasures of Lesbian Motherhood," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 2002, 6.

Another significant aspect of these types of comments is the heralding of lesbian motherhood over heterosexual reproduction. This perception was justified by the perceived necessary planning of lesbian motherhood. With the expectations of use through IVF and donor insemination, lesbian mothers were portrayed as extensive reproductive planners due to the circumstances around conception. This element was used by lesbians writing into the *LOTL* to push their advantage as parents. This attitude can be seen in the previous letter, which included ‘I am so for couples having a child born through love rather than born by mistake’.<sup>226</sup> Maternal love and planning were connected in response to September 2000 vox pop, asking for responses to John Howard’s stance on IVF. Jessica stated ‘the thought, planning, care and love that lesbians put into the decision (to be parents) means they make fantastic parents’.<sup>227</sup> Statements like these are difficult to qualify. Research on lesbian families was often built on comparisons to heterosexual families, indicating little difference between the two.<sup>228</sup> Writing in 2003, Millbank noted the absence of good quality demographic information on Australian lesbian and gay families and studies completed within the Australian context.<sup>229</sup> This is not to diminish lesbian mothers. Rather, political insistence on the quality of lesbian parenting to assuage concerns around the welfare of children was built around particular assumptions that family planning resulted in the perfect loving environment. These kinds of comments are interesting to consider in terms of context. Concerns for children of lesbian mothers are usually related to their potential social

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<sup>226</sup> Catherine, “Pleasures of Lesbian Motherhood,” 6.

<sup>227</sup> “Vox Pop,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 2000, 5.

<sup>228</sup> Millbank, “From Here to Maternity,” 554.

<sup>229</sup> Millbank, “From Here to Maternity,” 544.

exclusion and their potential sexuality, neither of which lesbian mothers have real control over. By placing these concerns on lesbian mothers, commentators obscured a homophobic society unwilling to accept diverse sexualities and families. Lesbian mothers and the broader lesbian community wanted to communicate their parental ability by arguing for a form of advantage when questioned by mainstream forces. This perspective was supported by certain forms of visibility, which pushed the respectability of lesbian families through showcasing two-parent families, usually white and middle class, emulating the socially desired nuclear family. Australian lesbians were not alone in engaging in this kind of presentation. Lisa Duggan wrote in the American context when she described ‘the new homonormativity’ in 2002.<sup>230</sup> The late 1990s and early 2000s represented a turn in activism, which took to new forms of lobbying and new arguments influenced by a politics of respectability. This rhetoric would be seen in the fight for relationship recognition, which is heavily connected to family rights.

These challenges to the lesbian mothers’ ability to have children were reflected in the lack of movement on legal rights of recognition of lesbian co-mothers. Lesbian couples and families had to deal with extensive invisibility within legal recognition, affecting parenting rights. It was not until the early 2000s that most Australian states had amended legislation to recognise relationships. However, this did not always extend to the recognition of co-mothers. As Jenni Millbank wrote in 2006 when recognition of parental rights was extended to co-mothers of children born from assisted reproduction, non-biological parents were ‘recognised by virtue of their relationship with their

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<sup>230</sup> Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” 179.

partner, rather than their relationship with the child, and so such recognition would cease if the parent and partner separated'.<sup>231</sup> Throughout the 1990s, lesbian magazines stepped in, publishing guides to enable lesbian couples to navigate the complex legal necessities to ensure some form of recognition, even if it was fallible. Often these guides were written by members of lobby groups, such as the Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service. An early guide from April 1991 stated 'the legal status of a lesbian parent is characterised by the invisibility of her relationships and by prejudice against sexuality'.<sup>232</sup> A cause for concern for lesbian mothers was the right of donors to children, however, most legislation did not recognise the donor as the father and did not afford him parental rights unless a parental relationship was established.<sup>233</sup> However, this was not always clear cut, with contact arrangements opening possibilities for legal recognition.<sup>234</sup> Millbank noted in her summary of legal parental rights of lesbian and gay families that recognition of known donors should 'be flexible and adapted to the circumstances of the family involved,' reflecting the range of roles donors played in lesbian families.<sup>235</sup> The co-mother was not regarded as a parent with responsibilities but could demonstrate closeness, similar status to an aunt or grandmother.<sup>236</sup> A 1996 NSW court case led to confusion around the responsibilities of co-mothers, as a co-mother was compelled to pay child support, as many had assumed that they were not required

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<sup>231</sup> Jenni Millbank, "Recognition of Lesbian and Gay Families in Australian Law - Part Two: Children," *Federal Law Review* 34, no. 2 (2006): 233.

<sup>232</sup> Helen Campbell, "Legal Issues for Lesbian Mothers," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1991, 12.

<sup>233</sup> Campbell, 12; Lesbian and Gay Legal Rights Service, "Out Law: Conception," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1992, 11; Anne Callahan, "Lesbian Parents, Donors and Child Support," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1998, 30.

<sup>234</sup> Campbell, "Legal Issues for Lesbian Mothers," 12.

<sup>235</sup> Millbank, "Recognition of Lesbian and Gay Families in Australian Law - Part Two," 245.

<sup>236</sup> Campbell, "Legal Issues for Lesbian Mothers," 12.

to do so due to their diminished legal status as non-parents .<sup>237</sup> The blend of legal recognition that lesbian mothers had to contend with, from the invisibility of co-mothers to limiting the potential rights of donors, led to the continued publishing of legal guides, helping to detangle the legal web for readers. Navigating the legal boundaries for lesbian mothers was difficult, facing difficulties in custody, accessing IVF and assisted reproductive technologies and legal recognition for their families. Lesbian magazines articulated lesbian perspectives on these, updating readers on lobby groups and legal changes, part of countering narratives that attempted to make their families invisible.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout this chapter, lesbian motherhood and its exploration in Australian lesbian magazines have been examined. Lesbian motherhood, as explored with lesbian periodicals, was a complex topic and experience, marred by a lack of control and access to their fertility, and in the case of custody arrangements, to their own children. The first section of this chapter considered lesbian feminist constructions and experiments in lesbian motherhood as detailed within the publications. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, lesbian mothers had to adapt to the new Family Court and its judges to gain custody of their children, as described within *Lesbian Newsletter*. Lesbian mothers discussed their experiences within the magazines, including experimentation in co-parenting and the exclusion of boy children. The late 1980s represented further transition in the place of lesbian motherhood, when lesbian couples utilized self-

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<sup>237</sup> Callahan, “Lesbian Parents, Donors and Child Support,” 30.



insemination information, spread through the periodicals, and burgeoning assisted reproductive technologies in some instances.

Moving into the 1990s, lesbian motherhood had to contend with conservative backlash, resulting in specific representations of lesbian families in the magazines to counter these politics, displaying two mothers and their young children. This representational mode can be connected to the context of considerable debates about lesbian access to IVF, which prompted comments on same-sex families. By opting for homonormative modes of visualising lesbian families, lesbian magazines did limit the imaginings of lesbian motherhood to a re-nuclearized arrangement. However, these images were still potent as political reactions to homophobic commentators. As Frank Bongiorno described, ‘the growing number of lesbians opting for motherhood, while appearing a conservative trend when set beside lesbian SM, actually poses a powerful challenge to widely held assumption concerning gender roles and the naturalness of the patriarchal family’.<sup>238</sup> Lesbian motherhood was complex terrain for the magazines to consider, however, the magazines provided space for lesbian mothers to voice their own experiences, especially grievances, on the topic. The magazines would play a similar role in discussing relationships and their legal recognition, a topic closely tied to lesbian parenting, to be explored further in the next chapter.

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<sup>238</sup> Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2012), 288.

## **Chapter 4 – “Rules and Relationships”: Exploring Lesbian Sexualities and Intimate Relationships**

This chapter will investigate the discursive creation and maintenance of lesbian intimate relationships and sexualities. The magazines served to mediate identity struggles through the community definition of lesbian relationships, lesbian sexual practices and the legal recognition of such partnerships. Scholarship around public sexual cultures and romantic love will be detailed, relating to the construction of intimate relationships within the magazines. Following on, lesbian feminist political questioning of heteronormative models of relationships in the periodicals will be examined, as well as the resulting relationship practices of this movement. The social experimentation of the 1970s had a lingering effect into the 1990s, particularly discourses around non-monogamy. Lesbian sexual practices from the 1970s onwards will be discussed, noting how lesbian sexuality has changed over time, with challenges from lesbian sex radicalism in the late 1980s, documented with the magazines. Another significant issue that reappeared over several decades, often without reference to earlier discussions, was lesbian domestic and intimate partner violence. Almost every decade the issue would be brought to light anew in the publications, revealing the continuing issues around its visibility and prevalence in lesbian communities. How commitment was communicated and represented within the magazines, particularly in the 1990s, will be examined, showcasing early interest in marriage. Finally, discussions around the state recognition of lesbian relationships will be analysed, noting both the desire and anxieties around legal validation. Core identity aspects of lesbianism were debated within the magazines,

accented by various definitions of lesbian partnerships and expressions of sexuality. Lesbian magazines provided the space for the discursive work of defining relationships, the medium allowing for articles, editorials and letters to the editor to speak to these issues.

### **Defining Intimacy**

How do you define a lesbian relationship? This question drove many Australian lesbians to attempt to answer and collate the experiences of lesbians in intimate relationships. Part of this discussion was on lesbian identity, as the expression of lesbianism included intimate relationships with other women. Lesbian identity was not solely imagined as the purview of sexuality. As this thesis has examined, lesbian identity is heavily inflected by a range of other discourses. Regarding Australian lesbian magazines, the politics of lesbian feminism, Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation all inflected the tone of the content. The politics of monogamy, the continual emergence of lesbian intimate partner violence, and the expression of sexuality all were viewed through a feminist lens. The vision presented by the articles did range in opinion. Still, most utilised feminist language to argue their position and create a representation of lesbian intimate relationships that reflected their worldview.

The medium of the Australian lesbian periodicals allowed for this diversity of representation. The discursive work of imagining lesbian intimate relationships was significant. As Berlant and Warner have stated, 'intimacy is itself publicly mediated,' countering the idea that intimacy is first relegated to private personhood and further

sexuality itself.<sup>1</sup> For Berlant and Warner, public mediation refers to societal framings, in particular heteronormativity, which limits the range of sexual public cultures.<sup>2</sup> For them, intimacy is publicly mediated in several senses. Firstly, “personal life” is differentiated from work, politics, and the public sphere conventionally.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, heteronormativity links intimacy only to the institutions of personal life, which makes them ‘the privileged institutions of social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of capital, and self-development’.<sup>4</sup> This makes sex seem merely personal, blocking the building of non-normative public sexual cultures.<sup>5</sup> This differentiation of intimacy to the personal culminates in the idea that it exists separate from the political, a ‘home base’ to which people are expected to leave and return after engaging in political discourse. This heteronormativity is countered with the experience of people who identify with marginalised sexual identities, who know that sexuality is not sequestered to the private but is showcased in public through expressions of control that differentiate between acceptable sexualities. In everyday life, sexual identities and intimacy are encountered in public through quick discussions between friends, family, co-workers, and many more and the expression of affection is limited through surveillance. The range of acceptability in the expression of sexuality and intimacy is created through representations and feedback. The discursive work of Australian lesbian periodicals attempted to counter the dominant heterosexual models of intimate partnership. Through the multiple running discussions presented within the magazines, through

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<sup>1</sup> Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998): 553.

<sup>2</sup> Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 553.

<sup>3</sup> Berlant and Warner, 553.

<sup>4</sup> Berlant and Warner, 553.

<sup>5</sup> Berlant and Warner, 553.

articles, editorials, and letters to the editor, the limits of intimacy and the multiple understandings of intimate relationships are revealed.

By this term, ‘intimate relationships,’ I refer to romantic and/or sexual relationships between people. The necessity of both romance and sexual activity is an intersection that will be detailed, with examples from the magazines which showcase the limits of relationship definitions. Further, romance is a tricky concept to historicise. Sarah Pinto documented this issue in her scholarly discussion on romantic love.<sup>6</sup> Pinto drew on the various definitions across disciplines, illustrating the limits of each description and approach to romantic love, noting the specificity of many definitions tied to disciplinary focus.<sup>7</sup> However, some broader views on romantic love have been theorised. Cultural anthropologist Jennifer Cole and historian Lynn Thomas described love as “the sentiments of attachment and affiliation that bind people to one another”.<sup>8</sup> I draw on this definition due to its open nature, allowing for a complete discussion of representations of love and intimacy within the magazines.

Scholars argue about the necessity of the combination of romance and sexual desire within intimate relationships. Romantic love is differentiated from other types of love, but how it is separated differs between definitions. Pinto noted that historian Lawrence Stone in his 1988 work, severed sexual desire and even the ties of long-term

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Pinto, “Researching Romantic Love,” *Rethinking History* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 567–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1333288>.

<sup>7</sup> Pinto, “Researching Romantic Love,” 570–72.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas, eds., *Love in Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 2, quoted in Pinto, 570.

relationships from romantic love, romantic love representing a “usually brief but very intensely felt and all-consuming attraction towards another person”.<sup>9</sup> However, as Pinto noted, this separation is not widely accepted; rather, the presence of sexual desire is a defining quality of romantic love.<sup>10</sup> The culmination, for Mary Evans, is that in ‘the modern western world, romantic love is usually understood as “an individual relationship which also involves a sexual relationship”’.<sup>11</sup> The academic community struggle with the concept of romantic love, revealing the limits of strict definitions and understandings.

### **Before Lesbian Feminism**

I will briefly explore Australian lesbian relationships prior to the 1970s to build the context necessary to understand the lesbian feminist reconstruction of intimate relationships. Jennings’ extensive scholarship on lesbians in Sydney depicted a culture of intimacy in the 1960s that had developed out of the need for secrecy and discretion. Jennings described the 1966 documentary on female homosexuality in Australia, ‘Love is Love,’ which portrayed the love between women as ‘elusive, hidden and sometimes almost asexual’.<sup>12</sup> Jennings noted the difficulty documenting the range of experiences during this period as oral history interviews selected ‘out’ lesbian subjects willing to discuss their lives, leaving the women they had dated but who had gone on to marry

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Stone, “Passionate Attachments in the West in Historical Perspectives,” in *Passionate Attachments: Thinking about Love*, ed. W. Gaylin and E. Person (New York: Free Press, 1988): 16, quoted in Pinto, “Researching Romantic Love,” 572.

<sup>10</sup> Pinto, 572.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Evans, *Love: An Unromantic Discussion* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2003): 1, quoted in Pinto, 572.

<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History*, Australian History (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 101.

men without their perspectives recorded.<sup>13</sup> With the lack of explicit cultural discourse on female homosexuality, this latter group of women were able to ‘engage in emotionally and sexually intimate relationships with other women without claiming a sexual identity around their same-sex desires’.<sup>14</sup> In the relationships that Jennings’ participants described, there was a lack of vocabulary and a hesitance to express desires for sexual intimacy, with the informant portrayed as the seducer and their partner as the passive seduced.<sup>15</sup> During the 1950s to the 1970s, there was a presence of the over-sexed representation of the lesbian, who was portrayed as prone to jealousy, relationships with other women short-lived.<sup>16</sup> During this period, the lack of stability was a concern for many lesbians wishing to create long-lasting relationships, made difficult by a homophobic culture and external pressures from family.<sup>17</sup> There was also a lack of relationship models produced by the necessary discretion to protect lesbian relationships, which left women with little guidance on navigating long-term intimate relationships with other women.<sup>18</sup> Heterosexual marriage was often used as a model, however, the strict gender roles and division of labour presented in the post-war period limited its application to lesbian relationships.<sup>19</sup> This model connected to perceptions of butch/femme relationships, which in the 1970s were criticised for replicating heterosexuality and its unequal power relations.<sup>20</sup> However, butch/femme conventions did not express themselves the same way across time and place, and some accounts

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<sup>13</sup> Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Jennings, 102.

<sup>15</sup> Jennings, 104, 110.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings, 112.

<sup>17</sup> Jennings, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Jennings, 117.

<sup>19</sup> Jennings, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Jennings, 121.

noted that women challenged the expectations of these relationships. From testimonies, butch/femme conceptions influenced imagining sexual intimacy, which was restrictive for some women.<sup>21</sup> Moving into the 1970s, with the propelling of Women's and Gay Liberation, lesbian identities became more viable to express openly and visibly.

## **CREATING VISIBLE LESBIAN SEXUAL PUBLIC CULTURES**

### **“Rules and Relationships”**

The questioning of heterosexual relationships from a feminist lens led to the creation and experimentation of new lesbian intimate relations. However, these political reimaginings did not always sit well in practice, creating their own form of restriction on lesbian relationships. An early example of the dissection of lesbian feminist relationships is Jenny Pausacker's 1976 paper for the Feminism and Sexuality Conference in Melbourne, reprinted in *Lesbian Newsletter* in 1979.<sup>22</sup> In this article, Pausacker attempted to define and write down the 'unwritten rules' of lesbian feminist relationships.<sup>23</sup> The politics of lesbian feminism significantly influenced the internal politics of the magazines under examination. Intimate relationships represented another aspect in which lesbian feminist politics, alongside Women's and Gay Liberation, questioned normative formations and expressions of intimacy. As Rebecca Jennings noted, both 'feminist and gay literature, magazines and newsletters were filled with passionate critiques of the nuclear family as a heteropatriarchal institution which crippled its individual members, oppressed women and promoted compulsory

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<sup>21</sup> Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 124.

<sup>22</sup> Jenny Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," *Lesbian Newsletter*, January-February 1979, 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 8.



heterosexuality'.<sup>24</sup> During this period, new constructions of intimate relationships were being worked out, particularly through conscious-raising discussion groups. As Jennings recounted, Australian lesbians were influenced by US theorists, which promoted a vision of equality between lesbian partners.<sup>25</sup> This perspective evolved from analyses of power. Charlotte Bunch, a member of the US group, The Furies, articulated this idea in 1975, stating, "Women-identified Lesbianism is, then, more than a sexual preference, it is a political choice. It is political because relationships between men and women are essentially political, they involve power and dominance".<sup>26</sup> In Australia, this notion was repeated in the *Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter* in 1979 in an article by Ludo McFingus, stating "Lesbian relationships cannot duplicate the power relations between men and women".<sup>27</sup> This equality was envisioned as inherent as women share a common understanding of the partnership's relationships, expectations, and experiences. However, this assumed equality did not live up to reality, as relationships proved themselves more complicated. In a 1976 letter to *Sydney Women's Liberation Newsletter*, a woman wrote, 'lesbians have problems, they quarrel and argue and love and hate. Don't put us down for being human/woman. We struggle for equality with our lovers'.<sup>28</sup> This complicated expression of hope for lesbian relationships to achieve the equality desired by lesbian feminists put unrealistic pressure on relationships.

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<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin: Lesbian Feminist Theories of Intimacy," in *Intimacy, Violence and Activism: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives on Australasian History and Society*, ed. Graham Willett and Yorick Smaal (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2013), 135.

<sup>25</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 136.

<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, ed. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 30.

<sup>27</sup> Jennings, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Jennings, 137.

This idea of doctrine and expectations is present in Pausacker's article on the unwritten rules of lesbian feminist relationships. Pausacker's paper represented an attempt to capture the unwritten expectations being built of lesbian feminist relationships. In her quest to define the unwritten rules, Pausacker talked to women in Adelaide and expected continued contributions at the Melbourne conference where the paper was presented. In an introduction to the reprinted article in 1983, Pausacker noted that she faced protest and fascination at the concept of rules themselves, looking for further feedback through the paper's publication in *Lesbian Newsletter*.<sup>29</sup>

In attempting to promote new modes of intimacy, lesbian feminist relationships rejected ideas of monogamy, promoting self-determination and independence. Pausacker's detailed rules speak to these ideals, however, her article is not a critique of the norms in support of new relationships but rather to try to present the rules in a straightforward manner. The article's tone does not entirely support lesbian feminist intimacy, focusing on the many prohibitions and tensions that these relationships could result in. This tonal issue is connected to the sincerity of the project, which is reflected upon further. The first section of rules noted the many limitations that casual intimacy promoted. It stated, 'Feminist lesbians who are fucking together don't: pash on in public places; go everywhere together; live together/ sleep together every night; say they want to be monogamous'.<sup>30</sup> Pausacker listed the reasoning behind this set of rules. Firstly, it limited the possibility that a relationship would become one's 'main security or interest,'

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<sup>29</sup> Jenny Pausacker, "What's On What's Off And What's Inbetween: Rules and Relationships," *Lesbian News*, November-December 1983, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 8.

and secondly, it left people open to other romantic/sexual partners.<sup>31</sup> The second set of rules followed, 'feminist lesbians don't: fall in love; feel jealous; want to be monogamous; and do talk about what they are doing, not only with each other'.<sup>32</sup> Again, Pausacker presented reasons behind these rules, noting that women were suspicious about the idea of love as it seems to have kept women 'out of action,' with similar reservations around monogamy as it looked 'to be there to make stable worker-producing families'.<sup>33</sup> With these first two sets of rules, the lesbian feminist imagining of intimate relationships is built, rejecting monogamy and restrictive relationship structures. Within the first set, there is an expectation that women won't appear to be in relationships, presented as a method to preserve the independence of the women involved. Their lives were not to be centred on romantic or sexual partnerships. This requirement is connected to the rejection of the concept of 'couples'. Jennings noted that there was a belief that "Couples" encouraged their members to be inward-looking, forging dependent bonds with each other, rather than functioning as independent beings or interacting with others'.<sup>34</sup> The second set of rules aided this goal further, presenting romantic love as restrictive.

Pausacker presented the third set of rules, dealing with multiple relationships. Significantly, all the rules in this section are an expansion of the last in the second set, the need for communication, especially with multiple partners.<sup>35</sup> The reasoning for

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<sup>31</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 8.

<sup>32</sup> Pausacker, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Pausacker, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 138.

<sup>35</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 8.

these rules noted the ‘untraining’ necessary to make non-monogamous relationships work, questioning previously taught positions that one partner would provide most of one’s emotional security.<sup>36</sup> Pausacker also noted that the basic pattern for three-way relationships is that of the wife-husband- mistress, which is against the equal relationships lesbian feminists wished to promote. The practice of non-monogamy aided the rejection of the concept of the ‘couple,’ which was replaced with the term ‘primary relationship’.<sup>37</sup> However, as Jennings noted, this phrasing inferred a sense of hierarchy. Further, this idea of a ‘primary relationship’ led many women to question their various relationships with women, sexual, romantic or platonic. As Jennings noted, ‘for many women, the sense of sexual and asexual friendships as existing on a continuum had a significant impact on the way in which they negotiated their intimacy with other women’.<sup>38</sup> Non-monogamy will be discussed later in this chapter but is fundamental to the questioning politics of lesbian feminist intimate relationships.

This article revealed the tension placed within living up to these personal principles. Pausacker acknowledged that she wrote out the rules ‘as dictatorial statements,’ without meaning to give them such importance. She noted ‘everyone who believes in them breaks them’.<sup>39</sup> As lesbian feminists questioned the standard set of relationships norms promoted by heterosexual society, this article attempted to encourage scrutiny of the new expectations women were building. Pausacker continued to state, ‘it means that we have to think about what we do, and not just drift along doing what we were always told

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<sup>36</sup> Pausacker, “Rules and Relationships,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> Jennings, “Womin Loving Womin,” 139.

<sup>38</sup> Jennings, 140.

<sup>39</sup> Pausacker, “Rules and Relationships,” 9.

to do'.<sup>40</sup> Pausacker ended the piece with several questions, revealing her curiosity and attempting to promote conversation. She noted, 'are we working out rules to make life easier or to change society?' and 'is this etiquette or politics?'<sup>41</sup> These are key questions, noting Pausacker's ongoing interest in the subject.

Reflecting years later, in 1983, *Lesbian News*, the rebranded *Lesbian Newsletter*, reprinted Pausacker's rules with further commentary from the author. Pausacker noted that she has gained a little infamy from the piece, with women of varying motivations recognising her in relation to this paper.<sup>42</sup> She noted that people have been stuck on the word 'rules', ignoring the piece for what it is, 'a joke – a bad joke'.<sup>43</sup> Pausacker reflected that there was a real belief in the work of this piece, stating that she believed 'that lesbian feminists would come up with such a comprehensive code of behaviour that all we'd have left to do is figure out how to live it'.<sup>44</sup> However, Pausacker noted that this sincerity was matched with a scepticism expressed when she read the rules aloud at the original conference in a 'deadpan send up'.<sup>45</sup> Pausacker allowed that the reasoning provided reflected true political beliefs and questions, though the rules do not reveal much without the context of experience. Pausacker ended her reflection calling for continued discussions of these issues but noted that there are no neat answers. This article, and the original publication of the paper, reveal much about attempts to live politically fulfilling lesbian feminist lives. The original set of rules' perceived dogma

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<sup>40</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 9.

<sup>41</sup> Pausacker, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Pausacker, "What's On What's Off And What's Inbetween," 5.

<sup>43</sup> Pausacker, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Pausacker, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Pausacker, 5.

revealed the unsaid aspects of questioning monogamy. Further, Pausacker's admitted naïve belief that lesbian feminists could reinvent relationships with agreed-upon rules revealed the drive of women to create new imaginings for themselves, even if they are unrealistic in practice. This latter aspect, the unsuitability of rules for something as nebulous as intimate relationships, highlights the complicated nature of living a lesbian feminist life.

It is significant that Pausacker implored women to keep questioning and talking, however, she let go of the idea of rules as relationship definers. The medium of the magazines aided this conversation that Pausacker is prompting. Although letters in response were limited, there is the potential for women to have discussed the article amongst themselves. Further, the medium of the magazine, especially *Lesbian Newsletter* and its rebranded format, *Lesbian News*, with its stretch across years, allowed for Pausacker to publish her reflections, showcasing how personal positions can change over time. Pausacker's reflections were published alongside a comic (see Figure 4.1), which summarised her thoughts. It portrays a lesbian feminist wishing for some definition of lesbian feminist lifestyle, who, in an allusion to Moses receiving the Ten Commandments, is given a tablet of rules. The last panel reiterated Pausacker's point, in which the lesbian feminist says, after reading the tablet, "I really don't like the look of this".<sup>46</sup> Australian lesbian feminists attempted to question intimate relationships. Pausacker then tried to make apparent what had been discussed, her reflections

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<sup>46</sup> Pausacker, "What's On What's Off And What's Inbetween," 6.

revealing the ongoing questioning part of lesbian feminist politics, not being able to accept rules from above or from the community.



**Figure 4.1 – Comic published alongside “What’s On What’s Off And What’s Inbetween: Rules and Relationships” by Jenny Pausacker in December 1983 issue of *Lesbian News*, page 6.**

### **Non-Monogamy**

Part of the lesbian feminist re-imagining of relationships involved the decentring of the romantic couple instead being open to relationships with others. This idea had multiple impacts on women. Rebecca Jennings explored this further in oral history interviews with women who experimented with non-monogamy in the 1970s. Jennings recorded that some women, on reflection, noted the issues with jealousy and breakdowns in self-esteem that accompanied attempts at non-monogamy.<sup>47</sup> There was pressure to live up to non-monogamous ideals linked to women’s commitment to lesbian feminist politics and

<sup>47</sup> Jennings, “Womin Loving Womin,” 142.

their identities as lesbians.<sup>48</sup> As described in Pausacker's article, the need for communication was understood as significant to maintaining a non-monogamous relationship.<sup>49</sup> However, through Jennings' interviews, women revealed that this was more complicated in practice. Sylvia described to Jennings the emotional pain of having to comfort her partner after a failed encounter with another woman, stating, "that's the level of politics we were at. Painful – oh, god, the pain".<sup>50</sup> Jennings noted that women came to view this political outlook on relationships as restrictive and enforced conformity.<sup>51</sup> This perspective is seen in Jenny Pausacker's reflection on her paper, noting she 'was linking up two things that should be very separate – the need for personal politics as part of political action, and the way in which ideas and analysis can turn into dogma and conformity'.<sup>52</sup> Jennings' informants described how women acted out ideology without fully committing to the ideals, including one couple who hid their relationship from their lesbian communities.<sup>53</sup> Jennings noted that women who experienced the pain of enforced non-monogamy struggled with intimacy in future relationships. She drew on Denise Thompson's reflections in 1984, which described the shocked celibacy of some women and the need for frequent, short-term partners for others.<sup>54</sup> This political practice is reflected to have impacted the expression of vulnerability and romantic affection in future relationships, seen to be lacking intimacy. Jenny Pausacker's articles were an early exploration of this concept in lesbian magazines. There would be continued references and reflections on the concept.

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<sup>48</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 139.

<sup>49</sup> Pausacker, "Rules and Relationships," 9.

<sup>50</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 144.

<sup>51</sup> Jennings, 144.

<sup>52</sup> Pausacker, "What's On What's Off And What's Inbetween," 5.

<sup>53</sup> Jennings, "Womin Loving Womin," 145.

<sup>54</sup> Jennings, 145.



The lingering ideals of 1970s lesbian feminist imaginings of relationships can be seen in a May-June 1987 letter to *Lesbians News* which details one woman's perspective on the idea of opening up her relationship. The article was written by a woman who had only recently come out as a lesbian and had started a committed relationship with another woman.<sup>55</sup> She noted that the idea of polyamory had been floated within the relationship, the article is part of articulating her thoughts on the subject. She stated, 'I am questioning the concept of polygamy – why we feel so strongly about it as lesbian feminists in addition to questioning my social conditioning in accepting monogamy as being the accepted way to have satisfying relationships'.<sup>56</sup> The article is broken down into her questions on the subject. Lesbian feminist ideals of autonomy and independence are questioned under 'Why do we fear dependency?'<sup>57</sup> She stated, 'we seem to have idealised autonomy, strength and power and have denied our needs for closeness, mothering and security. Not only are our needs still not being met, but we are perpetuating the male myth that these needs are negative, weak and insignificant'.<sup>58</sup> This criticism related to the earlier reflections of harm that non-monogamy produced for some women, limiting the depth of the emotional connection within their relationships to not be hurt by jealousy.

The article continued by questioning the ideological soundness of polygamy. There seems to have been a community turn against the idea, the writer noting, 'when

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<sup>55</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," *Lesbian News*, May-June 1987, 3.

<sup>56</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," 3.

<sup>57</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," 4.

<sup>58</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," 4.

questioning a friend on her views of polygamy as a feminist issue, she laughed and said that she believed it was a rumour started by a horny lesbian'.<sup>59</sup> In this instance, non-monogamy is portrayed as a justification for women to seek multiple partners. The author explored this idea in further depth, noting that she missed having a casual dating period with other women due to her late coming out and then committed relationship.<sup>60</sup> This experience was not unique to the author. Homophobia and heteronormativity limited the ability of women to explore their sexuality in their teenage and young adult years, restricting the experience they had with being in relationships with other women. This lack of experience was translated into issues with communication and negotiating expectations. There was a want for their relationships to be different to encounters with men but articulating this can be difficult. This struggle is further exacerbated by lesbian feminist principles, which encouraged practices such as non-monogamy when couples may not wish this or could withstand it. This article showcased the complicated nature of working out lesbian relationships, especially those recently out. It indicated the lingering lesbian feminist influence and the effect of homophobia in limiting the dating experiences of women. An article is an effective medium for this perspective, allowing the writer to talk to a lesbian community and work through her thoughts. The magazines would allow further reflections.

The discussion of monogamy exposed many beliefs about lesbian sexuality. The case for non-monogamy is explicitly about having multiple partners. In her interview with Rebecca Jennings discussing non-monogamy in the 1970s, Denise Thompson stated

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<sup>59</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," 25.

<sup>60</sup> "Polygamy or Monogamy," 25.

that some women moved between women without strong emotional connections.<sup>61</sup> However, in the articles discussing non-monogamy in the magazines, lesbian sexuality is described as having intense intimacy, often prompted by emotional closeness. This belief is seen in the previous article, in which the writer noted that she does not think she ‘would be able to have emotionally uninvolved casual sexual relationships with wimmin because I would feel that I was treating her in the same way that men treat us – as sexual objects’.<sup>62</sup> This denial of casual sex is due to the belief that it is a masculine behaviour attributed to men. In this instance, it is implied that this is straight men, however, this attitude would be challenged, noting that lesbians can and do have casual sex compared to gay men.<sup>63</sup> In the early 1990s, Georgina Abrahams reflected in a *Lesbian on the Loose* article, ‘The Polytics of Love,’ that non-monogamy feels threatening ‘because as lesbians we tend not to do non-intimate recreational sex.’<sup>64</sup> This belief about lesbian sexuality being more intimate and less recreational than other sexual identities abounded. However, women who became involved with lesbian sex radicalism would come to challenge this idea.

### **Intimacy and Lesbian Sexual Practices**

Women re-evaluated the construction of their relationships through a lesbian feminist perspective. This critical attention was to strip lesbian sexuality of heterosexual vestiges, including particular forms of sexual intimacy. Jennings noted that the finer details of

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<sup>61</sup> Jennings, “Womin Loving Womin,” 145.

<sup>62</sup> “Polygamy or Monogamy,” 4.

<sup>63</sup> S. C. Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s” (PhD, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2018), 214.

<sup>64</sup> Georgina Abrahams, “The Polytics of Love,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1992, 15.

sexual practice were not discussed, however, there was a general idea of sex ‘as equal, tender and non-penetrative’.<sup>65</sup> As Sylvia recalled to Jennings, there was an idea that there was to be “no violence, no aggression, it was even hard to talk about”.<sup>66</sup> The use of aids, such as vibrators and dildos, was rejected as male-identified, not aligned with the women-focused ideals of 1970s lesbian feminism.<sup>67</sup> This imagining of lesbian sexual intimacy did have an influence, lingering in discussions, adopted by some women as a lesbian sexual practice. However, increasingly, especially in the 1980s, women would question these conventions, building lesbian sex radicalism.

In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, lesbians in Australia began engaging with transnational lesbian sex radicalism.<sup>68</sup> Participant accounts from Kimberly O’Sullivan and C. Moore Hardy described Sydney as the epicentre of this sexual experimentation, its scene unique both domestically and internationally.<sup>69</sup> Sophie Robinson described the scene’s development as increasingly women demanded space in Sydney’s gay precinct centred around Oxford Street in Darlinghurst.<sup>70</sup> Workshops at conferences in the early 1980s allowed for the spread of information about S/M practices, and in 1984, two Sydney women, Robyn and Caz, started ‘Sexually Outrageous Women’ (SOW) to encourage others to experiment with their sexuality.<sup>71</sup> Internationally, similar groups and practices were evolving, though with derision from some lesbian feminists, creating

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<sup>65</sup> Jennings, “Womin Loving Womin,” 137.

<sup>66</sup> Jennings, 138.

<sup>67</sup> Jennings, 137.

<sup>68</sup> Sophie Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’: Lesbian Sex Radicals in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s,” *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 443.

<sup>69</sup> Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution,’” 443.

<sup>70</sup> Robinson, 445.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, 446.

the 'sex wars' division.<sup>72</sup> In the American context, these debates were between broad feminist perspectives, largely from a heterosexual lens, with one side believing that these practices were patriarchal and oppressed women, while the other side took an anti-censorship position, arguing that feminists should not stigmatise different forms of sexual expression.<sup>73</sup> However, in Australia, these debates centred on lesbian sexuality and sexual practices, with Kimberly O'Sullivan recalling that "the ferocious hostility between women took place almost exclusively within lesbian circles".<sup>74</sup> In her oral history interviews, Robinson noted her participants recalled that the debates of the 1980s and 1990s were about 'whether lesbian sex and relationships should not incorporate power-dynamics, role-playing, or indeed penetration, because this potentially recreated heterosexual and patriarchal norms in a women-identified context'.<sup>75</sup> These debates can be seen in the magazines.

*Lesbian Newsletter* and later *Lesbian News* included articles and letters discussing lesbian sex radicalism and S/M. The medium of the magazines allows for the conversation to flow across issues, with readers responding through letters and the production collective also publishing their responses. An early article on this issue was from 1982, coming out against Sado-Masochism as not a feminist practice.<sup>76</sup> They

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<sup>72</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 447.

<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Groeneveld, "Letters to the Editor as 'Archives of Feeling': On Our Backs Magazine and the Sex Wars," *American Periodicals* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 153.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Henderson, "Pornography in the Service of Lesbians: The Case of Wicked Women and Slit Magazines," *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 163, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.2.2.159\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc.2.2.159_1).

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, "The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution," 447.

<sup>76</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, "Sado-Masochism - Not a Feminist Option," *Lesbian Newsletter*, October-November 1982, 20-21.

stated, ‘we believe that Sado-masochistic sexual behaviour between women is an expression of the women-hatred, and thus self-hatred, with which we have all been indoctrinated’.<sup>77</sup> The perception reflected that lesbian sexuality should shirk anything lesbian feminists deem patriarchal, rejecting power plays and penetration. The article noted that women involved in S/M have argued that they are exploring patriarchal behaviour to expose its limits.<sup>78</sup> The article contextualised their belief against S/M, stating that they believed that lesbian feminist values and gains were being repressed.<sup>79</sup> The space that S/M occupied was imagined as taking in energy that could be used to fight this repression, stating ‘when there appears to be no worthwhile way of expressing our anger, or the possibility of liberating ourselves in a manner that will be effective, instead we become escapist’.<sup>80</sup> They noted that ‘Sexual politics is still relevant to our Feminist growth, and private actions are still our collective concern’.<sup>81</sup> This statement connected with earlier discussion around lesbian feminist sexual conventions and how they can be turned into dogma, as explored in Jenny Pausacker’s article, or applied strictly with damaging effects, as described by Rebecca Jennings’ informants. Lesbian sex radicals were attempting to challenge conventions of lesbian sexual intimacy, turning towards more recreational sexual practices, unlike what had been imagined before. S/M and lesbian sex radicalism represented their form of sexual politics as distinct, questioning the norms of both the heterosexual society and lesbian communities they belonged to. Sophie Robinson argued that lesbian sex radicals were

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<sup>77</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, “Sado-Masochism - Not a Feminist Option,” 20.

<sup>78</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, 21.

<sup>80</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Jenny, Wendy, and Vera, 21.

not as distinct from lesbian feminists as divisive articles like this one describe. Rather, the scenes in Australian cities allowed women to move between spaces and maintain lesbian feminist connections.<sup>82</sup>

*Lesbian News* published another dismissive letter in 1987, which criticised the presence of a questionnaire on erotica in the magazine, which included topics such as violence, butch/femme, and S/M, all sexual and identity practices dismissed by lesbian feminists.<sup>83</sup> The collective published their response alongside it, supporting their decision, indicating a level of acceptance for sex radical practices by this time. The letter was written by The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, which promoted a particular form of lesbian sexual intimacy. Through the letter, they were ‘expressing our concern at the ever-increasing practice of lesbian sexual techniques that can only be described as mimicking heterosexual intercourse’.<sup>84</sup> Penetrative sex is presented as akin to hetero sex and as butch and male-identified.<sup>85</sup> They stated, ‘yes, this does sound utopian, but let’s leave behind preconditioned obsession with penetration that our sex-hungry capitalist system and its boys promote’.<sup>86</sup>

The *Lesbian News* collective published a response justifying their questionnaire, noting that they wanted to know the opinions of their readers on these topics, among others.<sup>87</sup> They stated that they would print more articles from the Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective

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<sup>82</sup> Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’,” 446.

<sup>83</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, “The Joy of Lesbian Sex,” *Lesbian News*, December 1986-January 1987, 10.

<sup>84</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, “The Joy of Lesbian Sex,” 10.

<sup>85</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, 10.

<sup>86</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, 10.

<sup>87</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, 11.

and would include a mailing list for information for others interested in this perspective, maintaining space for diverse expressions of lesbian opinions.<sup>88</sup> A member of the collective, Brenda, took the space to share her opinion, supportive of open terms of sexuality. She stated, ‘placing rules on lesbian sex is no different to a patriarchal, capitalistic society telling us who we relate to or fuck with’.<sup>89</sup> Further responses to the initial letter were printed in the March-April 1987 issue of *Lesbian News*, with one letter from Kimberly O’Sullivan, eventual *Wicked Women* editor, one in support of the Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective and four critical of dogmatic rhetoric of the Collective restricting lesbian sexual practices.<sup>90</sup> These responses from the *Lesbian News* collective member Brenda and letters from readers indicate increasing acceptance of lesbian sex radicalism. The magazine also promoted the space necessary for such discussions, not dismissing the Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective completely, allowing them space if they wish, but acknowledging that readers could respond through letters for diverse opinions.

As indicated by the *Lesbian News* letters by the late 1980s, the presence of lesbian sex radicalism was more visible and established in lesbian communities. However, this did not always lead to acceptance, as the experiences of Jasper Laybutt showcase. Jasper was a significant figure in the lesbian sex radicalism scene through his exploration of fetishism and S/M throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s as he started to transition. Jasper and his then partner, Talisa Salmon, were the creators of lesbian erotica

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<sup>88</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, “The Joy of Lesbian Sex,” 11.

<sup>89</sup> The Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Multiple, “The Joy of Lesbian Sex (Responses),” *Lesbian News*, March-April 1987, 8–12.



magazine, *Wicked Women*, first published in 1988.<sup>91</sup> The magazine included ‘poetry, personal classifieds and features exploring lesbian sexual fetish in an attempt to broaden individual lesbians’ definition of their lifestyle’.<sup>92</sup> Laybutt and Salmon used pseudonyms initially to generate interest, making the scene look bigger than it was.<sup>93</sup> *Wicked Women* did address the Sex Wars in early articles, including a discussion of pornography that was reprinted from New Zealand’s *Pink Triangle*.<sup>94</sup> An editorial from 1989 noted the ongoing taboos still in place for expressing sexual desire for non-‘feminist’ modes of sexuality, leading to a difficulty in convincing women to submit their stories.<sup>95</sup> Kimberly O’Sullivan was made editor in 1994, promising to keep the magazine ‘radical in its political and sexual expression’.<sup>96</sup> The magazine would end its run in 1996 after 28 issues, O’Sullivan stepping down as editor, Salmon no longer organising fundraising and Laybutt having moved on to other projects.<sup>97</sup>

*Wicked Women* was an intervention into the publishing scene, developing the lesbian sex radical subculture. Margaret Henderson stated, ‘they have had to challenge the traditional limited visibility and, in some accounts, impossibility of lesbian desire’.<sup>98</sup> Salmon stated in an interview with Calder, “the seventies feminist thing just ended up being girls telling each other what to do. It became really dogmatic and it took the fun

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<sup>91</sup> Robinson, “‘The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’,” 452.

<sup>92</sup> William (Bill) Francis Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era: Australian Magazines and Newspapers 1970-2000” (PhD, University of Melbourne, 2015), 132.

<sup>93</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 132.

<sup>94</sup> Allanah Ryan, “Pornography: Desire or Degradation?,” *Wicked Women*, 1988, 19.

<sup>95</sup> “Editorial,” *Wicked Women*, 1989, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Kimberly O’Sullivan, “Editoria,” *Wicked Women*, 1994, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 136.

<sup>98</sup> Henderson, “Pornography in the Service of Lesbians,” 160.

out of sexuality and being a dyke”.<sup>99</sup> Notably, the magazine utilised imagery, displaying the sexual subculture for readers. ‘Wicked women’ were displayed both on the cover and in spreads throughout, incorporating elements of the sex radical fashion, largely leather, with models suggestively looking to the camera. Photo spreads showcased sexual fetish events, tying in with the fundraising events keeping the magazine afloat. Many prominent fiction pieces explicitly explored lesbian sexuality, including bondage, S/M and power play. Compared to relative vagueness of lesbian sexuality as described in the letter from the Joy of Lesbian Sex Collective, writers to *Wicked Women* were precise in their stories.

Outside of reading the magazine, women could engage with the scene cultivated by *Wicked Women* through their fundraising events. Their biggest draw was the Ms Wicked competition, which ran yearly, in which lesbians stripped and performed sexual acts for enthusiastic all-female audiences’.<sup>100</sup> In 1991, more than 500 people attended a Melbourne heat.<sup>101</sup> Other events included Be Wicked, a Mardi Gras dance party, which was raided by the police, and Girl Beat, held at gay male sex-on-site venue The Den.<sup>102</sup> Significantly the events ‘drew together the lesbian and gay male communities that in the 1980s lived largely separately from each other.’<sup>103</sup> Gay men were supporters of the magazine, including gay male sex stores, which were early stockists. However, this

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<sup>99</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 133.

<sup>100</sup> Calder, “Gay Print Media’s Golden Era,” 135.

<sup>101</sup> Calder, 135.

<sup>102</sup> Calder, 135.

<sup>103</sup> Calder, 135.

connection to the gay male scene further isolated the magazine, with some criticising this choice.

In an interview with Robinson, Jasper Laybutt explains the controversial nature of such performances, stating “having anything remotely like a phallus on the stage, like a dildo, was still seen as taboo, as anti-feminist, seen as kind of pro-male,” bondage and S/M seen as “violence against women by women”.<sup>104</sup> In Margaret Henderson’s analysis, ‘*Wicked Women's* proudly phallic lesbian desire splits apart the identity signified by the term ‘lesbian feminist’, and hence brings an autonomous lesbian desiring subject – a pornographic lesbian – into being’.<sup>105</sup> Robinson noted in her research that this split is built upon common ground, emphasising exploring and living lesbian lifestyles, political in their visions of expression amongst a homophobic backdrop.<sup>106</sup> Henderson furthers this argument, noting that ‘both camps...figured lesbianism as a sexual/political vanguard’.<sup>107</sup>

*Lesbians on the Loose* routinely published event recounts, including Ms Wicked. An account of the 1990 Ms Wicked final was published as the front cover of the July issue of that year.<sup>108</sup> The article detailed the event with little personal comment from the author. Some disapproval from the crowd at the inclusion of drag queen Fanny Farquar was described, however, this was soon alleviated with Fanny reminding the crowd that

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<sup>104</sup> Robinson, “The New Lesbian Sexual Revolution’,” 453.

<sup>105</sup> Henderson, “Pornography in the Service of Lesbians,” 161.

<sup>106</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s.”

<sup>107</sup> Henderson, “Pornography in the Service of Lesbians,” 163.

<sup>108</sup> “Wicked Winner,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1990, 1.

‘dykes and poofers suffer the same oppression – we should stick together’.<sup>109</sup> The various performers and their acts were described. Of the criticism of the event, Laybutt is described as being pleased with the debate the event produced, hoping ‘to encourage the expression of sexual diversity within our community’.<sup>110</sup> A similar report of the 1991 Final was also published, with *Lesbians on the Loose* providing updates on Wicked Women throughout the 1990s.<sup>111</sup> An early reader survey indicated that readers did not want S/M content within *Lesbians on the Loose*.<sup>112</sup> By recounting events, *Lesbians on the Loose* could engage with the sex radical scene without upsetting too much of its readership. However, this does not displace the space that *Wicked Women* developed for lesbian sexuality and sex radicalism, both within its own pages, but Australian lesbian publications as a whole. The magazine brought lesbian desire into the open, shrugging off some of the constraints that some lesbian feminists had placed on sexual expression.

In July 1992, *Lesbians on the Loose* published a letter to the editor entitled 'Redefining Lesbian,' attributed to Leslie Smythe.<sup>113</sup> Her letter and the responses to it combined various understandings of lesbian relationships and the place of sex within them, drawing from earlier discourses. Leslie stated, ‘I used to be a lesbian but now I am not’.<sup>114</sup> This bold statement is linked to Leslie and her partner’s lack of sexual activity. Living regionally, Leslie noted that ‘we loved hugging and holding one another, talking

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<sup>109</sup> “Wicked Winner,” 1.

<sup>110</sup> “Wicked Winner,” 1.

<sup>111</sup> Stevie, “Ms Wicked Final,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1991, 9; “Wicked New Editor,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Frances Rand, “Dykes Horde LOTL,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1993, 9.

<sup>113</sup> Leslie Smythe, “Redefining Lesbian,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1992, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Smythe, “Redefining Lesbian,” 5.

and working together, and we never let men onto our property'.<sup>115</sup> To Leslie and her partner, this lifestyle was the expression of their lesbian identities. Notably, the element of separatism is included, with both women focusing on their lives as they lived together and were affectionate with each other. However, Leslie and her partner moved to Sydney and engaged with the vivid lesbian communities in the city. Part of the culture shock was the introduction of public sexual cultures that Leslie had not included in her understanding of lesbian, including sex radicalism and S/M. She stated, 'we have been using the term "lesbian" all these years incorrectly to describe ourselves'.<sup>116</sup> The intimate relationship that Leslie and her partner shared was no longer understood as a lesbian one when engaging with other expressions. Many of the letters in response noted the necessity of sex to lesbianism, though this is not necessarily a given or straightforward. One letter highlighted this uncertainty as Kay Donaldson wrote, "I would think that it's not being lesbian – it seems fairly evident to me that lesbianism is directly related to sex and frankly I am quite sick of the constant emphasis on sex".<sup>117</sup> This letter revealed some of the uncertainties of lesbian identity. Donaldson's language is couched, seen in the "it seems fairly evident" and "I would think," which limits this belief to herself, with an element of passivity. Her ending opinion that she is sick of the emphasis on sex may reveal more about the context of the time rather than her sole opinion.

As Leslie experienced, during the late 1980s and 1990s, Sydney was a hub of lesbian sex radicalism and S/M communities. The presence of such a sexual public culture was

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<sup>115</sup> Smythe, 5.

<sup>116</sup> Smythe, "Redefining Lesbian," 5.

<sup>117</sup> "Suggestions for Leslie!", *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1992, 4.

contested within the lesbian community, as some did not approve of the stylings and expressions of sexuality promoted by the movement. Two other letters agreed with Donaldson, with Link Glasson noting, “you’re in the big city now. It’s all happening”.<sup>118</sup> Again, the context of Sydney is referenced, potentially influencing the understanding of lesbian identity and the necessity of sex to the identity. One letter agreed with Leslie’s original conception of lesbianism, stating, “right on, sister! It’s about time we got back to what lesbianism is all about”.<sup>119</sup> This letter reveals a generational aspect, referring to an imagined past in which Leslie’s expression of intimacy would constitute a lesbian relationship. Leslie Smythe’s letter prompted the discussion of lesbian identity and lesbian relationships, revealing differing understandings of intimacy requirements and community definitions of lesbianism. It also showcases my reluctance to limit intimate relationships to necessitate sexual desire, as this questioned itself within Australian lesbian periodicals. Intimate lesbian relationships did not have stable meaning with the magazines, this chapter showcases the various discourses at play that undermined any attempt to finalise any definitions.

## **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

This first part of the chapter has discussed the conceptualisations of lesbian intimate relationships. The significance of the 1970s lesbian feminist imaginings of equal partnerships between women has been explored, with particular attention to how this understanding of intimate partnerships was questioned and deconstructed. The lingering presence of these beliefs was restrictive of new imaginings of lesbian

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<sup>118</sup> “Suggestions for Leslie”, 4–5.

<sup>119</sup> “Suggestions for Leslie”, 5.

relationships. This attitude is seen in the repudiation of passive sexual practices through the emergence of lesbian sex radicalism. Further, portraying lesbian relationships as inherently equal diminishes the power relations within relationships and can hide the violence and harmful relationship expectations. For this reason, when the magazines discussed violence within lesbian relationships, the language deployed framed the article as the exposure of a hidden issue that had gone unnoticed in the lesbian communities. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, several articles on intimate partner violence were published in different magazines, all attempting to dispel myths around lesbian intimate partner violence and gain community attention to the issue.

Australian lesbians during this period were familiar with violence. They faced violence due to homophobia, seen in the reported cases of street violence in *Lesbians on the Loose*.<sup>120</sup> Australian lesbians also knew of domestic violence through extensive connection to the feminist refuge movement in the 1970s and onwards, with many lesbians continuing to work in women's services.<sup>121</sup> However, when it came to their own community, some had trouble rationalising the violence present. Women's experiences in refuges and around domestic violence saw the issue of relationship violence framed around male violence, with patriarchy at its source.<sup>122</sup> This perspective shaped how intimate partner violence was interpreted in the magazines.

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<sup>120</sup> Frances Rand, "Vixens Vigilantes," *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1991, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 133.

<sup>122</sup> Jacqui Theobald, "Women's Refuges and the State in Victoria, Australia: A Campaign for Secrecy of Address," *Women's History Review* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.846116>.

One article from 1989 in *Lesbian News*, in which lesbian partner violence is connected to the patriarchy, is seen as ‘still symptomatic of a male structure in which one of our early lessons is to use violence’.<sup>123</sup> In speaking about sexual abuse committed by lesbians, a 1994 *LOTL* article states that sexual violence ‘is an enormous challenge to the feminist thinking of men being ‘the enemy’ or ‘the other’ and that away from males, lesbians can escape being abused or raped’.<sup>124</sup> To counter this framing of violence, articles and letters were published detailing accounts of women who had experienced relationship violence, emphasising that women were capable of harming their partners.<sup>125</sup> In both examples cited, the survivors describe a range of abuse, from physical, emotional, psychological and verbal. Mij Tanith wrote of her experience, ‘True, she never hit me, but the verbal harassment, the bullying, the desire for control, were all typical forms of abuse’.<sup>126</sup> Tanith’s testimony challenged the absence of physical violence as lessening the abuse. It was earlier emphasised in a *Lesbiana* article from 1992, in which Michelle Daw wrote ‘acts of violence and abuse that are non-physical are? often more difficult for the lesbian who is being abused to name or confirm as acts of violence and abuse’.<sup>127</sup> ‘Eve’ in her letter to *Lesbian News*, stated ‘when you don’t believe me, you choose to deny violence in our community, you choose to believe the myths of provocation, mutual battering, that lesbian abuse is less than het abuse, that women fight back, don’t feel sick with fear, must have been a wimp if she didn’t’.<sup>128</sup> This

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<sup>123</sup> Luce, “Lesbian Violence,” *Lesbian News*, March-April 1989, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Frances Rand and Bronwyn Arns, “Lesbian Rape: The Hate That Dare Not Speak Its Name,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1994, 8.

<sup>125</sup> “Eve,” “Please Believe Me...,” *Lesbian News*, October-November 1990, 12–13; Mij Tanith, “Life with Penelope: A Recollection of Domestic Violence,” *Lesbiana*, October 2001, 24.

<sup>126</sup> Tanith, “Life with Penelope: A Recollection of Domestic Violence,” 24.

<sup>127</sup> Michelle Daw, “Lesbian Domestic Violence and Abuse: Stop the Silence!,” *Lesbiana*, June 1992, 13–14.

<sup>128</sup> “Eve,” “Please Believe Me...,” 13.



statement revealed further myths about lesbian violence, especially when it was physical. In particular, the idea of ‘mutual battering’ was common, in which women who fought back were configured to be part of the violence and provoke it.<sup>129</sup> These testimonies challenged ideas about lesbian partner violence, emphasising that lesbians were capable of harm through a range of abuses.

The magazines also dissected community silence. Most of these articles date from the late 1980s, moving into the 1990s, with further reappearances of the issue in the early 2000s. Irwin noted in the North American context that ‘it has been a struggle for violence in lesbian relationships to be recognized despite its exposure in the early 1980s’.<sup>130</sup> In Australia, the issue has been presented repeatedly, with an article usually promoting discussion for a month or two before the issue is overshadowed, only to be re-discovered later. Factors played into the lessening of lesbian intimate partner violence within Australian lesbian communities. An article from 1987, published in *Lesbian News*, noted the factor that homophobia played in denying violence. The issue was believed to add fuel to homophobic attitudes that wished to diminish the legitimacy of lesbian relationships.<sup>131</sup> Further, homophobia may have impacted the ability of victims to access resources or protections from partners, many unwilling to engage with heteronormative and actively homophobic institutions such as the police. This perspective was linked to the absence of lesbian domestic violence in the discussion of

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<sup>129</sup> Nina (Christina) Hudson, “Family Violence Laws: Traditional Narratives and the (in)Visibility of Lesbian Relationships and Lesbian-Parented Families,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 23, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2019.1599241>.

<sup>130</sup> Jude Irwin, “(Dis)Counted Stories: Domestic Violence and Lesbians,” *Qualitative Social Work* 7, no. 2 (June 2008): 200, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325008089630>.

<sup>131</sup> Jenni Gray, “Violence!,” *Lesbian News*, March-April 1987, 16.

legislation and scholarly literature on the subject.<sup>132</sup> Unsupportive families could limit the help available to women, who worried their sexuality could be dismissed into acts of violence.<sup>133</sup> If women did turn to refuges for help, the small lesbian communities meant that women could face friends or acquaintances of their abusers who worked at these sites.<sup>134</sup> This small network of lesbian communities limited some victims in naming their abuser, worried that it could get back to them or that women who were friendly with their abuser would victim-blame them for the abuse.<sup>135</sup> 'Eve' implored in her letter that if violence was left unaddressed, the community was allowing 'women who are violent to continue and not get help' and would continue to 'isolate victims'.<sup>136</sup> These testimonies implored the lesbian community to conceptualise lesbian violence and understand it as an issue, attempting to hold the communities to account.

A third feature of the articles on lesbian intimate partner violence in Australian lesbian magazines was the attempts to re-conceptualise the issue. As stated above, domestic violence was viewed as a heterosexual issue, tied explicitly to the patriarchy. To accept lesbian intimate partner violence, women writing at the time wished to analyse the problem. This analysis has also been seen in scholarly literature. The articles used as examples sometimes follow similar thinking to the academic literature. Jude Irwin described that there are two approaches to understanding lesbian partner violence. One such approach evolves from feminist theories of gendered power relations, which seeks

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<sup>132</sup> Hudson, "Family Violence Laws," 374.

<sup>133</sup> Luce, "Lesbian Violence," 21.

<sup>134</sup> Gray, "Violence!," 17.

<sup>135</sup> Daw, "Lesbian Domestic Violence and Abuse: Stop the Silence!," 14.

<sup>136</sup> "Eve," "Please Believe Me...," 13.

to compare lesbian experiences to heterosexual ones. This is generalised as ‘women batter women because they have internalised the interconnected norms of heterosexism/homophobia and misogyny which lie at the core of the sex role system’.<sup>137</sup> This is seen in the magazines, as women attempted to take the knowledge they had gained from working within refuges and domestic violence services and apply it to the issue of lesbian violence.<sup>138</sup> However, this was not without its problems. An article in *Lesbiana* reinstated the idea that women in lesbian relationships are more equal than heterosexual ones, insinuating the ‘mutual battering’ idea that left victims feeling isolated and blamed for their abuse.<sup>139</sup> Irwin presented scholarly critiques, noting that this idea often reinforces ‘a binary between abuser/abused that replicates masculine/feminine gender roles which in turn promotes the idea that lesbians mimic traditional heterosexual relationships’.<sup>140</sup> The second approach to lesbian intimate partner violence attempted to compare violence in lesbian relationships to gay male relationships, focusing on social-cultural and psychological explanations.<sup>141</sup> There were elements of this approach in the lesbian magazines. As one article stated, ‘no analysis of lesbian domestic violence can ignore the power invested in privileged identities along the lines of race, class and age’.<sup>142</sup> Davis and Glass noted that this analysis allowed for ‘a de-centering of a gendered construction of intimate partner violence while recognizing the inter-acting nature of multiple layers of oppression’.<sup>143</sup> The different magazine

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<sup>137</sup> Irwin, “(Dis)Counted Stories,” 201.

<sup>138</sup> Luce, “Lesbian Violence,” 20.

<sup>139</sup> Maria Losurdo, “Our Violence, Our Challenge,” *Lesbiana*, June 1993, 17.

<sup>140</sup> Irwin, “(Dis)Counted Stories,” 202.

<sup>141</sup> Irwin, 201.

<sup>142</sup> Tracey Hales, “Whose Violence?,” *Lesbiana*, August 1993, 7.

<sup>143</sup> Kierrynn Davis and Nel Glass, “Reframing the Heteronormative Constructions of Lesbian Partner Violence: An Australian Case Study,” in *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*, ed. J. L. Ristock (Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 20.

articles did not complete this attempted re-examination of lesbian domestic violence. However, they represented an attempt by lesbians to consider how violence operated in their communities.

Overall, these articles completed three functions in their discussions of lesbian domestic violence. They dispelled myths around violence as male, and that violence was represented in various forms in lesbian violent relationships, as told by testimonies. Secondly, these articles spotlight continued community silence on the issue, though with limited connection across magazines. Finally, they attempted to analyse lesbian intimate partner violence, sometimes using older models, sometimes challenging women to consider other forms of power. Discussion on intimate relationships would be limited if violence and abuse topics were not articulated, with lesbian magazines attempting to create visibility for the issue and further awareness in their communities.

### **COMMUNICATING COMMITMENT**

The magazines' played a significant role in recognising and representing long-term committed relationships, particularly in the 1990s. Recognition from the community will be analysed by discussing lesbian marriages, commitment ceremonies, and long-term relationships. The lack of media and societal visibility lessened the availability of lesbian relationship role models. The magazines attempted to project this reality for their readers by publishing commitment material. Alongside these representations was the discussion around state recognition. In the 1990s, increasingly activism looked to equalise de facto relationship status for same-sex couples. The magazines kept their readers up to date on developments and their current legal rights. Connecting with

marriage, discussions of the positives and negatives of state recognition will be discussed. Part of state recognition is how lesbian couples were recognised for immigration purposes and how this changed over time. Relationship recognition took many forms within the magazines, this section analyses and contextualises discourses of the time.

### **‘Tying the Knot’**

By the 1990s, Australian lesbians were starting to assert their committed relationships within the magazines, seen in the increasing attention to commitment ceremonies and marriages. These ceremonies were not necessarily always political in the sense they were pushing for marriage equality. The marriage equality campaign in Australia would only pick up as an issue in 2004, with the Howard federal government’s change in marriage legislation.<sup>144</sup> Instead, these ceremonies were often performed for the couples to express and recognise their commitment to each other in front of friends and family. Although legal marriages and other forms of state relationship recognition have genuine ramifications regarding entitlements, protections and legitimation, this aspect will be discussed further in the chapter. Before doing this, I will look at representations within the magazines of commitment ceremonies, noting how lesbians addressed this topic and the experiences of different lesbian couples.

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<sup>144</sup> Barbara Baird, “The Politics of Homosexuality in Howard’s Australia,” in *Acts of Love and Lust: Sexuality in Australia from 1945-2010*, ed. Lisa Featherstone, Rebecca Jennings, and Robert Reynolds (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 134.

The feminist politics of lesbian marriages and commitment ceremonies was questioned by letters and articles within the lesbian publications. As Marion noted in a letter to *Lesbian News*, in response to calls for more lesbian marriages, ‘as a model of what a relationship is, marriage has got all mixed up with the ownership of women and children, with “his” house and family and superannuation, with dependence and all that stuff’.<sup>145</sup> Another article in *Lesbians on the Loose* was prefaced by a feminist analysis of marriage and its connection to patriarchal control, stating ‘for many lesbians, one of the greatest joys of our sexuality is that we will never be owned by a man in this way’.<sup>146</sup> Further, the idea that these ceremonies were copies of heterosexual marriages was questioned. However, many proponents of lesbian marriages see these ceremonies as distinct. Writing to *Lesbian News*, Kaye noted in her letter that she is married to her wife in a Holy Union and questions ‘Do other Lesbians know that Lesbian marriage (not a heterosexual mimicry) is an option?’<sup>147</sup>

The author of ‘Tying the Knot,’ the *LOTL* article, Jane Clements, was initially sceptical, but noted the different experiences of lesbian marriages and ceremonies. Clements was prompted to consider lesbian marriage when friends invited her to their commitment ceremony, but worried that she would judge them.<sup>148</sup> Clements interviewed three couples who had commitment ceremonies, including her friends. Two couples used different terminology to describe their days, one as ‘Commitment Day’ and the other as

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<sup>145</sup> Marion, “In Sickness and In Health,” *Lesbian News*, April-May 1990, 4.

<sup>146</sup> Jane Clements, “Tying the Knot,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1990, 10.

<sup>147</sup> Clements, “Tying the Knot,” 10.

<sup>148</sup> Clements, 10.

‘Alliance Day’.<sup>149</sup> Both these couples were hesitant to call their ceremonies ‘marriages’. One woman from the first couple stated, ‘she thought of it as a marriage in the sense that she now’ felt bonded to her partner ‘for life’.<sup>150</sup> Kim from the Alliance Day couple was explicit that her ceremony was not a marriage, stating ‘they had wanted the alliance to let everyone know that they no longer saw themselves in terms of individuals separate from each other, but as a couple whose lifetime decisions would have to take each other into account’.<sup>151</sup> The third couple interviewed called their union a marriage, with the ceremony performed in a church by a clergy member to conform to their religious views.<sup>152</sup> These ceremonies were about achieving recognition for the commitment to the relationship, often in front of friends and sometimes family. For some, their family did not attend the ceremony. However, two women in different couples noted they were hopeful that the ceremony would help their mothers take their relationships seriously.<sup>153</sup> As much as these ceremonies were significant for the couple to communicate their commitment, these ceremonies were often a way of ‘making a public announcement of their love and their intention to stick together’.<sup>154</sup> Clements noted the complexities in maintaining a long-term commitment, stating ‘society’s disapproval and our own internalised lesbophobia coupled with the inevitable cooling down from the “in love” phase of a relationship can make it difficult to find the motivation to stick together when the passion disappears’.<sup>155</sup> As part of recognising how lesbians celebrated their relationships, articles such as ‘Tying the Knot’ documented the many meanings and

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<sup>149</sup> Clements, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Clements, 10.

<sup>151</sup> Clements, “Tying the Knot,” 10.

<sup>152</sup> Clements, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Clements, 11.

<sup>154</sup> Clements, 11.

<sup>155</sup> Clements, 11.

approaches that lesbians took in the early 1990s to celebrate their relationships and recognise their commitment outside of state institutions.

### **‘In bed with...’**

Distinct from the commitment ceremonies and marriages, the *Lesbian on the Loose* column, “In bed with...” presents a different approach to representing long-term relationships. The column ran from January to July 1998, crossing over with coverage of the highly profiled marriage of Kerryn Phelps and Jackie Stricker in April of that year. These articles detailed interviews with women in a committed lesbian relationship, discussing how they met and viewed and maintained their relationship. As discussed in the previous section, many lesbians struggled to imagine long term relationships for themselves, either due to political principles or lack of visibility. Barbara Baird noted that ‘while gay and lesbian (*individual*) identity was consolidated across many public spheres during the 1990s and 2000s, including most popular culture, the visible recognition of gay or lesbian *coupledom*’ was still rare.<sup>156</sup> This column can be imagined as an attempt to counter these perceptions, displaying committed relationships in the general Sydney lesbian community.

A running theme in the column was how commitment was communicated. All the couples had been together for at least seven years when interviewed. While the couple must negotiate commitment for themselves, many forms of commitment also communicated this intent to others, including family and friends. These displays

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<sup>156</sup> Barbara Baird, “Historical Contexts for a Very Public Australian Lesbian Coupling,” in *Speak Now: Australian Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage*, ed. Victor Marsh (Melbourne, Australia: Clouds of Magellan, 2011), 9–23.



enabled recognition of the relationship. The conceit of the column was accompanied by photographs of the couples in bed together, inviting the reader to the intimate space of the bedroom. Domestic shared space was a theme within the column. For Bev and Helen, Helen stated, ‘our commitment was when we bought the house’.<sup>157</sup> This step of buying and creating a home together formed a method of recognising commitment, not only to themselves but also to others. Andrew Gorman-Murray has recorded the significance of homemaking for gay and lesbian relationships and identities, as this private domestic space allows the couple to signify their relationship.<sup>158</sup> The use of photographs reinforced the closeness of couples, many taking advantage of the photoshoot to have fun and showcase their families by including children and pets (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3). Couple Nikki and Jo were the only couple not to be explicitly in bed; instead, Nikki was in a body cage connected to their business, Karnal Leather (see Figure 4.4). The privacy of the home and the intimacy of the bedroom allowed the couples to communicate their connection to the readers, in some ways controlling their image. This closeness allowed discussion of their private lives, including questions about monogamy and how they handled conflict.

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<sup>157</sup> Roxxy Bent, “In Bed with... Bev & Helen,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1998, 10–11.

<sup>158</sup> Andrew Gorman-Murray, “Gay and Lesbian Couples at Home: Identity Work in Domestic Space,” *Home Cultures* 3, no. 2 (July 2006): 147, <https://doi.org/10.2752/174063106778053200>.



**Figure 4.2 – Juliet and Jessica from the January 1998 “In Bed With...” column in *Lesbians on the Loose*.**



**Figure 4.3 – Bev and Helen from the February 1998 “In Bed With...” column in *Lesbians on the Loose*.**



**Figure 4.4 – Nikki and Jo from the June 1998 “In Bed With...” column in *Lesbians on the Loose*.**

Similarly, to ‘Tying the Knot’, marriage did feature in the interviews as a comparison point for long-term relationships. One couple notes that friends and family know that ‘we’re as close as any married couple and want to live our lives that way,’ indicating they are recognised as a committed couple.<sup>159</sup> Significantly, the couples were asked who their relationship role models were. Most of the couples answered their parents, wishing to have committed, long-term relationships. No one listed another lesbian couple, one woman stating, ‘I don’t know any long-term lesbian relationships that I admire’.<sup>160</sup> This statement spoke to the necessity of representing long-term relationships within the

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<sup>159</sup> Roxxy Bent, “In Bed with... Nikki & Jo,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1998, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Roxxy Bent, “In Bed with... Sam & Wendy,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1998, 18–19.



magazines, building and recognising committed relationships so that others can reflect on its possibility.

None of the couples interviewed described a public commitment ceremony. Juliet and Jessica noted that they had ‘never actually said words to each other’. One couple had privately bought rings for each other. Another stated that they were committed but had not had a public ceremony. When interviewed, the final couple, Sam and Wendy, were planning a ‘do’. However, Sam stated, ‘I’m not into the concept of marriage, I think it’s trapping of patriarchal society, and I don’t want to replicate that. It’s public affirmation’. The “In bed with...” series brought to light the many ways couples communicated their commitment, leading to the recognition of their relationships. *Lesbians on the Loose* allowed for the mediation of such representations. This column presented a sustained attempt by one of the magazines to recognise relationships in its community, representing intimacy for others to see and model off.

### **Kerryn and Jackie**

The highest-profile marriage celebrated in the *Lesbians on the Loose* was that of Kerryn Phelps and Jacqui Stricker. They were married in New York in December 1997 and held a wedding party upon their return to Sydney in January 1998.<sup>161</sup> A month later, they received little notice of press attention from the Sydney *Sunday Telegraph*, in which a story on their marriage and wedding was published.<sup>162</sup> Depicted on the front cover of the

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<sup>161</sup> Barbara Baird, “Kerryn and Jackie’: Thinking Historically about Lesbian Marriages,” *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 126 (2005): 253.

<sup>162</sup> Baird, “Kerryn and Jackie”, 253.

April 1998 issue of *LOTL*, the married couple was the centre of attention (see Figure 4.5). This sustained visibility is referenced in the article on their marriage, stating ‘when two high profile Australian women exchanged their marriage vows in front of a Jewish Rabbi in New York, they knew, for better or for worse – their relationship would become public property’.<sup>163</sup> Their celebrity was unique in Australia, in which there were limited ‘out’ celebrity lesbians for the magazines to comment upon. Phelps was a general practitioner, media doctor and medical politico, while Stricker was a primary school teacher at the prestigious private school Ascham.<sup>164</sup> The significant media focus that the couple received would affect their careers differently, with Phelps’ medical-political ambitions not hindered as she was elected as the NSW president of the Australian Medical Association and then president of the national body in 2000.<sup>165</sup> As a school teacher, Stricker faced scrutiny, including from the principal of the school she taught at, who suggested that Stricker was ‘flaunting’ her sexuality for the media.<sup>166</sup> Stricker went on extended service leave in April 1998 and did not return to the position, instead working as Phelps’ personal assistant.<sup>167</sup>

Previous examples of marriages and commitment ceremonies used a variety of descriptors to create new formations of lesbian marriage separate from heterosexuality. Within the reporting on the marriage of Kerry and Jackie there was instead an emphasis to utilise the same language as heterosexual marriage. The article states “Ours

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<sup>163</sup> Barbara Farrelly and Frances Rand, “Your God Shall Be My God...,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1998, 24.

<sup>164</sup> Baird, “Kerry and Jackie”, 253.

<sup>165</sup> Baird, 253–54.

<sup>166</sup> Baird, 254.

<sup>167</sup> Baird, 254.

is called a marriage, not a commitment ceremony,” Kerryn says firmly. “Please use the word ‘marriage’. The word is powerful. Our love is powerful.”<sup>168</sup> By committing to the concept of marriage, coupled with their public attention, Kerryn and Jackie attempted to legitimate their relationship and its potential recognition to promote acceptance of committed lesbian relationships. The article referenced reader surveys, stating that lesbians ‘want our relationships to be recognised as lawful and to be entitled to the same rights and responsibilities as heterosexual couples’.<sup>169</sup> This perspective marks a change from earlier modes in which marriage and relationship recognition were understood to be too heterosexual and too patriarchal to capture lesbian relationships.

Drawing on Reynolds’ and Robinson’s interviews with gay and lesbian Australians across several generations, they depict their informants as falling into three age categories, with their historical contexts influencing their views. Notably, there is a difference between the middle category, who was influenced heavily by feminist critiques of marriage and the youngest category, who expected marriage equality as a symbol of achieving equal rights.<sup>170</sup> The transition from a perspective critical of marriage, as defined by feminist analysis, to the positive promotion of state recognition through marriage can be seen during the 1990s. The beginnings of activism for recognising gay and lesbian relationships were seen in the mid-1990s, with the results being achieved in the early 2000s.

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<sup>168</sup> Farrelly and Rand, “Your God Shall Be My God...,” 25.

<sup>169</sup> Farrelly and Rand, 26.

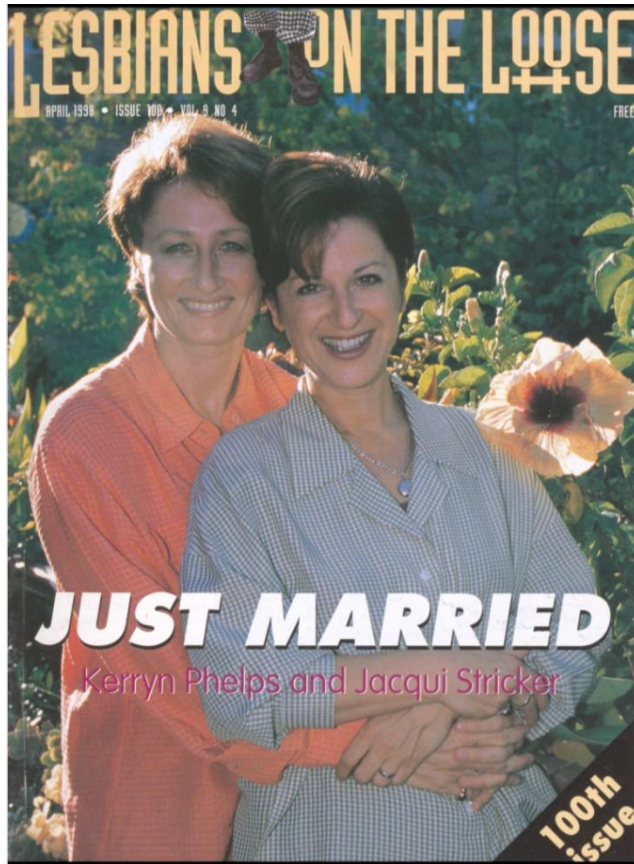
<sup>170</sup> Robert Reynolds and Shirleene Robinson, “Marriage as a Marker of Secular Inclusion? Oral History and Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Marriage in Contemporary Australia,” *Journal of Religious History* 43, no. 2 (2019): 276, 282, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12591>.

In her analysis of the marriage of Kerryn and Jackie, Baird is aware of the flattening effect of marriage. She stated, ‘the equation of marriage *per se* with “legal heterosexual marriage” rests on what has been excluded and what continues to sit uncomfortably with the white, middle class, heteronormative ideals and embodiments of legal marriage’.<sup>171</sup> The relative acceptance of Kerryn and Jackie’s marriage rested on the respectability of the pair, however this was complicated by Stricker’s profession. As a primary school teacher, Stricker’s job did cross the threshold of acceptance, as the continued homophobic association of young children and the danger of visible expressions of non-normative sexualities persists. As Baird noted, ‘celebrating Kerryn and Jackie’s status as the first lesbian couple to receive public acceptance risks reinstating a homogenised version of both past and present that privileges certain meanings of “lesbian”, certain kinds of publics, certain kinds of knowledge and memory’.<sup>172</sup> The marriage of Kerryn and Jackie, while receiving much public attention outside of the lesbian press, is just one example of the marriage and commitment ceremonies mediated by lesbian magazines during this period. The coverage of their marriage can be juxtaposed with the intimate depiction of coupledness in the April 1998 “In Bed With...” column, with the conservative front cover distinct from the playful posing of Sam and Kerrie in the column (see Figure 4.5 and 4.6). The elevation of Kerryn and Jackie’s marriage, including in the lesbian media, reflects a transition period in which relationship recognition was no longer for the couple and their close friends and family but was extending to the broader public and the state.

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<sup>171</sup> Baird, “Kerryn and Jackie”, 270.

<sup>172</sup> Baird, 264.



**Figure 4.5 – Front cover of April 1998 issue of *Lesbians on the Loose*, depicting Kerryn Phelps and Jacqui Stricker.**



**Figure 4.6 – Sam and Kerrie from the April 1998 “In Bed With...” column in *Lesbians on the Loose*.**



## STATE RECOGNITION OF LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

### ‘Defacto and doleless’

In the mid-to-late 1990s, activism changed to focus on relationship recognition from the state. This activism would result in changes in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Earlier examples of relationship recognition were seen in ministerial discretion for immigration purposes, which would have to fight to maintain relevance as the Howard federal government changed recognition categories. Before this period, activism targeted decriminalisation, anti-discrimination legislation and HIV/AIDs responses.<sup>173</sup> Barbara Baird stated it was not ‘until the 1990s rights activism had not been premised on the fact that gay and lesbian people form relationships’.<sup>174</sup> Jill Jones suggested factors for the shift, noting the general reform of heterosexual de facto relationships and ‘the growing political and economic power and sense of entitlement among (middle ageing) lesbians and gays,’ connected to growing homonormative expectations.<sup>175</sup> Wayne Morgan located the beginnings of de facto organising to feminist lobbying in the 1970s, which resulted in some protections extended to women in de facto relationships achieved in the 1980s.<sup>176</sup> Baird located the formal start of community-based activism for legal recognition of same-sex relationships to the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby of NSW (GLRL) 1994 report, ‘The Bride Wore Pink’.<sup>177</sup> There were rumblings of marriage activism, but as Baird stated, the issue of same-sex marriage was arguably introduced into the political agenda by Howard himself when in 2004, his government amended marriage legislation

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<sup>173</sup> Baird, “Historical Contexts for a Very Public Australian Lesbian Coupling,” 11.

<sup>174</sup> Baird, “Historical Contexts for a Very Public Australian Lesbian Coupling,” 12.

<sup>175</sup> Baird, 12.

<sup>176</sup> Wayne Morgan, “A Brief History of Relationship Law Reform in Australia,” in *Speak Now: Australian Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage*, ed. Victor Marsh (Melbourne, Australia: Clouds of Magellan, 2011), 144.

<sup>177</sup> Baird, “The Politics of Homosexuality in Howard’s Australia,” 134.

to reflect that marriage was defined as between a man and a woman.<sup>178</sup> As we have seen, though lesbian couples would get ‘married’, they understood the ceremony to be outside of legal recognition and more of a social statement of their commitment. By the end of the 1990s, state legislation would increasingly recognise same-sex relationships.

Community legal activism resulted in achievements in the various Australian states in the early 2000s, which saw some recognition of same-sex relationships. Graycar and Millbank noted that the 1990s activism on this issue was ‘characterized by the absence of any real interest in marriage and instead focused on developing more functional and adaptive models of relationship recognition, primarily through presumption-based models’.<sup>179</sup> This is seen in the 1994 GLRL report, which proposed a dual recognition system, ‘incorporating same-sex cohabiting couples within the existing comprehensive de facto relationship regime and creating a new category for other significant relationships that would not require the parties to be a couple or to cohabit.’<sup>180</sup> In 1999, NSW was the first state to pass legislation redefining de facto relationships to incorporate same-sex couples.<sup>181</sup> In Queensland, a conservative approach was taken to introduce the idea of same-sex de facto recognition, with changes to definitions in limited legislation, with further comprehensive changes in 2002.<sup>182</sup> In 2001, Victoria amended legislation to ‘include cohabiting same-sex couples as ‘domestic partners’ on

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<sup>178</sup> Baird, “The Politics of Homosexuality in Howard’s Australia,” 134.

<sup>179</sup> Reg Graycar and Jenni Millbank, “From Functional Family to Spinster Sisters: Australia’s Distinctive Path to Relationship Recognition Following Marriage,” *Washington University Journal of Law & Policy* 24 (2007): 122.

<sup>180</sup> Jenni Millbank, “Recognition of Lesbian and Gay Families in Australian Law - Part One: Couples,” *Federal Law Review* 34, no. 1 (2006): 9.

<sup>181</sup> Millbank, “Recognition of Lesbian and Gay Families in Australian Law - Part One: Couples,” 10.

<sup>182</sup> Millbank, 18–19.

the same basis as unmarried heterosexual couples,' with continued exclusions from IVF, a privilege afforded to heterosexual couples.<sup>183</sup> Western Australia introduced reforms in 2002 and 2003, with earlier 2001 amendments to 'grant presumed parental status to the consenting female de facto partner of a woman who has a child through assisted means,' the first state to do so and allow a second female parent on the birth certificate.<sup>184</sup> The Northern Territory made similar changes in 2003.<sup>185</sup> In 2003, Tasmania introduced a de facto relationship category and a registration system with no cohabitation requirements for de facto couples.<sup>186</sup> The ACT slowly changed with property division changes in 1994, family provision after death in 1996 and significant amendments made in 2003 and 2004.<sup>187</sup> Finally, South Australia granted death benefits to state employees and in 2004 introduced substantial amendments to de facto, with a three-year cohabitation.<sup>188</sup> Prior to their establishment, the ramifications of these reforms were discussed and debated in the 1990s, with lesbians unsure of pursuing such relationship recognition.

Early discussions on relationship recognition focused on the potential negatives that lesbian couples may face. However, they do highlight the legal ramifications of such invisibility. Writing to *Lesbian News*, Marion noted how her family was affected, not considered a family unit for Medicare, and not recognised as next of kin for superannuation. She required decent life insurance to ensure her family was protected

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<sup>183</sup> Millbank, "Recognition of Lesbian and Gay Families in Australian Law - Part One: Couples," 15, 17.

<sup>184</sup> Millbank, 21, 23.

<sup>185</sup> Millbank, 24–25.

<sup>186</sup> Millbank, 26.

<sup>187</sup> Millbank, 29–31.

<sup>188</sup> Millbank, 32–33.

after her death.<sup>189</sup> However, Marion was sceptical about marriage, connecting it to patriarchal control, aware of the connection to the religious statement of union and commitment and civil/legal agreement.<sup>190</sup> In an article for *Lesbians on the Loose*, Madeline Shaw educated readers, drawing from material the Lesbian and Gay Relationship and the Law event at Mardi Gras in 1992.<sup>191</sup> She noted issues around death, funeral rights, property rights, custody provisions, employment benefits and problems when someone was experiencing serious illness and disability.<sup>192</sup> Shaw noted that her experiences with the law had not always been positive, with others feeling similarly, and it had made them wary of the state.<sup>193</sup> Further, she noted how relationship recognition could affect social security. This issue was picked up by Chris Sitka in 'Defacto and doleless' in 1993. She noted that the trade-off between legal recognition and access to welfare was that women might become ineligible for the dole in a recognised de facto relationship, leading to the loss of independent income.<sup>194</sup> In Sitka's feminist analysis, 'the married couple as an economic unit is an anachronism that benefits no one except men who still earn the higher wages resonant of their patriarchal status'.<sup>195</sup> Not all the articles on relationship recognition highlighted the potential negatives associated with feminist critiques. By 1994, a shift can be seen in the discussion of possible relationship recognition. Focus shifted onto keeping women up to date on changes occurring. *Lesbiana* showcases this change seen in the 1999 article 'Law Reform Update,' detailing

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<sup>189</sup> Marion, "In Sickness and In Health," 2.

<sup>190</sup> Marion, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Madeline Shaw, "Our Relationships and the Law," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1992, 9.

<sup>192</sup> Shaw, "Our Relationships and the Law," 9.

<sup>193</sup> Shaw, 9.

<sup>194</sup> Chris Sitka, "Defacto and Doleless," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1993, 7.

<sup>195</sup> Sitka, "Defacto and Doleless," 7.

debates around Victoria's potential amendments to de facto status.<sup>196</sup> When dealing with particularities of legal relationship recognition, lesbians weighed their options. Very aware of the ramifications of invisibility to significant issues such as entitlements, insurance and decision-making, there were reasons to seek legal relationship recognition. However, feminist critiques were also present, unsure about hetero-legal recognition and what that would mean for lesbian understandings of their relationships.

### **Immigration**

An early example of federal relationship recognition was for immigration purposes. As Hart noted, 'from 1985 until 1997, it was possible for new couples to begin their relationships in Australia or overseas and within six months apply for residency'.<sup>197</sup> This distinct period resulted from activism from the evolving Gay Immigration Task Force and ended due to conservative backlash from the Howard federal government, which imposed new requirements.<sup>198</sup> The opportunity in the 1980s to develop modes of gay immigration was made possible due to the Labour governments, which were in power from 1983 to 1996.<sup>199</sup> The application of ministerial discretion was significant to achieving immigration approvals for partners, with couples appealing to the Minister for Immigration to recognise their relationship. Many partners attempted to use familial definitions to gain entry to Australia, requiring the Department of Immigration to develop internal policies toward homosexual couples.<sup>200</sup> The Human Rights

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<sup>196</sup> "Law Reform Update," *Lesbiana*, July 1999, 4–5.

<sup>197</sup> John Hart, *Stories of Gay and Lesbian Immigration: Together Forever?* (Florence, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 2.

<sup>198</sup> Hart, *Stories of Gay and Lesbian Immigration*, 2.

<sup>199</sup> Hart, 3.

<sup>200</sup> Hart, 11.

Commission spent two years reviewing the *Migration Act* of 1958, during which ‘the issue of homosexual relationships, migration, and discrimination had become personalized in the form of specific and visible cases on which the Department of Immigration had to make decisions’.<sup>201</sup> Further, lobbying efforts had expanded with task force groups in NSW, Victoria and the ACT.<sup>202</sup> In 1985, a meeting between the Task Force and the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs led to the arrangement in which homosexual couples would be considered at ministerial discretion if they had ‘a genuine and monogamous relationship of at least four years standing with an Australian citizen or resident’.<sup>203</sup> This time requirement was reduced to thirty months in 1989. The Interdependency visa category was created in 1991, understood as significant to gay and lesbian couples.<sup>204</sup> ‘This regulation enabled those who qualified to apply for a temporary visa to enter Australia and then apply for permanent residence based on their relationship with the Australian sponsor’.<sup>205</sup> A two-year extended eligibility temporary visa would then be granted, and if the relationship were still ongoing after this, they would be given a permanent visa.<sup>206</sup> The magazines celebrated these changes, as seen in the *LOTL* articles ‘Law Changes: Overseas Lovers Can Stay’ and ‘Lesbian Visa-bility’.<sup>207</sup> This category would be disrupted by changes made by the Howard federal government in 1997. These changes and relevant activism were discussed within the magazines, recalling the stories of women immigrating and resistance to Howard’s changes.

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<sup>201</sup> Hart, *Stories of Gay and Lesbian Immigration*, 14.

<sup>202</sup> Hart, 23.

<sup>203</sup> Hart, 26.

<sup>204</sup> Hart, 2.

<sup>205</sup> Hart, 2.

<sup>206</sup> Hart, 2.

<sup>207</sup> “Law Changes: Overseas Lovers Can Stay,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1991; Stevie, “Lesbian Visa-Bility,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1991, 12–13.

The interaction between immigration cuts and the conservatism of the Howard government was explored in the 1997 *LOTL* article, 'The Long Goodbye'. Deborah Singerman introduces the topic in the context of general immigration restrictions, which connected to population and immigration anxiety discussed in Chapter 3. Singerman noted that the Interdependency category numbers had been cut in half, and pre-application requirements had been tightened with a required year of cohabitation.<sup>208</sup> The article aimed to provide a human face to the process, with Deborah and her Australian partner Cathy having experienced the process in the late 1980s.<sup>209</sup> Several other couples' stories were also detailed. Significantly the level of commitment and difficulty in communicating their relationships to heterosexual bureaucrats was noted as an issue. One woman stated, "It's hard having to define yourself in heterosexual terms".<sup>210</sup> As Judith Butler described, 'to be legitimated by the state is to enter into terms of legitimation offered there and to find that one's public and recognizable sense of personhood is fundamentally dependent on the lexicon of that legitimation'.<sup>211</sup> Medical fitness is referenced by another woman, stating, 'It seems to be a contradiction in terms, having to be so emotionally interdependent and still being a sane person'.<sup>212</sup> Without the clear relationship recognition in the form of acceptable modes, such as marriage, the process had a significant impact on the relationships tested by the process. One couple noted that counselling helped them understand the full effect of the lack of

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<sup>208</sup> Singerman, "The Long Goodbye," 6.

<sup>209</sup> Singerman, 6.

<sup>210</sup> Singerman, 7.

<sup>211</sup> Judith Butler, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 17.

<sup>212</sup> Singerman, "The Long Goodbye," 7.

recognition and the constant need to prove it.<sup>213</sup> However, at the heart of this article is the emphasis on love being central to their motivations, helping couples make it through.<sup>214</sup> Immigration relationship recognition required couples to conform to bureaucratic expectations of committed relationships. It also represents an early example of federal relationship recognition, which makes it unique during this period as amendments to federal de facto arrangements would not be finalised until 2008 under the Rudd government. The opportunity undertaken by the Task Force and the Minister in the 1980s to utilise discretion and the eventual creation of a new category allowed for many couples to live out their relationships in Australia. The magazines reminded readers of the significance of changes and documented people's experiences who went through the process. At times it was difficult, but love motivated the couples, their relationships were understood as significant and recognisable.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter explored the place of intimate relationships within the magazines. The discursive construction and sometimes de-construction of lesbian sexualities and identities was examined, in particular tracing the ongoing influence of political imaginings of lesbian feminist cultural practices from the 1970s, with critiques of patriarchy featuring heavily. These conceptualisations were explored in Jenny Pausacker's discussions of "rules", and her reflections on these ideas over time. Further constructions of lesbian sexuality as inherently intimate, intense and committed were questioned by lesbian sex radicalism, as explored within *Wicked Women*, which

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<sup>213</sup> Singerman, 8.

<sup>214</sup> Singerman, "The Long Goodbye," 8.



highlighted recreational sex as part of lesbian intimate relationships. These ideas around lesbian sexuality influenced discussions of intimate partner violence within the magazines, which questioned assumed norms around power and equality within lesbian relationships. Finally, the last section noted the place of representations within the publications as part of activism for relationship recognition. Increasing attention was paid to achieving some form of legal recognition for lesbian long-term relationships to secure entitlements and protections afforded to their heterosexual counterparts. This chapter highlighted discursive creations of lesbian intimate relationships within Australian lesbian periodicals, from politically influenced modes of dating and commitment to legal articulations of relationship recognition, documenting these changes over time. This next chapter will follow similar examination of lesbian cultural practices within the magazines, connecting dress and fashion to subcultures and lesbian identities, including those discussed here in the 1970s lesbian feminist and lesbian sex radicalism.

## **Chapter 5 – ‘From Docs to Stilettos’: the Exploration of Fashion and Dress within Australian Lesbian Periodicals**

Fashion and dress significantly impacted the expression of lesbian identities displayed and discussed in the magazines, particularly by the 1990s. This chapter will describe how dress functioned as an identity marker, from butch/femme, lesbian feminist to the lipstick lesbian. Further, dress as a history that women tapped into will be examined, noting how lesbians reinvented and re-engaged with older presentations of lesbianism, influencing their own identities. This is seen in the discarding and then reappraisal of the butch/femme identities. By the late 1990s, many lesbians had embraced different forms of dress, all representative of lesbian visibility in different ways. However, there was an element of fabrication and consumerism emphasising the distinction of the 1990s from earlier periods. The magazines played a role in articulating and representing lesbian dress, from articles and letters to the editor, to advertising in the publications themselves.

Dress as a political expression will be discussed, noting the role of lesbian feminist ‘uniform’ and the adoption of new forms of dress with the emergence of sex radicalism. In this manner, fashion and dress became visible markers of community membership. Identifiably lesbian modes of appearance helped to solidify community bonds in which members could recognise others. This included subcultures such as sex radicalism, in which desire was encoded in the clothing and mannerisms they adopted. However, this also makes dress divisive. In the time period discussed within this thesis, multiple

moments of division were often signalled through the expression of a new style of dress. This is seen in the rejection of early butch/femme by lesbian feminists. Further, the split between sex radical lesbians and lesbian feminists was signalled through fashion and dress. Dress was heavily influenced by political outlook, seen as a visible marker of one's perspective. The 1990s provides significant scope to discuss fashion and dress, the culmination of the 1980s trends. In this period, women were encouraged to dress freely, leading to multiple discussions about the place of fashion and dress. Finally, the place of lesbian chic and the mainstream interest in lesbian dress and the lavender dollar will be explored. Dress provided productive points of interpretation for the expression of identity and how it changed and adapted over time as Australian lesbian identities evolved. With their connection to community and visual aspect, the magazines provided a medium for women to discuss and debate fashion and dress.

### **What is fashion? What is style?**

Both fashion and style have broad meanings. Scholarly work on fashion and history and the intersection of fashion and dress with lesbian identities is useful to define these terms. To begin, I draw on Anne Hollander's definition of fashion 'as the clothing that everyone puts on in the morning to go about their day's business'.<sup>1</sup> For Australian lesbians, clothing has played an important role in projecting politics, such as with the Uniform, subcultural affiliations with sex radicalism, and professionalism in terms of lesbian chic. Patrizia Calefato believed that 'clothes, covering, the objects with which we

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1994): 11, quoted in Malcolm Barnard, "Fashion as Communication Revisited," *Popular Communication* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2020.1844888>.

adorn ourselves, the signs that engrave and decorate us are the forms through which our bodies relate to the world and to other bodies'.<sup>2</sup> Clothing, packaged as distinct styles, indicated various subcultural connections in Australian lesbian communities. The magazines added to this display through the slow diversification and increased importance of fashion to lesbian identities and expressions. Clothing can perform 'the ideological function of either a bridge (community cohesion), or a fence which keeps identities separate'.<sup>3</sup> The policing of dress and identity expression slowly evolved within lesbian magazines as new magazines and identities proliferated. This process culminated in the 1990s with articles detailing the distinct fashion identities expressed.

Style, within this chapter, combines the fashion aspect of dress with mannerisms and embodied modes of being that encapsulate various styles. This chapter will explore this topic further when discussing diverse lesbian dress identities, such as the 1950s/60s butch/femme and lesbian sex radicals. Part of dress is the mannerisms and affectations promoted by particular modes of dress which encompass the physical expression of identities. Although consumption habits do play into understandings of style, for lesbians, this often takes on different political meanings. This will be explored further in the discussion on lesbian chic in the early 1990s, which had ramifications on lesbian understandings of dress and identity. Lewis and Rolley note that 'fashion itself is

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<sup>2</sup> Patrizia Calefato, "Fashion and Worldliness: Language and Imagery of the Clothed Body," *Fashion Theory* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 1997): 69, <https://doi.org/10.2752/13627049779754534>.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Maynard, "Dress for Dissent: Reading the Almost Unreadable," *Journal of Australian Studies* 30, no. 89 (January 1, 2006): 107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443050609388096>.

understood to be both inherently heterosexual and inherently trivial'.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I challenge these ideas, exploring the increased significance of fashion, dress and lesbian identities from the 1970s to the early 2000s. As Reddy-Best and Jones noted, 'the media is understood as a space where the knowledge and meaning of lesbian identity (e.g. how they look and act) is constructed, circulated, and contested'.<sup>5</sup> In particular, my focus on Australian lesbian periodicals reveals distinct local identities expressed within the magazines and their connection to broader political and cultural movements. I will discuss how dress reflected community connections and tensions, demonstrating its significance in exploring Australian lesbian communities and media.

### **“THE WHOLE BIT”**

To fully understand the transition and diversification of presented lesbian styles, some context needs to be built around earlier forms of expression. This begins with looking back to the 1950s and 1960s to consider butch/femme couples and identities. This period became incorporated as an imagined lesbian past in which women would re-appraise and reinvent the stylings and identities of this time, beginning in the 1980s. It also builds a point of difference for lesbian feminist dress, which rejected explicit butch/femme coupling and style. For these reasons, I will detail the Australian context of butch-femme and note butch/femme's broader appeal and influence on following decades.

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<sup>4</sup> Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley, "Ad(Dressing) the Dyke: Lesbian Looks and Lesbians Looking," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. Peter Horne (1996: Routledge, n.d.), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly L. Reddy-Best and Katie Baker Jones, "Is This What a Lesbian Looks like? Lesbian Fashion and the Fashionable Lesbian in the United States Press, 1960s to 2010s," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 24, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2019.1685816>.

Drawing on Rebecca Jennings' work on post-war Sydney and the lesbian bar scene, it's debatable whether Australia had a strong butch/femme subculture.<sup>6</sup> However, Jennings' interviews reveal that the dress and identities did impact the scene. In particular, the dress and mannerisms of butch lesbians were recounted in detail, described as 'full drag' with "three-piece suits, cufflinks, ties, the whole bit".<sup>7</sup> Further, some informants note that bar butch women could be threatening and territorial over girlfriends, adding to the expectation of the butch style expressed at the time.<sup>8</sup> Notably, the butch women's expression was highlighted as highly visible compared to their femme companions. The distinct dress style, including a specific haircut, made butch women of the 1950s/60s memorable and visible. This visibility was linked to the repression of masculine dress for women in this period. For many women at the time, there was a sense that dressing masculine was surveilled heavily, especially by police. Jennings noted that many informants expressed uncertainty about whether there was an actual code that restricted dress. One woman stated they couldn't live as men but could dress as one; another said there was a legal requirement to wear three pieces of women's apparel.<sup>9</sup> Jennings suggested that the vagrancy laws were used in NSW to condemn masculine women.<sup>10</sup> Jennings' interviews highlighted that butch/femme dynamics were part of the bar scene in post-war Sydney. Broadly, the informants of this oral history were women who did not fit into this scene, indicating that 'butch lesbians

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<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Jennings, "A Room Full of Women: Lesbian Bars and Social Spaces in Postwar Sydney," *Women's History Review* 21, no. 5 (2012): 820–21.

<sup>7</sup> Jennings, "A Room Full of Women," 820.

<sup>8</sup> Jennings, 820.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Jennings, *Unnamed Desires: A Sydney Lesbian History*, Australian History (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 8.

co-existed with women of more conventional appearance, often sharing the same social spaces'.<sup>11</sup> However, it also left the voices of butch/femme women absent from the record.

Aside from oral history, insight into the butch/femme subculture in Australia can be seen in Marion Paull's account in *The Persistent Desire: a femme-butch reader*, an anthology exploring butch/femme experiences across time and place. Paull wrote from an Australian point of view, having been born and raised in Melbourne, and described briefly living in Canberra and Christchurch, New Zealand. It is challenging to situate Paull's account of her life in clearly defined expressions of butch identity. Paull detailed early in the piece that she struggled with her identity, stating 'being butch, being a passing dyke or whatever other label you put on it now, was at that time not a political statement or a stand taken; it was just what I did'.<sup>12</sup> In this manner, being butch was not a politically motivated identity but part of Paull's innate expression. Paull noted the class element connecting to visual presentation, able to work as a man in blue-collar roles but expected to embrace a level of femininity to perform white-collar roles.<sup>13</sup> Paull worked both roles at different points in her life. Paull's account draws heavily on the place of visual appearance as defining her experiences as butch, with her partners being more feminine comparatively. At various points in her account, she drew attention to dress, both her and her partners. In particular, she describes their clothing for women's dances in Melbourne at the time. For Paull, she wore either a suit, narrow tie and

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<sup>11</sup> Jennings, "A Room Full of Women," 821.

<sup>12</sup> Marion Paull, "A letter from Australia," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle, 1st ed (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 175.

<sup>13</sup> Paull, "A letter from Australia," 174.

pointed shoes or sports jacket and dark trousers, and her partner might wear tight pants and sandals or a 'frock with a full skirt'.<sup>14</sup> Part of her masculine appearance enabled her to be read as a man, protecting her relationships when they lived together, allowing them to slip under the radar of the straight world.<sup>15</sup> In her account, Paull alluded to further expectations of butch/femme life outside of the dress, indicating both sexual and domestic roles. However, she did not follow this pattern with her partners and expressed the belief that others did not either. She stated 'the lifestyles were based on what we all knew – the heterosexual lifestyle. We put on a public façade and invented the rest'.<sup>16</sup> In finishing her account, she described attending a Women's Liberation movement meeting and facing backlash. 'They accused us of role-playing, imitating heterosexual couples'.<sup>17</sup> This criticism will be explored further in the next section, which details the lesbian-feminist dress and its expectations.

There was a presence of butch/femme subcultures within Australia, though it is difficult to ascertain the lived experiences of these women. The oppression that many women faced during this period influenced their lifestyles, as can be seen in Paull's account of living as a passing man to work and protect her and her partners from scrutiny. In Jennings' oral history testimonies, butch/femme couples were remembered for their dress and mannerisms, often recounted by women who were neither, indicating the crossover of this period. Moving into the 1970s, dress and appearance came under increasing scrutiny within the lesbian community with the proliferation of lesbian

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<sup>14</sup> Paull, 173.

<sup>15</sup> Paull, "A letter from Australia," 174.

<sup>16</sup> Paull, 178.

<sup>17</sup> Paull, 177.



feminism. The butch/femme subculture of this earlier period would come under fire, only to be re-evaluated in the 1980s onwards.

## **THE UNIFORM**

The adoption of a specific mode of dress linked politics to lifestyle in the case of lesbian feminists during the 1970s. What is commonly referred to as ‘the uniform,’ clearly indicated a person’s involvement in the political lesbian feminist community. The dress has been described as t-shirts, often referencing a political movement or issue one was affiliated with, jeans or overalls and a general rejection of feminine stylings, such as short hair or a lack of makeup. Categorized by Barbara Creed as between butch and the tomboy, the 1970s lesbian ‘was a dyke – not a butch – whose aim was to capture an androgynous uniformed look.’<sup>18</sup> However, it is difficult to reconstruct the significance of this dress from the periodicals of the time. Little reference to dress was included in lesbian feminist publications, such as *Lesbian Newsletter*. This does not lessen the prevalence of such a style in the Australian lesbian community. The non-examined nature of this style exposes the ubiquity of the expectation, requiring little comment within the magazines. Looking at different sources, including oral histories and images from the time, does illuminate the lesbian feminist dress. It was also heavily reconstructed in the later decades as women began to divest themselves from this style. Further, technological limitations of the 1970s magazine production restricted the visual culture that would develop in later magazines as greater funding and technological

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<sup>18</sup> Barbara Creed, “LESBIAN BODIES: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts,” in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), 101.

advancements allowed for glossy and colourful publications. In this section, the politics of the lesbian feminist uniform will be discussed, helping to contextualise later periods of divergence in fashion and dress.

Developed from the Women's Liberation movement, the lesbian feminist uniform represented a rejection of hetero-patriarchy. It expressed solidarity with other members of the political movement and experimented with visible forms of lesbian self-representation. As many women re-evaluated their lifestyles and relationship to the patriarchy, fashion and dress were analysed in connection. The expectations of feminine beauty standards were seen as connected to male dominance and control of women's appearance. Barbara Creed has stated that the 'lesbian feminism of the 1970s became obsessed with appearance, arguing that the true lesbian should reject all forms of clothing that might associate her image with that of the heterosexual woman and ultimately patriarchal capitalism'.<sup>19</sup> There was also a critique of capitalism captured by this mode of dress. As Arlene Stein stated, 'lesbian-feminist antistyle was an emblem of refusal, an attempt to strike a blow against the twin evils of capitalism and patriarchy, the fashion industry and the female objectification that fuelled it'.<sup>20</sup> This reinvention of dress represented the politics that backed the movement and the spirit of experimentation that enveloped this period. Sophie Robinson noted that her informants had made themselves visible to each other 'through public and bold displays of their lesbianism, and several especially emphasised how they rejected a dress or aesthetic that

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<sup>19</sup> Creed, "LESBIAN BODIES," 101.

<sup>20</sup> Arlene Stein, "All dressed up, but no place to go? Style wars and the new lesbianism," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle, 1st ed (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992), 432.

might be read as dressing for the male gaze, developing their own look and cultivating a 'lesbian gaze'.<sup>21</sup> The Uniform was significant to the visibility of the movement and the expression and development of lesbian feminist politics. It also fostered a sense of belonging and connection to the other women participating in the movement.

The lesbian feminist aesthetic did not sit with everyone who participated, leading to backlash and questioning. Part of this was the sheer prevalence of the look, which led to insecurity in those who did not look like a lesbian in these terms or were too conformist for those with broader aesthetic expressions. Notably, the style promoted androgyny as part of its imagining of equality. As Jennings noted in the Sydney bar scene during this period, 'much of the conflict between members of the older bar scene and the new political cultures was expressed through dress, being centred on differing understandings of how to articulate a lesbian identity and challenge assumptions about heterosexuality and femininity.'<sup>22</sup> As Marion Paull's experiences indicated, butch/femme was deemed connected to heterosexual modes of living, accused of replicating heterosexual roles and reinforcing gender norms. Arlene Stein articulated this imagining, noting 'butch-femme roles, at least in their prefeminist incarnation, linked sexuality, appearance, and, frequently, economic position in a highly ritualized way'.<sup>23</sup> In the search for perceived equality of appearance, the uniform could have a flattening effect. This can be linked to the collective politics of the period, which reinforced the unifying aspect of the dress. However, over time individuals would

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<sup>21</sup> S. C. Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s" (PhD, Sydney, University of New South Wales, 2018), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jennings, *Unnamed Desires*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> Stein, "All dressed up, but no place to go?" 434.

question whether this style worked for them. For some, ‘the androgynous “dyke” look was too dull, too conforming, but most of all, too *masculine* for women’.<sup>24</sup> This led to questioning the lesbian feminist dress and the diversification of lesbian styles in the 1980s and 1990s.

## **DIVERSIFICATION**

### **Questioning the Uniform**

While it is challenging to discern lesbian feminist attitudes towards fashion and dress through the Australian lesbian publications of the 1970s, beginning in 1980, there was increased questioning of lesbian styles within articles published, especially in the lesbian-feminist-oriented magazine, *Lesbian Newsletter*. In a sense, through these continued questioning of previously held assumptions, lesbian feminist attitudes can be reconstructed and noted how they became static within the community in the decade prior. These reflections of lesbian feminist perspectives are not stand-ins for 1970s thought around fashion and dress but indicate how this period would come to be remembered and represented. This element of remembered representation would be significant by the 1990s, as an imagined 1970s would become a placeholder for rigid political lifestyles which the new diverse styles would build off. This process began with these questioning articles detailing the experiences of some who questioned lesbian styles of the period.

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<sup>24</sup> Betty Luther Hillman, “No Woman Can Be Free... Until She Loses Her Femininity’: The Politics of Self-Presentation in Feminist Activism,” in *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s* (Lincoln, UNITED STATES: Nebraska, 2015), 79.

Beginning in February 1980, *Lesbian Newsletter* presented a group of articles questioning the place of ‘roles’, alluding to butch/femme styles. However, they were not purely comments on this subculture but on lesbian feminism. The first article was a reprint from *Lesbian Tide*, the magazine of the Los Angeles chapter of the lesbian community group, the Daughters of Bilitis. Entitled ‘Are Roles Really Dead?’ the author and several others completed an informal survey of women in New York, San Francisco, LA, and San Diego.<sup>25</sup> To showcase the differing backgrounds of women, participants were split into three groups: old gays who came out pre–Women’s Liberation, radical lesbian feminists, and those with mixed backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> Notably, radical lesbian feminists were defined as against ‘roles’, one respondent referencing dress stating, “we tend to dress androgynously, combining the comfort and utility of ‘men’s clothes with the diversity of colour and dress available in ‘women’s’ clothes”.<sup>27</sup> This is contrasted with the response of ‘old gays’, who tied roles less with dress and state that they can be stabilising for relationships.<sup>28</sup> Notably, it was those of mixed and moderate backgrounds who critiqued lesbian feminist dress, perceiving it to have an element of role-playing, signified by the masculine attire tied to ‘the uniform’.<sup>29</sup> This article is followed by a *Lesbian Newsletter* collective comment, which noted that the decision to reprint this article was to promote discussion of ‘roles’ and prompt letters in response.<sup>30</sup> They stated that this discourse had been limited within the Australian context, as seen in the lack of articles in the 1970s.

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<sup>25</sup> Jeanne Cordova, “Are Roles Really Dead?,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, February 1980, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Cordova, “Are Roles Really Dead?,” 12.

<sup>27</sup> Cordova, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Cordova, 12.

<sup>29</sup> Cordova, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Cordova, 13.

This article was not printed alone but accompanied by a reflection by a presumably Australian lesbian. Introduced as Christine, the piece followed her experiences as a politically moderate feminist and activist, described as in her thirties with a white-collar profession.<sup>31</sup> Focusing her account on her experience at a radical lesbian feminist conference in 1978, she noted that she could not identify any femmes. ‘Everyone was dressed in the butch uniform: boots, jeans, men’s shirts or T-shirts, short hair, and aggressive behaviour, constantly interrupting each other’.<sup>32</sup> Christine felt that her ideas were overlooked, connected to her more feminine appearance and that when her butch partner affirmed her perspectives, her partner was listened to.<sup>33</sup> This was a sentiment that would be repeated as more feminine women described their experiences in lesbian communities. Notably, Christine also took aim at butch/femme, noting that early experiences with lesbians involved in the ‘old world’ as she put it, ‘was the most inhibiting environment I’d ever been in’.<sup>34</sup> Christine’s reflections present an early example of more feminine and politically moderate women being published and examined. She critiqued both lesbian-feminist and butch/femme subcultures as limiting her lesbian expression. The publishing of this account opened the discussion that *Lesbian Newsletter* noted had been limited in the Australian context. Other articles continued this trend in the early 1980s.

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<sup>31</sup> Christine, “In the Board Room and Bedroom,” *Lesbian Newsletter*, February 1980, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Christine, “In the Board Room and Bedroom,” 13.

<sup>33</sup> Christine, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Christine, 14.

*Lesbian Newsletter*, then having rebranded as *Lesbian News*, published 'A Decade of Rules and Roles' by Helen Pasaucker, which explored intersection between dress and relationship roles.<sup>35</sup> Pasaucker described the social experiment of attaching butch and femme identities to members of the collective based on instinct rather than clothing. The results indicated that femmes were understood as more passive, with the butch active.<sup>36</sup> Pasaucker continued the piece by describing how, in the 1970s, 'butch fashion were in vogue -overalls, dirty jeans, etc etc'.<sup>37</sup> The 1970s uniform's preference for more masculine modes of dress is conflated with butch stylings, though arguably, they are different, rooted in the fashions of their period. Pasaucker noted the beginning diversification of dress, stating 'lesbians are getting dressier again,' with 'make-up and jewellery' 'becoming acceptable again (if you pretend not to be serious about them)'.<sup>38</sup> The included caveat is interesting. It could signify the lingering disapproving of make-up and other feminine expressions. Women who wished to re-incorporate more feminine stylings needed to frame their preference as fun, lacking serious investment in the practice to get around critiques. This would frame how encouragement to experiment with different styles portrayed the new styles as free of deep political investment. Another example of a similar rhetorical dismissal of more feminine expressions is seen in a reprint of a *Lesbian Network* article in 1985. The author, signed as 'P-Plater Feminist' stated 'now, to my dismay, as I gradually accumulate a vast horde of discoordinates, angry t-shirts and functional shoes, I discover style rearing it's

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Pasaucker, "A Decade of Rules and Roles," *Lesbian News*, November-December 1983, 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Pasaucker, "A Decade of Rules and Roles," 13.

<sup>37</sup> Pasaucker, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Pasaucker, 13.

beautiful, sexy, gorgeous (sorry, I lost control) oppressive and ugly head'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the author must discredit her interest in feminine fashion to fall back on prevalent feminist critiques. Pasaucker commented on the ubiquity of the 1970s uniform, noting 'I just hope that we won't feel the pressure to all move in the one direction – as happened in the 1970s ... that we will feel a greater freedom to express ourselves as we wish'.<sup>40</sup> From this article, the significance of the 1970s uniform and earlier imaginings of butch/femme is reinforced, necessary to understanding the changing lesbian styles. Further, the place and privileging of masculine dress were noted, with more feminine stylings slowly being re-introduced. These articles articulated the diversification of lesbian dress in the Australian context.

### **Leather, Sex Radicalism and Other Uniforms**

The lesbian sex radicalism of the 1980s has been discussed in relation to the new expressions of lesbian sexualities it promoted. Significantly, lesbian sex radicalism was connected to certain styles and fashions. In the Australian context, *Wicked Women* exemplified and grew this community. The magazine itself was part of this visual culture, featuring erotic photographs with specific fashion focuses. Further, the written aspects, both fiction and articles, highlighted the erotic nature of clothing and dress. This style will be examined in this section, looking at how sex radical women dressed and how the wider Australian lesbian community interpreted this.

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<sup>39</sup> P-Plater Feminist, "What Shall i Wear? What Shall i Wear?," *Lesbian News*, September-October 1985, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Pasaucker, "A Decade of Rules and Roles," 13.



The founders of *Wicked Women*, Jasper Laybutt and Lisa Salmon, then a couple, had been experimenting with sex radical styles in public, facing backlash in Sydney.<sup>41</sup> In a brief history of the magazine, published as part of its third anniversary, Laybutt described how Salmon had a lit cigarette stubbed out on her and drinks thrown at them at Mardi Gras 1988.<sup>42</sup> Sex radicalism embraced S/M and fetish elements, leading to the valorisation of black leather, studs and the incorporation of uniforms, in particular military dress. Early support for *Wicked Women*, as well as for Laybutt's personal expression, came from S/M gay male subcultures, with the fashion translating across communities. The dress was part of the erotic charge, seen in the fiction printed by *Wicked Women*. One story describes the sexual actor as 'dressed in black tights, black boots, studded belt, a black leather singlet,' representing elements of the style.<sup>43</sup> This dress drew influence from international trends as well. In "Skirting the Issue", Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry discussed lesbian fashion, predicting trends for the 1990s.<sup>44</sup> They described the visibility of leather, drawing the onlooker into 'a web of fantasy'.<sup>45</sup>

Aside from leather, the use of uniforms exemplified the element of play and dress-up. Laybutt wrote an editorial describing the fascination. He stated 'Cowgirls, bikers, nurses, hookers, nuns, soldiers, leathergirls, sex queens, cops, riding mistress, school girls... all of these are uniforms, role-playing uniforms that we choose to present to

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<sup>41</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 270.

<sup>42</sup> "Disexion," *Wicked Women*, 1991, 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> Claire, "Away From Home," *Wicked Women*, 1988, 6.

<sup>44</sup> Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry, "Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s," *Feminist Review*, no. 34 (1990): 67-78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395306>.

<sup>45</sup> Blackman and Perry, "Skirting the Issue," 70.

others as a character in keeping with our fetishes'.<sup>46</sup> The place of dress was significant to expressions of sexuality and intimately tied to the wearer's identities. Blackman and Perry referenced uniforms in their discussion, stating 'within this culture, wearing uniforms for sex implies an exchange of power'.<sup>47</sup> Laybutt noted that the Australian scene was small at the time, seen in the isolation and condemnation he and Salmon experienced when they publicly asserted their sex radicalism. He encouraged other women to dress up, contemplating the state of lesbian dress. He stated, "Are our wardrobes really so dull? Is it all a matter of economics? Are we too afraid of our peers?"<sup>48</sup> These questions allude to the ubiquity of interpretations of the 1970s uniform and the ongoing pressure against sex radicalism. Uniforms also faced critique when fetish wear overstepped the bounds of political acceptability. The military uniform could be controversial if the historical context was ignored. A letter to *Wicked Women* indicated that though uncommon, issues around symbols would come into these spaces. In the letter from 1990, a woman detailed how she confronted a woman for wearing a swastika to the event.<sup>49</sup> Although there were no detailed discussions around this issue, there were questions about appropriateness at venues.

Uniforms denote solidarity, as discussed within the 1970s context. This was also true in sex radical spaces. Laybutt, having experienced both the gay and lesbian S/M and sex radical scenes, placed hope in the coalition, hoping to engage both communities.

Notably, Laybutt labelled *Wicked Women* as an apolitical magazine, his actions outside

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<sup>46</sup> Jasper (Francine) Laybutt, "Editoria: Uniformity," *Wicked Women*, 1989, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Blackman and Perry, "Skirting the Issue," 70.

<sup>48</sup> Laybutt, "Editoria: Uniformity," 2.

<sup>49</sup> "FeMail," *Wicked Women*, 1990, 5.

the publication indicated a keen interest in political activism filtered through sex radicalism. His desire for coalition and activism led to the creation of G.O.D in 1990 with Lisa Salmon and another woman credited as Jade.<sup>50</sup> The group were highly visible in their patches and uniforms.<sup>51</sup> Lisa Salmon recalled that the acronym refers to the religious higher authority, as well as taking on multiple meanings such as ‘Girls of Dishonour, Guys of Disgrace, Girls on Drugs’.<sup>52</sup> The group helped protect each other in a time when Sydney experienced high levels of gay bashing alongside police harassment.<sup>53</sup> Salmon said that uniform and the camaraderie it encouraged drew the attention of the wider lesbian community.<sup>54</sup> In an interview with Robinson, Kimberly O’Sullivan noted that “they were so cool,” people at the bars commenting, “Don’t look at them, or they’ll bash you!”.<sup>55</sup> The group also fundraised for gay and women’s charities through ‘slave auctions’ connecting sex radical aspects with political activism.<sup>56</sup> Robinson noted that the group, although brief, with their politics, their uniform and sexual appeal, were emblematic of the Sydney lesbian sex radical scene, ‘cool, intimidating, seemingly exclusive, and highly provocative’.<sup>57</sup> The place of dress defined identity and connections.

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<sup>50</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 276; Lisa Salmon, “On the G.O.D Gang of Sydney’s 1990s, Queer Objects and Archives,” Archer Magazine, March 17, 2022, <https://archermagazine.com.au/2022/03/queer-objects-archives-lesbian-history/>.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 276; Salmon, “On the G.O.D Gang of Sydney’s 1990s, Queer Objects and Archives.”

<sup>52</sup> Salmon, “On the G.O.D Gang of Sydney’s 1990s, Queer Objects and Archives.”

<sup>53</sup> Salmon.

<sup>54</sup> Salmon.

<sup>55</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 276.

<sup>56</sup> Robinson, 276.

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, 277.

Another aspect of the lesbian sex radical dress was the incorporation of butch/femme. A discussed part of the dismantling and critiquing of the 1970s filtered through discussion of roles broadly associated with butch/femme. As sex radicalism played with roles through an erotic lens, the revitalisation of butch/femme played into the scene. This revitalization leant into aspects of play and dress. For femmes, *Wicked Women* published photos that juxtaposed lingerie with the harder materials of leather and chains to create an image of the sex radical femme.<sup>58</sup> Kimberly O'Sullivan articulated this revitalisation, especially when she took over as editor in 1994.<sup>59</sup> She discussed the evolution of her identity, noting that she 'struggled to be androgynous'.<sup>60</sup> She stated, 'as a femme in the '90s, I look for ways that I can honour both the old butch/femme world but live in a new femme way'.<sup>61</sup> She published Mel Henry's account 'Being Butch' during her editorship.<sup>62</sup> Henry noted how butch-femme lingered underneath the 1970s uniform, referencing ripping off the overalls to reveal jocks or lingerie.<sup>63</sup> This metaphor indicated the visual aspect of these identities, embodied through dress. Butch/femme are larger identities than just style and dress, encompassing sexualities, mannerisms and appearance. The sex radical revitalisation reinvigorated playful elements in these older identities. The embrace of butch/femme, sometimes denoted as 'neo butch/femme', during this period was neither 'nostalgic nor retrograde,' but a 'complex exploration of their sexual and gender identities'.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, the lesbian sex radical

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<sup>58</sup> *Wicked Women*, 1988, 14.

<sup>59</sup> O'Sullivan, "Editoria," 4.

<sup>60</sup> Kimberly O'Sullivan, "Different Rhythms," *Wicked Women*, 1992, 27.

<sup>61</sup> O'Sullivan, "Different Rhythms," 29.

<sup>62</sup> Mel Henry, "Being Butch," *Wicked Women*, 1994, 24–25.

<sup>63</sup> Henry, "Being Butch," 24.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, "The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s," 269.

scene utilised style and dress to embody their desires and identities, incorporating elements from the broader S/M scene, such as leather and uniforms, and reinvigorating older lesbian identities of butch/femme.

## **MAINSTREAMING**

The 1990s represents the mainstreaming of lesbian visibility, leading to the assimilation of the diversification of lesbian styles. Although more feminine dress had increased in attention within the magazines, Robinson noted that during the mid-1990s, ‘a certain butch look (much more so than femme) had become a common and somewhat a ‘uniform’ in the Sydney lesbian scene, complete with shaven or short, cropped hair, leather, and jeans’.<sup>65</sup> This description shows various elements from previous and emerging styles incorporated into the lived lesbian look. The uniformity and jeans connected to 1970s style, while the leather could allude to the increased acceptance and popularity of the sex radical fashion. However, this look needs to be contrasted with what was shown and discussed within Australian lesbian magazines at the time. The emergence of more mainstream visibility was credited with the rise of lesbian chic, a commercial take on the lesbian dress. Further, multiple women with more feminine dress expressions would continue to write about their experiences within a sometimes-hostile lesbian scene. During this period, there were an increasing number of articles and letters discussing lesbian fashion, often deconstructing past styles to find something new. This section will explore the mainstreaming of more feminine lesbian styles through lesbian chic while noting the lived experience of women in the scene. Further,

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 268.

this section will note how historical styles have been utilised and how a new 1990s was constructed. Connected to this idea was how fashion styles became shorthand for political views during this period. The 1990s represent a productive time in lesbian fashion, connected through the promotion of new forms of identity making and marking. The magazines were placed as a visual medium to explore these new styles while documenting the forms of exclusivity experienced by women.

### **Lesbian Chic**

During the early 1990s, the 'lesbian chic' phenomenon entered the cultural vocabulary. Referring to the use of debatably lesbian imagery to sell products, lesbian chic emerged as a fashionable alternative to past imaginings of lesbian visibility. Situated during a period of lesbian fashion revival and experimentation, lesbian chic was the up lifted vision of lesbian dress, filtered through a commodity fashion lens. As Danae Clark noted, 'dress as resistance becomes commodifiable as chic when it leaves the political realm and enters the fashion world'.<sup>66</sup> Lesbian chic, as a phenomenon, has been much discussed within scholarship.<sup>67</sup> It was also a topic mediated within the magazines, with Australian lesbians displaying a range of reactions to its popularity. This section will examine these discussions, noting the dissonance between the imagined lesbian chic and the lived, as evidenced within the magazines.

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<sup>66</sup> Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," *Camera Obscura*, no. 25/26 (1991): 193.

<sup>67</sup> Turner, "CATCHING THE WAVE: Britain's Lesbian Publishing Goes Commercial," 774; Erin Rand, "An Appetite for Activism: The Lesbian Avengers and the Queer Politics of Visibility," *Women's Studies in Communication*, no. 36 (2013): 124–25; Farhall, "'Girl-on-Girl Confessions!' Changing Representations of Female-Female Sexuality in Two Australian Women's Magazines," 219; Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism."

As Robinson noted, the Sydney scene had solidified around a certain butch or masculine look, which devalued more feminine expressions of lesbian dress.<sup>68</sup> This is distanced from the glamorous imagery of lesbian chic. Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley analysed several 1990s fashion spreads that engaged in lesbian imagery in the high fashion context. Part of the analysis was a personal investment in lesbian readings and enjoyment of fashion magazines.<sup>69</sup> They broke down elements of fashion spreads that evoked lesbian sensibilities, part of lesbian chic. Elements of cross-dressing and butch imagery were utilised by fashion magazines.<sup>70</sup> However, they were often part of a parody, heightened as unreal rather than a naturalised example of butch women.<sup>71</sup> Further, Lewis and Rolley note the use of gendered couples in fashion spreads, indicating lesbian imagery through the stylised binary of masculine and feminine dress.<sup>72</sup> Another element suggested by Lewis and Rolley is ‘Lesbian moments,’ in which fashion spreads would draw upon understood historical eras, places and people significant to lesbian historical imaginings.<sup>73</sup> These settings invoke the lesbian, communicated further through physical proximity and touches.<sup>74</sup> Lewis and Rolley note ‘in viewing these spreads, lesbians were able to recognize a (recently constructed) narrative of the lesbian past along with popular looks from the lesbian present’.<sup>75</sup> Finally, ‘twinning’ is the last element examined by Lewis and Rolley, though understood

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<sup>68</sup> Robinson, “The Lesbian Presence in Feminist, Gay and Queer Social Movements in Australia, 1970s-1990s,” 268–69.

<sup>69</sup> Lewis and Rolley, “Ad(Dressing) the Dyke: Lesbian Looks and Lesbians Looking,” 178.

<sup>70</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 185.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 185.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 187.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 188.

<sup>74</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 188.

<sup>75</sup> Lewis and Rolley, 188.

to be more ambivalently lesbian than the others.<sup>76</sup> Lewis and Rolley's analysis indicates the popular elements of a high fashion spread in creating lesbian chic, though focusing on the lesbian gaze deconstructing these images. Lewis and Rolley noted the pleasure they and many others gain from viewing these images. This is true of Australian lesbians, as fashion-focused articles, and even fashion spreads themselves, proliferated within the magazines (see Figure 5.1 and 5.2).<sup>77</sup> However, the lesbian chic phenomenon also faced lesbian critique when leaving the realm of the lesbian gaze.

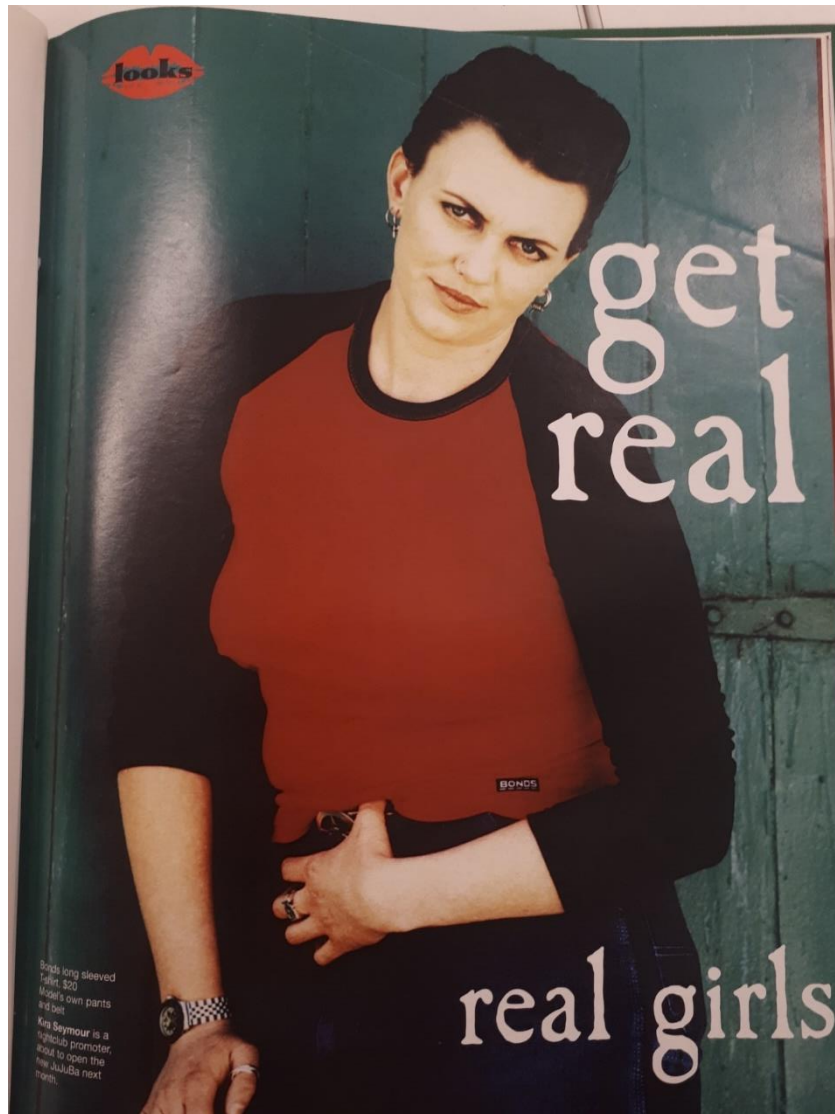


**Figure 5.1 – Lip July 1997 n.1 looks section p.27**

<sup>76</sup> Lewis and Rolley, “Ad(Dressing) the Dyke: Lesbian Looks and Lesbians Looking,” 189.

<sup>77</sup> An example is Julia Hancock, “From Docs to Stilettos...: Lesbian Fashion Statements,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1993, 16-17.





**Figure 5.2 – Lip n.3 1997, looks section p.27**

Responses to lesbian chic ranged from uncertainty, particularly with Australian lesbian magazines, to heavy critique, often noted by scholarly evaluations. As Erin Rand describes lesbian chic ‘produced images of lesbianism that were fashionable and marketable but ultimately insubstantial and depoliticized, making lesbian into “a

novelty, a fad, something to be consumed and played with”.<sup>78</sup> This temporary element of lesbian chic was compounded by mainstream media’s attention to the topic and its nature as a fashion, which are understood as limited until the next new thing emerges. This is seen in one response from a *Lesbians on the Loose* survey in 1993, in which a woman responds that lesbians are fashionable “because I read it somewhere”.<sup>79</sup> This response indicated that the origin of lesbian chic was outside of Australian lesbian media, although it was discussed, this particular vox pop was published in the same issue as a fashion deep dive article. In another vox pop examining media representations of lesbians, published in 1997, one respondent noted, ‘It’s very hip at the moment as far as I can see, but it’s all very surface’.<sup>80</sup> From these responses, it seems that some of the Australian lesbian communities did not appreciate or invest in the lesbian chic phenomenon occurring outside of their lived existence. Further, lesbian chic is criticised as heterosexualising the mainstream image of a lesbian.<sup>81</sup> Notably, this is seen in the strained relationship that Australian lesbian magazines had with the women’s magazine *Cleo*.

*Cleo* was a prominent Australian women’s magazine that began in the 1970s. While the magazine was often derided for its limited political stance, Megan Le Masurier re-asserted the significance of its popular feminism in the Australian context.<sup>82</sup> While its exploration of sexuality often focused on heterosexual relationships, it did publish on

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<sup>78</sup> Rand, “An Appetite for Activism: The Lesbian Avengers and the Queer Politics of Visibility,” 122.

<sup>79</sup> Tom Fairweather, “Mouthing Off,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1993, 7.

<sup>80</sup> “Mouthing Off,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1997, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Turner, “CATCHING THE WAVE: Britain’s Lesbian Publishing Goes Commercial,” 774.

<sup>82</sup> Megan Le Masurier, “FAIR GO. Cleo Magazine as Popular Feminism in 1970s Australia” (PhD, Sydney, University of Sydney, 2007).

sexual experimentation amongst women. Le Masurier noted, 'In the *Cleo* advice column, especially towards the end of the seventies, we hear not moralism or prescription but support and a pluralistic acceptance of different sexual practices'.<sup>83</sup> *Cleo* remained fairly popular with lesbian readers, with market research in 1994 indicating that 56% of readers didn't identify as heterosexual, with almost 1 in 5 identifying as lesbians.<sup>84</sup> This was publicised within *Lesbians on the Loose* under the title 'Chic sells sapphic sex,' connecting this prevalence to the popularity of lesbian chic. Further, *LOTL* kept close watch of *Cleo*, with quotes highlighting the erotic potential of lesbian sex featuring in the "Great Moments in Media" section.<sup>85</sup>

*Lesbiana* had a slightly different perspective. The Melbourne magazine maintained its connection to earlier explicitly lesbian feminist media, leading to the publication of more substantial critiques of lesbian chic. For example, columnist Jodie Joyce took aim at the magazine's 1997 advertisement for its Bachelor's List. In her column 'Queer Accessories', Joyce described the ad, which featured two women sharing a bed suggestively reading the Bachelor's List issue of *Cleo*.<sup>86</sup> Joyce pointedly joked about the many interpretative possibilities behind this ad, often connected back to the disregard for lesbian identities.<sup>87</sup> In one suggestion, she noted, 'the joke is on us ('you really thought that the two women would emerge as lesbians: are you serious?')'.<sup>88</sup> Joyce

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<sup>83</sup> Le Masurier, "FAIR GO," 203.

<sup>84</sup> Frances Rand, "Chic Sells Sapphic Sex," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1994, 1, 3.

<sup>85</sup> "Great Moments in Media," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1996, 16; "Great Moments in Media," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1996, 13; "Great Moments in Media," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1996.

<sup>86</sup> Jodie Joyce, "Queer Accessories: The Meaning of Cleo," *Lesbiana*, March 1997, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Joyce, "Queer Accessories: The Meaning of Cleo," 25.

<sup>88</sup> Joyce, 25.

repeated *Cleo's* past issues with lesbianism. As stated, lesbian chic found footing in the early 1990s, with *Cleo* stating in 1993 that lesbians had freed themselves from a 'ghastly image problem' and stated that a name change was in order to match the look.<sup>89</sup> Joyce declared the ad as 'the final destination of lesbian chic' in her final interpretative point.<sup>90</sup> In this column, *Queer Accessories*, Joyce often poked at queer media, from advertising to gossip, with a lesbian feminist edge. The move to queer politics did not sit comfortably with some Australian lesbian communities, often those with a history or connection to lesbian feminism. This was highly present within the magazines, reflecting their origins in the Australian context. The need for lesbian space led to the creation of Australian lesbian magazines, limiting their appeal to coalition politics or new forms of queer identities.

These examples discuss the use of lesbian chic within advertising which was significant to the construction of the dress. The element of consumerism further emphasised the contentious place the dress had within lived Australian lesbian communities for some. In *The Lesbian Menace*, Sherrie Inness noted, 'an emphasis on style can encourage an emphasis on surfaces and on buying an endless supply of commodities to keep the appearance of "style," which thrives on constant consumption'.<sup>91</sup> The emerging lesbian consumer subject sat awkwardly for many. The 1990s made this subject possible through the generational change and increased spending power of Australian lesbians,

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<sup>89</sup> Joyce, "Queer Accessories: The Meaning of Cleo," 25.

<sup>90</sup> Joyce, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Sherrie A. Inness, "'They're Here, They're Flouncy, Don't Worry about Them': Depicting Lesbian in Popular Magazines, 1965-1995," in *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, USA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 63.

especially readers of *Lesbians on the Loose*. Both *LOTL* and *Lesbiana* collected reader surveys providing some insight into differences in the magazines and the emerging demographics of their readership. For the most part, the age data indicated that both *LOTL* and *Lesbiana* were of a similar age range. *LOTL* readers consistently were majority aged between 25-44, with little breakdown between this group.<sup>92</sup> *Lesbiana* has comparatively limited survey data from the 1990s, with the 1996 survey revealing that 43% were aged between 35-45 and 26% of readers were under 35.<sup>93</sup> This grouping, 25-44, represented a wide range of experiences. Those on the older side would have some observations or lived experience of the Women's Liberation movements of the 1970s. It can only be inferred that part of this group would have engaged with lesbian feminism, potential aligning with some of its politics. The younger side of this grouping would not have this same lived memory of the movement, rather coming of age post this period of activism. Again, it is difficult to assign political leanings through age. However, many of these women would have benefitted from the changes of this period, owing their careers and increased possibilities for income to incorporation of some feminist goals into the workforce. Notably, within *LOTL's* data set, the average reader was likely to be a manager or professional working full time.<sup>94</sup> This connected to the income findings. In 1994, the income levels were higher than the NSW female average.<sup>95</sup> In 1999, *LOTL* readers earned higher than the national average for women.<sup>96</sup> This extra income could be funnelled into consumer goods, such as clothing. Vicki Karaminas paraphrased Linda

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<sup>92</sup> "LOTL Survey Promotes Visibility," 4; "1995 Readership Survey," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1996, 9; "Dykes Under Survey-Lance," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1991, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Jan Campbell, "And so Say," *Lesbiana*, July 1996, 7.

<sup>94</sup> "LOTL Survey Promotes Visibility," 4; "1995 Readership Survey," 9.

<sup>95</sup> "LOTL Survey Promotes Visibility," 1.

<sup>96</sup> "1999 Readership Survey," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 2000, 9.

Dittmar, noting that for the latter lesbian chic was ‘defined by class, not sexuality, whose main purpose is to encode power and to give women a place at the crossroads of femininity and authority’.<sup>97</sup> The new lesbian professional class needed a style that would communicate their competence, incorporating stylised power-dressing with sleek and sophisticated silhouettes. This contrasted with early 1970s lifestyles, in which many women lived off the dole and lived to anti-capitalist ideals. By the 1990s, potentially many readers were more politically open to consumer citizenship and had the disposable income to participate. This connected to lesbian chic as women could desire and attain the looks.

Although lesbian magazines have included discussion of fashion and dress, rarely did they indulge in a fashion spread. This left fashion ideas to the abstract, often presented with images of people at events or comics. *Lip* presented their readers with fashion spreads, however most of the models remained people associated with the lesbian community rather than professional models. This was a stated goal of *Lip*. When discussing the Swimsuit issue, acting editor Bridget Haire wrote ‘with our commitment to using real women in our fashion stories rather than professional models, finding the talent for the togs was a challenge’.<sup>98</sup> In the end, they used acrobatic group Club Swing, presenting images of strong, athletic women (see Figure 5.3). The background of the magazine, published by Bluestone Media, jumpstarted the production value of the magazine, however, it was not as lasting as the community-based magazines, even those

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<sup>97</sup> Valerie Steele, *A Queer History of Fashion: From the Closet to the Catwalk* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Fashion Institute of Technology New York, 2013), 215.

<sup>98</sup> Bridget Haire, “Editorial,” *Lip*, 1997, 4.

who became increasingly commercial like *LOTL*. The connections of the larger publisher influenced the advertisements that *Lip* had access to. Notably, several Telstra advertisements featured, including one promoting Telstra Visa cards.<sup>99</sup> The inclusion of fashion spreads in *Lip* represented a divergence from other lesbian magazines explored within this thesis. However, *Lip* retained some essence of questioning, especially of lesbian chic. In an opening article within issue one, then editor, Kelly Gardiner, wrote ‘Lesbian chic, the surge of fetishised popularity on which some lesbians rode in the mid-1990s, may have died down, but its impact on the lesbian community, and the world around us, remains. If only on our credit card statements’.<sup>100</sup> *Lip* engaged in lesbian chic imagery, the promotion of fashion, but its writers and editors also questioned aspects of consumerism, presenting a mixed view.

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<sup>99</sup> “Let Me Show You How to Score a Few Points,” Back Cover.

<sup>100</sup> Kelly Gardiner, “The State of the Lesbian Nation,” *Lip*, July 1997, 13.



**Figure 5.3 – Front Cover of *Lip* n.4 1997**

Lesbian chic led to lesbian representation and imagery created outside of lesbian-owned media. Australian lesbians expressed discomfort at the loss of this control. As Catherine Lumby stated, ‘after years of complaining about their invisibility, the lesbian community is discovering that media visibility comes with its own price tag, the chief cost being a loss over which images of lesbian identity circulate’.<sup>101</sup> Lesbian chic was a brief

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<sup>101</sup> Catharine Lumby and Jill Julius Matthews, “Nothing Personal: Sex, Gender and Identity in the Media Age,” in *Sex in Public: Australian Sexual Cultures* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1997), 13.



fashionable phenomenon that briefly highlighted interpreted lesbian styles outside of lesbian communities. Many Australian lesbians processed this change in multiple ways. As seen in Joyce's column, the issue with the phenomenon became evident through the suggestive use of lesbianism within advertising. However, for other magazines, the dress was incorporated within their imagery, such as *Lip's* fashion spreads. Increasing consumerism and professionalism meant that lesbian chic could be enjoyed by many readers as attainable and desirable. The increased diversification in styles accepted by the broader lesbian community as well as decreasing political currency of rigid lesbian feminism led to an embrace of lesbian chic. However, lesbian media also held space for critiques of the style, the medium of the magazine able to express both sentiments.

### **Celebrating lesbian styles**

In 1993, *LOTL* published an article celebrating the range of lesbian styles. In 'From Docs to Stilettos...: Lesbian Fashion Statements,' Julia Hancock established that 'dykes are definitely the darlings of the 1990s as politicians, newspaper proprietors, music moguls, and publicans fall over themselves to court us'.<sup>102</sup> Aspects of this statement connect to lesbian chic and the rise in lesbian celebrities, as utilised by the City Kia car dealership advertisement described in Chapter Two, with its reference to sportswoman, Martina Navratilova and musicians Melissa Etheridge and k.d. lang. Hancock relates this newfound appreciation to the increasing diversity in lesbian dress. Hancock reiterated that clothes were 'the fundamental method by which we express ourselves and our appearance reveals much about who we are and how we feel'.<sup>103</sup> Although the

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<sup>102</sup> Hancock, "From Docs to Stilettos," 16.

<sup>103</sup> Hancock, 16.

androgynous dress was popular, Hancock noted a re-appropriation of feminine dress. She said that previously demonised fashion accessories deemed as patriarchal under the lesbian feminist dress were re-emerging 'to suit their own political purposes'.<sup>104</sup> Clothing and material referenced by Hancock, corsets and leather, connect to the sex radical dress, indicating that the fashion had been adopted more broadly.<sup>105</sup> Hancock referenced older lesbian feminist styles, such as the uniform, without critically engaging in the politics that defined this look. Further, she linked this look to discrimination against lesbians, seen in the statement 'The myth of the ugly, hairy dyke was an all-too-convenient stereotype for lesbophobes to use as a weapon against us'.<sup>106</sup> This assessment limited the critique of the uniform. Although the conformity of the uniform tired over time, its anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist politics were represented clearly. The diverse 1990s instead showcased a choice politics that encouraged an individualist dress sense. This is seen in particular in Hancock's description of body hair trends. In the associated segment to the article, 'The A-Z of Dyke Fashion,' H deemed hair to be 'only on your head'.<sup>107</sup> This is in contrast with an earlier article in Melbourne-based magazine, *Labrys*, in which facial hair was to be embraced as the last frontier of hair acceptance.<sup>108</sup> *Labrys* argued that 'one of the most empowering things about being lesbian is that you don't have to conform to social conditioning or pressure and to have choices'.<sup>109</sup> Increased diversity in lesbian styles helped individuals to express their own identities. However, Hancock's push for beauty standards, reclaimed as choice politics,

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<sup>104</sup> Hancock, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Hancock, 17.

<sup>106</sup> Hancock, 16.

<sup>107</sup> Hancock, 16.

<sup>108</sup> LNC, "Hair!," *Labrys*, September 1991, 11.

<sup>109</sup> LNC, 11.

limited the political critique of lesbian fashion, which is distinctly different to previous styles that had emerged.

In contrast, *Lesbiana* published an article detailing the range of dress, focusing on what the author observed on Brunswick St, Fitzroy. This article categorised several fashion styles in a tongue-in-cheek tone, often highlighting the humour in each representative identity. Kim Dorin noted the changing fashion landscape, stating that picking out what to wear is ‘not an easy decision for an ageing lesbian with a blurred view of lesbian ethics’.<sup>110</sup> She listed nine types: the Uniform, the Punk, Leather Dyke, Bull Dyke, Lipstick Lesbian, Crossed-dressed, Androgynous, Femme, and Butch.<sup>111</sup> Dorin noted that the Uniform was ‘cheap and easy but a little passe,’ indicating the falling popularity of the dress, recognised in generational changes.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, the Lipstick Lesbian look described does not align with other understandings of the look, often portrayed as generally feminine.<sup>113</sup> Dorin’s Lipstick Lesbian was reminiscent of feminine stylings of sex radical fashion, with her emphasis on black and piercings.<sup>114</sup> A travel article from South-East Queensland-based magazine, *Dykewise* noted that femme standards were higher in Melbourne than Brisbane, with leather emphasised in the account.<sup>115</sup> Dorin ended the piece with a reminder that these categories were a guide only, more of a result of Dorin’s people watching than strict types. Although they both showcase the evolving,

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<sup>110</sup> Kim Dorin, “THERE’S SOMETHING HANGING IN MY CLOSET,” *Lesbiana*, February 1994, 12.

<sup>111</sup> Dorin, “THERE’S SOMETHING HANGING IN MY CLOSET,” 12.

<sup>112</sup> Dorin, 12.

<sup>113</sup> Dorin, “THERE’S SOMETHING HANGING IN MY CLOSET,” 12.

<sup>114</sup> Dorin, 12.

<sup>115</sup> Alda, “Chit Chat Melbourne,” *Dykewise*, April-May 1996, 20.

diverse styles found in Australian lesbian communities, this article presented each as an idiosyncrasy of lesbian dress rather than building up the old over the new.

The increased emphasis on individual styles, did not always sit comfortably as diversity could be seen as division. From *Women Out West*, editor Ruth Wykes wrote:

‘Except that what we do then is to mirror the worst behaviour that we've come to expect for ourselves. So if Lipstick Lesbians make us feel uncomfortable because they challenge our femininity, we'll trash them. If flannie dykes make us feel uncomfortable, we'll call them ugly bush pigs. If leather dykes remind us that we have sex, or that we are sensual, we turn our noses up at them. If political dykes attempt to speak on our behalf, we pull apart everything they say and call them liars. It's a great way to not accept people into our community - to label, and then reject them.’<sup>116</sup>

Note how dress became shorthand for identity. This could be good for recognition and visibility, in which one's identity was clearly communicated to others. However, it could promote tension. This was repeated with the emergence of each new style, the 1970s Uniform adherents critical of the butch/femme styles of the previous decades. The Uniform itself came under scrutiny in the 1980s, with the distinct dress of the sex radical subculture exposing participants to harassment. Dress made visible political and subcultural affiliations, bonding those with the in-group and excluding others on the out.

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<sup>11626</sup> Ruth Wykes, “In Search of the Mythical Lesbian Community,” *Women Out West*, September 1999.

## **Articulating the Lipstick Lesbian**

To complete this discussion on the increasing diversity of lesbian styles, especially the growing critique of lesbian chic, I will turn to articulations of the lipstick lesbian. As stated above, it was unclear what identifying as a lipstick lesbian entailed. Kim Dorin's typecast draws more from sex radical dress, still highly feminine. Jodie Joyce provided a different analysis, connecting the concept to what has been described as lesbian chic. Notably, both were published in the same magazine, *Lesbiana*, though Joyce's column was published two years later. In her other column, 'Tales from the Archives,' Joyce provided "A Brief History of the Lipstick Lesbian".<sup>117</sup> Joyce was a volunteer at the then Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives and, through this column, often discussed lesbian history. Joyce located the media attention to the lipstick lesbian to 1993, the peak of the lesbian chic phenomenon. She stated, 'the media findings were common, consistent and conclusive: having thrown out her overalls, slimmed down, found a decent hairdresser and a matte lipstick, this new-fashioned lesbian was declared fit for public consumption'.<sup>118</sup> As discussed, this statement captured the mainstream use of lesbian chic as a marketable image, as Joyce summarised 'both consumer and consumable'.<sup>119</sup> Joyce provided a robust analysis of the lesbian chic phenomenon as perceived from an actual Australian lesbian perspective. However, this was only one perception and understanding.

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<sup>117</sup> Jodie Joyce, "Tales from the Archives: A Brief History of the Lipstick Lesbian," *Lesbiana*, September 1996, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Joyce, "Tales from the Archives: A Brief History of the Lipstick Lesbian," 7.

<sup>119</sup> Joyce, 7.

Other women who felt linked to the lipstick lesbian identity articulated their experiences within the magazines through various means. Notably, beginning in 1998, *Lesbian on the Loose* published Laura Duerden's comic 'Libby Lipstick'.<sup>120</sup> The comics centre on self-described lipstick lesbian Libby, placed in various experiences participating in lesbian communities (see Figure 5.4). A running theme was Libby's difficulty in being recognised in her identity as a lesbian.<sup>121</sup> What identifies Libby as a Lipstick lesbian is just general femininity, with her long hair, makeup and sometimes long nails.<sup>122</sup> However, this comic series did articulate a lesbian experience that reflected others and a need for this to be represented. Several letters across the 1990s described experiences of women being turned away from lesbian venues for looking too feminine.<sup>123</sup> The place of feminine lesbians within Australian lesbian communities and their media was not settled. This is linked to the multiplicity of experiences within communities. The critique of the use of lesbian chic and lipstick lesbian in mainstream media sat aside articulations of lived experience in lesbian media. Both display the critical analysis that Australian lesbians possessed of how they were understood and represented—the magazines allowed for multiple voices and expressions. Further, the magazines as a medium allowed this in various forms, from letters, articles and comics.

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<sup>120</sup> Laura Duerden, "Libby Lipstick: The Club Scene," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1998, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Laura Duerden, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Being a Lipstick Lesbian," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1998, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Duerden, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Being a Lipstick Lesbian," 17.

<sup>123</sup> Examples include Sarah Barnett, *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1995, 12; Trish, "Too Femme for a Dyke," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1999, 19; "Femme Power," *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1999, 18.



**Figure 5.4 - “Advantages & Disadvantages of being a Lipstick Lesbian” by Laura Duerden, *LOTL*, Nov 1998 p.17**

## CONCLUSION

Travelling through lesbian dress has explored various lesbian identities and how they evolved over time. Starting with the 1950s and 1960s butch/femme subculture provided a grounding and history that women would return to in creating and imagining new identities for themselves. The solidarity and perhaps conformity of the 1970s uniform provided a recognition point, lesbian feminists living their politics. However, depictions of this style within the magazines were limited due to technological limitations at the time. The 1980s began a process of questioning, often looking back and evolving new understandings of roles and butch/femme. Further, the sex radical dress pushed the limits of many but eventually was incorporated into lesbian dress. Printing advancements allowed *Wicked Women* to capitalise on the visual aspect of this subculture through the publishing of photographs. Finally, the 1990s attempted to

understand where femininity sat within the community. Many women articulated their struggles to be seen as lesbians within the magazines. The magazines also played host to critiques of how the mainstream media utilised images of lesbians, analysing how lesbianism was communicated as well as how these often-feminine depictions defanged the politics and values of lesbian lifestyles of previous decades. The diversity of expression by the 1990s pushed an individualist pursuit of lesbian expression. Fashion and dress have played significant roles in expressing lesbian identities. This was mediated within the magazines, attempting to articulate changing expressions and identities, drawing from lesbian lived experiences. The next chapter will further delve into the identity work of Australian lesbian magazines, considering the inclusionary and exclusionary practices of the periodicals.



## **Chapter 6 – “Inclusiveness Exaggerated”: Lesbian Identities and Australian Lesbian Magazines**

This thesis has traced various debates and discourses within Australian lesbian magazines, often linking to conceptions of identity and community. This last chapter will confront this theme further, considering how the lesbian communities of Australia have been constructed and who has been included or excluded over time. This chapter will highlight how the medium of the magazines allowed some voices to be heard and others dismissed. The experiences of non-Anglo lesbians will be detailed in connection to the magazines, noting when race and ethnicity are foregrounded and are absent from the content. In particular, the rise of content from the voices of marginalised ethnicities in the 1990s will be contextualised. Further, the place of men and adjacent issues will be considered. This section will include debates on the utility of coalition politics, with lesbians increasingly returning to mixed political groups with gay men, with some tension. This concept also provides for the place of related sexualities and gender identities and their ties with the lesbian community. In this section, I will examine why and how this insecurity around these identities is linked to uncertainty around lesbian identity and its connection to men. The Lesbian Space Project of the 1990s will be detailed as an example of the themes of this chapter, noting the difficulties in creating physical lesbian space. Questions on who was to be included are central to this project, leading Australian lesbian communities to question their own definition of ‘lesbian’. Through these sections, I consider definitions of lesbian identities, asking who is speaking within the magazines, who is heard and who is excluded.

Before delving into the material, I will explore the medium of magazines and how they function to produce stable ideals of reading communities. Elizabeth Groeneveld noted that ‘the magazine asserted that there *was* such a thing as lesbian culture, and it provided readers access to the representational practices of that culture’.<sup>1</sup> The various Australian lesbian magazines do this same work in their particular local context. As Barbara Baird stated, the magazines ‘create space where debates about, and creative interventions into, the intersections of discourses and practices of sexuality with discourses and practices of race, gender, class, ability, and other social and cultural differences, can flourish’.<sup>2</sup> Concerning this chapter’s analysis, who is included in this conversation must be noted and examined. Editorial choices to publish specific articles and letters to the editors, to promote or limit debate must be considered, as well as the potential for mediation of certain voices. Again, Baird noted, ‘these debates signify the fiction of any notion of unified “lesbian community,” and too often the hegemony of white, Anglo, middle-class able bodies in lesbian public spheres, no less than any other in Australia’.<sup>3</sup> The space of magazines is significant for community production, though they can reproduce exclusionary practices that reflect lived experiences. As Groeneveld stated, ‘the act of reading a magazine, therefore, is about far more than simply consuming information or entertainment: it is a personal and intimate activity closely tied to individual and collective identity formation’.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will historicise the

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Groeneveld, “Letters to the Editor as ‘Archives of Feeling’: On Our Backs Magazine and the Sex Wars,” *American Periodicals* 28, no. 2 (September 2018): 161.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Baird, “Contexts for Lesbian Citizenships across Australian Public Spheres,” *Social Semiotics* 14, no. 1 (April 2004): 74.

<sup>3</sup> Baird, “Contexts for Lesbian Citizenships,” 74.

<sup>4</sup> Groeneveld, “Letters to the Editor as ‘Archives of Feeling,’” 165.

identity work of Australian lesbian magazines, noting the practices of inclusion and exclusion produced and how these changed over time. Further, the medium of the magazines will be discussed in how they function to reproduce these practices, noting authorial and editorial choices.

This chapter looks into the construction of lesbian identity and cross-over points that inflect one's own perception of self. Lesbian identity has been understood differently over time. The tie between the historical mining of lesbian pasts and defining the 'lesbian' is explicit. Who is included? Who can join the imagined lesbian community? What other identities intersect with sexuality? Who is centralised as the 'Australian lesbian' the magazines imagined as the reader? The Australian magazines added other forms of lesbian identification, from the 1970s lesbian feminist to the lesbian sex radical and the chic lesbian, all expressed, produced and represented in the magazines. Each has its own values and practices, which are debated and discussed in the magazines.

### **“CELEBRATING OUR DIFFERENCES”**

Reflective of the participation of marginalised races and ethnicities within the Australian feminist movement of the 1970s, Australian lesbian magazines had limited inclusion of lesbians from non-British backgrounds until the 1990s. Although reader surveys did not ask about the race or ethnicity of readers, engagement with the magazines can be analysed through the inclusion of articles discussing the various experiences of lesbians outside of the Anglo majority. Importantly, questions about who gets to speak and what is assumed will be asked of the magazines. Notably, during the 1970s and 80s, Australian lesbian magazines had limited inclusion of direct articles on

the experiences of marginalised ethnicities. This absence connected to the assumed Anglo focus of second-wave feminism in Australia and can be historicised in this manner. A change occurred by the 1990s, with increasing articles written by women of marginalised ethnicities and races articulating their experiences. Notably, the Sydney Asian Lesbian Network evolved to highlight the complexity of Asian lesbians' experiences. Further, in the 1990s, Indigenous activism developed the Reconciliation movement. This section will explore the absence of significant engagement with marginalised races and ethnicities within the early magazines, noting what this says about the assumed audience and production of such periodicals. The increased involvement in the 1990s will then be discussed, noting who got to speak and when, producing its own assumptions. Through this analysis, the construction of Australian lesbian identity will be examined, considering who was included and excluded at different points and what historical factors influenced this conceptualisation.

### **Anglo-Centricity and the Women's Movement**

The voices of lesbians of marginalised ethnicities are notably limited in early Australian lesbian magazines. It is only when events, such as conferences, are reported that ethnicity is included in the pages of the magazines.<sup>5</sup> This absence of direct accounts speaks to some assumption of the readership of early lesbian magazines, *Lesbian Newsletter* and *Lesbian News*. The Anglo-centric nature of these magazines can be

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<sup>5</sup> For example "Celebrating Our Differences Conference," *Lesbian News*, July-August 1989, 14–15; "9th National Conference of Lesbians & Homosexual Men...", *Lesbian News*, November-December 1983, 33.

connected back to the construction of the Women's Movement within Australia during this period.

Significant to articulating this Anglo-centricity is Adele Murdolo's work on the four Women and Labour conferences which were held between 1978 and 1984.<sup>6</sup> Within this article, Murdolo questions the histories to be written of the post-war Australian feminist movement, with particular attention to how migrant and Indigenous feminists might be understood and represented. The fourth conference was held in 1984 and was themed 'Racism and black and migrant struggles in Australian society'.<sup>7</sup> Murdolo noted that this conference had been presented as a turning point in contextualising racism in the feminist movement.<sup>8</sup> However, Murdolo wished to question its centrality in the politicisation of all feminists about race and ethnic divisions, noting that she wanted to 'question the proposition that immigrant and Aboriginal women began to speak only when Anglo-Australian women began to indicate their intention to listen'.<sup>9</sup> Murdolo examined the dynamic built which has 'operated to ensure that Anglo-Australian women's organizations have been located 'inside' and immigrant women's organisation 'outside' of what is accepted to be the women's movement'.<sup>10</sup> This opposition built is significant to understanding early Australian lesbian magazines, which operated on the assumed norm of Anglo-centricity, or whiteness, though the absence of discussions of other intersecting identities. Further, Murdolo cited Kilic, who noted that the perceived

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<sup>6</sup> Adele Murdolo, "Warmth and Unity with All Women? Historicizing Racism in the Australian Women's Movement," *Feminist Review*, no. 52 (1996): 69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395774>.

<sup>7</sup> Murdolo, "Warmth and Unity with All Women?," 71.

<sup>8</sup> Murdolo, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Murdolo, 71.

<sup>10</sup> Murdolo, 72.

'unity of Australian feminism is based on notions of 'Australian women' and 'Australian feminism' which are universalized from an Anglo, middle-class point of reference and which may, in effect, maintain Anglo, middle-class privilege'.<sup>11</sup> This perception can be applied to early Australian lesbian magazines, centring a distinct lesbian feminist voice.

Discussions of racism and diversity did feature within *Lesbian Newsletter* and *Lesbian News*. They were often centred on specific events, in particular conferences. An early example of this would be Lilitu Babalu's (known then as Sheril Berkovitch) discussion of the 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men.<sup>12</sup> Babalu and another woman presented at a workshop entitled 'Racism and Anti-Semitism and Gay Liberation Cross-class, Cross-cultural relationships'.<sup>13</sup> Babalu noted that similar workshops across conferences often perform two functions; bringing together diverse people to discuss complex issues and providing a forum for a second 'coming out'.<sup>14</sup> Babalu described the isolation of those who tried to bring up difference in broader discussions, different experiences brushed aside in the unity of sexual identity. Further, Babalu was told that her paper was alienating when it should be educating. She responded, 'I for one am sick and tired of educating so-called radicals about their anti-semitism and racism.'<sup>15</sup> This account indicated that issues were present in the lesbian and gay community with dealing with ethnic difference, however, many found space at conferences to voice their

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<sup>11</sup> Segvi Kilic, "Who Is an Australian Woman?," in *Contemporary Australian Feminism*, ed. Kate Pritchard Hughes (Melbourne: Longman Chesire, 1994): 13, quoted in Murdolo, "Warmth and Unity with All Women?," 79.

<sup>12</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, "8th National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men," *Lesbian Newsletter*, October-November 1982, 14–16.

<sup>13</sup> Berkovitch, "8th National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men," 15.

<sup>14</sup> Berkovitch, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Berkovitch, 16.

experiences. Similar accounts of conference workshops described the bringing together of non-Anglo lesbians. Later in the decade, one woman described the comfort and solidarity she had felt at the “Meeting for Jewish Lesbians” at the 1989 National Lesbian Feminist Conference and Celebration in Adelaide.<sup>16</sup> Through these conference recounts insight into the experiences of non-Anglo lesbians was provided, indicating interest in discussions of difference and experiences of Anti-Semitism and racism. Further, informal contact details were passed around at the conferences, preparing the scene for more established support groups to develop into the 1990s.

### **Increasing Support Groups**

In response to the Anglo-centricity of the lesbian community, various races, ethnic and religious groups formed to formalise networks and provide specific cultural support. The earliest documented group was Sydney Asian Lesbians (SAL), detailed in *Lesbians on the Loose*.<sup>17</sup> Their opening paragraph noted that Sydney’s lesbian community can be Anglo-dominated in its groups and meeting places.<sup>18</sup> Founding member Annie Ling stated in an interview in *LOTL* that SAL was formed in March 1990 with the objective ‘to support each other and to promote Asian lesbian visibility in the mainstream lesbian community’.<sup>19</sup> Similar groups formed for other marginalised communities, including the Koorie Wirguls group, focused on Indigenous women, the Melbourne Jewish Lesbian Group and a Sydney-based group for Middle Eastern lesbians.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, Koorie

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<sup>16</sup> “Meeting for Jewish Lesbians,” *Lesbian News*, March-April 1989, 9.

<sup>17</sup> “Asian Lesbians Get Together,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1990, 12.

<sup>18</sup> “Asian Lesbians Get Together,” 12.

<sup>19</sup> Debbie Zwolsman, “Mei Tze Is Also My Name,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1992, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Louise Bell, “Koorie Wirguls,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1991, 11; “Melbourne Jewish Lesbian Group,” *Lesbiana*, August 1995, 4; “Lifting the Veil,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1994, 18–19.

Wirguls organised to receive 10% of money raised from the Lesbian Conference in 1991 as a pay the rent levy, referring to the practice of paying local Indigenous groups in acknowledgement of their sovereignty over the land.<sup>21</sup> These groups aimed to provide cultural connections and support, often also with a political angle, to bring awareness to specific issues.

Interlesbian was a support group in Melbourne that connected lesbians from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds. As Rose Kizinska noted, it was the only support group of its kind in Melbourne between 1993 and 1995.<sup>22</sup> In October 1995, the group held a conference entitled “Sappho Was A Wog Grrrl”.<sup>23</sup> Several of the papers from the conference were later published and give insight into the experience of Interlesbian members and lesbians of Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), as was the language of the time. In Rose Kizinska’s piece, “A Love Letter from NADIA (Non-Anglo Dykes in Australia), she described the limited inclusion of NESB lesbians in the broader lesbian community. Kizinska, through this love letter, noted the various constructions of NESB experiences, from the tokenistic to the furthering othering, calling out the broader lesbian community for its limited inclusive practices and other NESB lesbians for their ignorance of different ethnicities. Connecting this to the magazines, as stated in the 1990s, increasingly articles detailing the experiences of NESB articles were included, however, there is an element of tokenism. Importantly, NESB voices were speaking for

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<sup>21</sup> Bell, “Koorie Wirguls,” 11.

<sup>22</sup> Rose Kizinska, “A Love Letter from NADIA (Non-Anglo Dykes in Australia),” *Journal of Homosexuality* 36, no. 3–4 (February 16, 1999): 159, [https://doi.org/10.1300/Jo82v36n03\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1300/Jo82v36n03_10).

<sup>23</sup> “Sappho Was a Wog Grrl,” *Lesbiana*, October 1995; Kizinska, “A Love Letter from NADIA,” 159.



themselves and their experiences. However, their limited inclusion potentially created a distance from the rest of the content. Further, many of these articles were introductions to new support groups. It was essential to spread this information and make sure connections could be built, but it was also connected to one experience documented by Kizinska. She noted that women who had approached LYNX, the conservative lesbian social group, were often directed to Interlesbian as the group for NESB lesbians.<sup>24</sup> The inclusionary practices of the magazines could be viewed similarly, in which articles by NESB lesbians operated as a part directory to support groups.

The assumed Anglo-centricity produced an assumed Christianity within many of the magazines. In another “Sappho Was A Wog Grrl” published paper, Jewish lesbian Hinde Ena Burstin detailed the Anti-Semitism within Australian lesbian communities. Part of the Jewish Lesbian Group, Burstin expressed the belief that ‘the Jewish community has been far more open to confronting its homo/lesbophobia, than the lesbian community has been to examining its anti-Semitism’.<sup>25</sup> Burstin illustrated the dominance of Anglo-Christianity with the lesbian community through the assumption that Christmas is universal. In particular, she noted that the December 1996 issue of *Lesbiana* was dominated by Christmas content, without ‘a token acknowledgment that many readers are not and have never been Christian’.<sup>26</sup> However, as Burstin noted, this was an assumed universal experience that did not reflect non-Christian experiences. Burstin did

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<sup>24</sup> Kizinska, “A Love Letter from NADIA,” 165.

<sup>25</sup> Hinde Ena Burstin, “Looking Out, Looking In: Anti-Semitism and Racism in Lesbian Communities,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 36, no. 3–4 (February 16, 1999): 147, [https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v36n03\\_09](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v36n03_09).

<sup>26</sup> Burstin, “Looking Out, Looking In,” 148.

include a hopeful post-script noting that in 1997, anti-racism protest was being picked up by queer people and the queer press. She stressed the campaign to have a bookshop in Melbourne closed for its Nazi content, which included a visible queer presence at the Anti-Nazis rallies.<sup>27</sup> This increased attention to anti-racist causes was reflected broadly in the 1990s, with an increase in racism in politics and in society in general.

### **Indigenous Connections**

The late 1980s and 1990s marked a period of significant landmarks for the Australian Indigenous communities, bringing broader discussions of Indigenous affairs to the wider Australian community, including the lesbian community. This renewed attention was consolidated under the Reconciliation movement, which aimed to promote unity between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians, through government apparatus, such as councils, legislation, and reports.<sup>28</sup> Considerable attention was paid to the land rights movement and associated legal cases and government policies in *Lesbiana*.<sup>29</sup> These discussions were filtered through the white perspective for a white audience. Although informative, it can be seen that lesbian activism around Reconciliation was framed as disconnected from their main identity cause, instead incorporated as part of general lesbian feminist activism, which opposed racism and often the state. As discussed in this thesis, 1980s lesbian feminism activism contributed to various other movements, which were expressions of their general politics. Attention paid to

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<sup>27</sup> Burstin, "Looking Out, Looking In," 154; "Nazis Out of Fawkner," *Lesbiana*, March 1997, 14; "Queers, Feminists Say 'Close the Nazi Bookshop,'" *Lesbiana*, August 1997, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Faiza Ways, "Reconciliation Timeline: Key Moments," Reconciliation Australia, May 18, 2021, <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-timeline-key-moments/>.

<sup>29</sup> Barbary Clarke, "WIKed Women," *Lesbiana*, April 1998, 14; Barbary Clarke, "210 Years of Genocide - and Now a Ten Point Plan!," *Lesbiana*, February 1998, 6–7.

Reconciliation and the preservation of Native Title followed this path. I wish to note the construction of this issue outside of their lesbian identity specifically. One example is the article 'Koori Konnections' by Jean Taylor. She noted the various events, specifically arts-related projects, such as exhibitions and shows, happening across Melbourne at the time. However, there is a slight detachment from lesbian and Indigenous identities. Taylor noted that many Koori events were occurring, which 'both acknowledge that there is a still a long way to go and to allow us to take time out to enjoy the range and diversity of Koori culture'.<sup>30</sup> I do not want to dismiss Taylor's piece, as Taylor prominently attempted to get readers to think about Indigenous struggles, seen in her column, 'What Are Dykes Doing in the Year of Indigenous People?', renamed for the year.<sup>31</sup> However, there is a detachment between the 'dyke' and Indigenous people. It seems clear that there is an assumption that the readers were likely non-Indigenous. This assumption is historically influenced as there have been longstanding issues between white feminists, including lesbian feminists, and Indigenous feminists, linked to the Women's Liberation movement. It is clear that Australian lesbian magazines, especially more activist-aligned periodicals such as *Lesbiana*, informed their readers of significant events in Indigenous activism at the time. Further, Indigenous cultural events were important to the scene and that *Lesbiana* readers were encouraged to attend. However, there is a limitation to the inclusion, in which Indigenous lesbian voices were not speaking from inside the lesbian community, rather, white lesbian feminists were encouraging each other. Although attempts were made to be inclusive,

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<sup>30</sup> Jean Taylor, "Koori Konnections," *Lesbiana*, April 1997, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Taylor, "What Are Dykes Doing in the Year of Indigenous People?," *Lesbiana*, July 1993, 15.

the Australian lesbian magazines were based on Anglo-centric assumptions that presumed a white audience. Other voices were occasionally included, however, they were often stand-ins for whole ethnicities and promoting support groups.

## **THE MAN QUESTION**

In considering the inclusionary and often exclusionary practices of Australian lesbian magazines from the 1970s to the 1990s, the question of who is included within the lesbian community and who is identified as a lesbian is significant. Australian lesbians were and are commonly seen as part of a larger LGBT community. However, the construction of lesbian identity within the magazines often limited the discussion and inclusion of other LGBT identities. This is primarily due to the instability around the place of men. As discussed, the identity of the lesbian feminist evolved during the 1970s from lesbian participation in Women's and Gay Liberation. Within the Women's Liberation movement, they faced homophobia. Within Gay Liberation, they faced misogyny. This led to the separate development of lesbian spaces, such as the *Lesbian Newsletter*. The 'man question' was a significant talking point within the Women's Liberation movement. For lesbians, it was more contentious as many embraced separatist ideas to build a women-focused identity.<sup>32</sup> Further, coalition politics, working with gay men, fell out of favour. This frame of lesbian space within the magazines continued through the 1980s. However, the new burst of lesbian publishing of the 1990s brought new identity inclusion questions. Bisexual women were nominally discussed, often to their exclusion because of their attraction to men. Similarly, trans identities

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<sup>32</sup> Sophie Robinson, "The Man Question: Men and Women's Liberation in 1970s Australia," *Outskirts* 31 (November 2014): N\_A.

were discussed but could not be placed within the lesbian experience due to their connections to male identities. For trans women, this resulted in transphobic attacks on their identities as women and lesbians for their perceived male past. Trans men who had previously identified as lesbians, faced questions about their connection to the lesbian community. The proximity to maleness was not always tolerated. This was further exacerbated by the emerging queer politics, which presented itself in contrast to 1970s lesbian feminism and embraced ambiguity and coalition politics. Again, the inclusion of men made it difficult for some Australian lesbians to engage with these politics. This section will consider the ongoing uncertainty around men and maleness in the lesbian community through the often-exclusionary debates within the magazines.

### **Coalition Politics**

This thesis has considered the context of the emerging lesbian feminist identities and politics within Women's and Gay Liberation, noting the wish to create lesbian space for lesbian issues. This is seen explicitly within the lesbian magazines from the 1970s onwards, wishing to cater to the lesbian community. Some lesbian feminists divested their activist efforts from broader coalition politics in the 1970s to focus on lesbian politics. As Fela and McCann discussed, this is a strong narrative within Australian queer histories of this period. They noted, 'this particular 'fragmentation thesis' centres on the idea that a division of gay men and lesbians in political organising is inevitable'.<sup>33</sup> Fela and McCann question this inevitability and attempts in historical scholarship to

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<sup>33</sup> Geraldine Fela and Hannah McCann, "Solidarity Is Possible: Rethinking Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s Australia," *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no. 93 (July 3, 2017): 325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2017.1407634>.

naturalise it as so. In one example, they note that prior to December 1979, *Lesbian Newsletter* included mixed groups and argued for their inclusion in their listings.<sup>34</sup> However, the policy was changed without comment. In their analysis, Fela and McCann stated, ‘the *controversy* surrounding whether lesbians should split from gay men was, even at the time, attempted to be forgotten’.<sup>35</sup> I argue that the magazines continued to serve as a space for negotiation around coalition politics with several articles detailing multiple perspectives on the issue from the 1980s onwards.

In a series of articles within the November-December 1985 issue of *Lesbian News*, this question of working with men is returned to. Three articles discuss the authors’ experience working with gay men, noting the positives and negatives. The first article, ‘A redundant question?’ presented the perspective of Alison Thorne.<sup>36</sup> She said she has been working with gay men since coming out in 1979.<sup>37</sup> She detailed the political principles that accompanied this choice, changing over time. Notably, she stated that this choice faced no ideological dilemmas in the first year.<sup>38</sup> However, the following year, she defended her choice on principle, stating, ‘this was my response to being attacked and criticised by separatists for being in mixed collectives or, more often, I must confess, being the token woman’.<sup>39</sup> By 1985, the anger around working with men had mellowed out for both Thorne and her detractors. Instead, working with gay men was personally evaluated, Thorne said she would not work with gay men or lesbians

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<sup>34</sup> Fela and McCann, “Solidarity is Possible,” 330.

<sup>35</sup> Fela and McCann, 330.

<sup>36</sup> Alison Thorne, “A Redundant Question?,” *Lesbian News*, November-December 1985, 7–9.

<sup>37</sup> Thorne, “A Redundant Question?,” 7.

<sup>38</sup> Thorne, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Thorne, 7.

solely based on their gay and lesbian identities.<sup>40</sup> Thorne listed issues she had faced working with gay men and lesbians, stating, ‘decisions about who we work with should be based on political agreement, not mechanistic formulas’.<sup>41</sup> The second article detailed Karen Charman’s experience working with gay men in a theatre group, ultimately hopeful of the opportunity.<sup>42</sup> The last piece is comparatively pessimistic. Entitled ‘Working with gay men, why bother?’ Margie Kaye noted the limited political scope of some gay men she had worked with.<sup>43</sup> In her experience, Kaye said that many gay men could articulate “good politics” but could not follow through in actions.<sup>44</sup> This refrain was repeated within the previous two articles, however, they noted the ability to select the gay men to work with, aligning political principle with political action allowed for positive experiences of coalition politics. These articles indicated that working with gay men remained an issue and was not a settled position for the lesbian community. While some women could integrate working with gay men into their political principles, others could not. The misogyny and difference of experience exaggerated the gap between gay men and lesbians; for some, it was not worth crossing this boundary.

Negotiations around coalition politics would again be discussed within *Lesbians on the Loose*, prompted by the election of more lesbians onto the Mardi Gras board in the 1990s. Beginning in early 1990, women were implored to join Mardi Gras, which had recently included a higher number of lesbians in positions of power but was looking for

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<sup>40</sup> Thorne, “A Redundant Question?,” 7.

<sup>41</sup> Thorne, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Karen Charman, “Working with Gay Men.,” *Lesbian News*, November-December 1985, 10–11.

<sup>43</sup> Margie Kaye, “Working with Gay Men, Why Bother?,” *Lesbian News*, November-December 1985, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Kaye, “Working with Gay Men, Why Bother?,” 12.

further community support.<sup>45</sup> This was reiterated in an article by Kimberley O’Sullivan in February 1990.<sup>46</sup> She noted, ‘the strong move to gay/lesbian coalition politics in Sydney over the past eighteen months has opened many doors for lesbians’.<sup>47</sup> O’Sullivan stated that lesbian involvement was high on Mardi Gras’ political agenda and was an opportunity for visibility for lesbians. The place of lesbians in Mardi Gras was brought up again in 1994 with the establishment of Dyke Bar at the Mardi Gras Party. A letter to the editor criticised the move, stating, ‘I think it is outrageous that dykes are, effectively, being “ghettoised” at their own party,’ noting that it undermined coalition space.<sup>48</sup> Notably, the response from the lesbian members of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Party Committee to the letter was published in the same issue. They defended the choice, stating that by promoting lesbian space at Mardi Gras parties, more women would be encouraged to attend what had been dominated by gay men in the past.<sup>49</sup> This uncertainty around lesbian space within coalition spaces illustrates the ongoing negotiations of increasing coalition work, with a remaining element of separation between gay men and lesbians. The jostling of Mardi Gras between lesbians and gay men continued into the late 1990s, with Kirsty Machon reporting on the 1997 Mardi Gras programme, stating some gay men criticised the amount of lesbian content, with lesbians doing the opposite.<sup>50</sup> Although coalition politics increased in the 1990s, with Mardi Gras being a significant example, ongoing tensions remained. Working with men representing a gay and lesbian community was being negotiated during this period.

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<sup>45</sup> “Lesbians in Mardi Gras,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1990, 5.

<sup>46</sup> “Lesbians in Mardi Gras,” 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kimberley O’Sullivan, “Lesbians in Mardi Gras,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1990, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Laura Macfarlane, “Dyke Bar Ghettoises,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1994, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Cara Seymour and Lou Glover, “Giving Lip: Dykes Deserve Party Space,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1994, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kirsty Machon, “The Contest for Our Culture,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1997.



## **Bisexuality**

Although bisexuality is a distinct sexual identity, Australian bisexual women have been part of the lesbian community through accessing lesbian media and spaces.<sup>51</sup> The place of bisexuality and bisexual women were contentious within the Australian lesbian media. McCann and Monaghan noted that lesbian feminists rejected bisexuality ‘considering it a dilution of the lesbian feminist movement and a threat to the vision of a lesbian nation’.<sup>52</sup> Bisexuals revealed the permeability of identity boundaries for many. Examples of biphobia can be seen in the May 1993 issue of *Lesbians on the Loose*, which published a Mouthing Off vox pop and Giving Lip editorial comment on bisexuals.<sup>53</sup> Further, bisexuals responded with letters to the editor, showcasing how the magazines’ medium articulated community tension.

Beginning with the Mouthing Off vox pop, women at Leichhardt Hotel were asked, “Would you date a bisexual woman?”<sup>54</sup> Seven out of twelve said no, four said yes, and one said she didn’t know.<sup>55</sup> One response stated: “No, I wouldn’t. Women who like women have a better understanding of women. If they have an understanding of men, that doesn’t count’.”<sup>56</sup> Other responses reiterated similar ideas about bisexual women,

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<sup>51</sup> The 1994 and 1995 *LOTL* Reader Surveys indicated that 6% of respondents identified as bisexual. “*LOTL* Survey Promotes Visibility,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1994, 1, 4; “1995 Readership Survey,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1996, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (London: Red Globe press, 2019), 64.

<sup>53</sup> Stevie, “Mouthing Off,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1993, 5; “Giving Lip: In Two Minds,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1993, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Stevie, “Mouthing Off,” 5.

<sup>55</sup> Stevie, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Stevie, 5.

that they are 'emotionally risky' and that their sexual practices put them in danger of disease.<sup>57</sup> In the published magazine, next to this vox pop is a letter to the editor from members of the South Australian Bisexual Network.<sup>58</sup> The letter appealed to a sense of feminist solidarity. They stated, 'discrimination is one of the major divisive tools of the patriarchy, and through it, we perpetuate our own disempowerment.'<sup>59</sup> On the previous page, an editorial comment was provided in 'Giving Lip: In Two Minds'. In this comment, editor Frances Rand noted that she was unsure about bisexual inclusion. She stated, "Does recognising bisexuals detract from our own identities?" Further, 'I do consider that because bisexuals have the option of heterosexuality they don't have the same experience of discrimination that we have.'<sup>60</sup> All these elements create a sense of pervasive uncertainty and biphobia. Bisexual women's connection to men placed them in proximity to heterosexuality. In the following issue, a bisexual woman wrote a letter to an editor in response to the previous issue's 'Mouthing Off' and 'Giving Lip'. Linda wrote, "I am a bisexual woman, Give me some credit."<sup>61</sup> She addressed the repeated stereotypes. Linda noted that she was isolated from both the lesbian and heterosexual communities. In her 'Giving Lip' editorial, Rand stated that bisexuals were part of the community, no matter how unsure she was.

A more open approach into considering bisexual experiences came from *Lesbian Territory*, a magazine based in Darwin.<sup>62</sup> Bisexuals within the Darwin community were

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<sup>57</sup> Stevie, "Mouthing Off," 5.

<sup>58</sup> Margaret and Sabina, "Biphobia," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1993, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret and Sabina, "Biphobia," 5.

<sup>60</sup> "Giving Lip: In Two Minds," 4.

<sup>61</sup> Linda, "Bi Discrimination," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1993, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Janet Hoskings, "Bisexuality," *Lesbian Territory*, February 1994, 12–14.

asked about their lives and experiences. A few noted that Darwin's scene was much smaller than other cities. Notably, the lesbian and gay community were said to be more difficult to negotiate than the straight community. Hosking noted, 'reasons for biphobia with the lesbian and gay community appear to be based upon fear or upon a political principle.'<sup>63</sup> Further, the place of AIDS was described, usually associated with bisexual men, however, fear of disease was brought up in the *LOTL* vox pop as a boundary against dating bisexual women.<sup>64</sup> The article ends with the growing bisexual networks within Australian cities, providing information about the Australian Bisexual Network based in Queensland.<sup>65</sup> This article presented bisexual experiences, breaking down some of the stereotypes present within the community. Bisexuality was presented as an issue to the dichotomy between gay and straight identities, leading to uncertainty around bisexual inclusion within the lesbian community. While bisexual inclusion briefly popped up as a topic of discussion, sustained and centred attention was not paid to the issue within Australian lesbian magazines.

### **Queer Politics**

The emerging queer politics and identities prompted new discussions around lesbian identity as tied to lesbian feminism. As stated within this thesis, many magazines developed from a lesbian feminist consciousness, defined by the need for lesbian space. Even the less radical magazines in the 1990s had this grounding, even if they strayed from the anti-capitalist viewpoint fundamental to lesbian feminism. McCann and

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<sup>63</sup> Hoskings, "Bisexuality," 13.

<sup>64</sup> Hoskings, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Hoskings, 14.

Monaghan stated that 'in the 1980s, queer was reclaimed by the LGBTIQ community as an umbrella term to designate resistant and non-normative sexuality, seemingly unburdened from the separatist strains that had emerged around gay and lesbian identities'.<sup>66</sup> This distance from separate gay and lesbian identities caused anxiety amongst many writers and readers of Australian lesbian periodicals during the 1990s. Created to maintain lesbian space, queer was often constructed as a threat to this. Clare Hemmings, in her analysis of accounts of the evolution of Western feminism, discussed how queer politics featured in 'loss' narratives.

Loss narratives lament the distillation and reduction of feminism. Hemmings stated, 'Loss narratives *require* the "death of feminism" in order to retain a static and familiar object to be lamented, in order to ensure at all costs that they do not encounter that object in the present, and in order to imagine a future in which that familiar feminism can be recovered by the same subjects as those who keen for its current internment'.<sup>67</sup> Hemmings based her analysis on academic accounts, building from scholarship published in influential feminist journals. However, a similar pattern emerged within the magazines, with some demeaning queer politics. Hemmings noted, 'queer theory comes to represent, and its subject to embody, the worst excesses of abstract postmodernism and poststructuralism'.<sup>68</sup> Further, 'in generational terms, despite (or perhaps because of) its superficiality, queer theory is also actively seductive, turning young feminist heads away from material inequalities, seducing those (not) old and wise

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<sup>66</sup> McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 90.

<sup>68</sup> Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 90.

enough to know better'.<sup>69</sup> For those who tied their lesbian identity to feminist participation, particularly in Women's Liberation and versions of lesbian feminism, the rise of queer politics was seen as threatening to their way of life. The perceived loss of a particular feminism represented a loss of a distinct lesbian identity, constructing a lesbian-specific loss narrative. This narrative featured in some discussions of queer politics within Australian lesbian media, though not all participated in this perspective.

Early discussion of queer politics is seen in *LOTL* with "Where to from Queer?" published in December 1995.<sup>70</sup> Notably, this comment article took a positive approach to queer politics, locating it within a renewed expression of progressive politics. Kath Gelber described the emergence of lesbian identities in the 1970s as an attempt to find space outside of Women's Liberation, with women coming out and then announcing a tie to a lesbian identity and politic. However, Gelber noted that this had changed in the 1990s, with the correlation between gay and lesbian identities and progressive politics having eroded. 'Queer emerged in part as an antidote to the perceived dead end of separatism, and the limitations of identity politics'.<sup>71</sup> Gelber noted the potential of queer politics allowed for broad coalitions and a dynamic movement.<sup>72</sup> This article represents a measured and positive approach to queer politics, which acknowledged space for coalition work.

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<sup>69</sup> Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 93.

<sup>70</sup> Kath Gelber, "Where to from Queer?," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1995, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Gelber, "Where to from Queer?," 21.

<sup>72</sup> Gelber, 21.

This response can be compared to a later *Lesbiana* article, “Queer Becomes You,” published in September 1999.<sup>73</sup> *Lesbiana* generally had a more lesbian feminist perspective than *Lesbians on the Loose*. Written by Jennifer Rice, this article utilised the metaphor of a peace train occupied by different movements. ‘Mr Queer’ was equated as a virus and described using he/him pronouns. Rice wrote that Mr Queer had united the passengers based on commonalities, ignoring divisions. Notably, parties play a prominent role as distractions from political work, as well as ‘Mr Queer’ slipping between ‘*marketplace*’ and ‘*community*’, tying a sense of commercialisation to queer politics.<sup>74</sup> Rice introduced a radical feminist character, ‘Ms Feminist’, to question the peace train, who stated ‘that Queer Nation was manicuring the illusion of peace by disappearing people who were oppressed by the sexism, racism, classism and ableism upon which male-owned movements such as queer depended’.<sup>75</sup> She ended the piece with the ‘Ms Feminist’ character turned ‘Ms Queer’, realising that she had been tricked and experience universalised.<sup>76</sup> This article operated in a similar pattern to Hemming’s feminist loss narratives in which the multiplicity of feminism is reduced to a myopic vision, often blamed on queer politics.<sup>77</sup> This article equated queer politics with growing commercialisation and the party scene. Further, queer was imagined as male-dominated and masculine in focus. This reflected lesbian feminist critiques of coalition activism and gay men. Queer politics and identities did not sit neatly within a lesbian feminist perspective. The distinction between sexual identities was blurred, the openness of the

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<sup>73</sup> Jennifer Rice, “Queer Becomes You,” *Lesbiana*, September 1999, 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> Rice, “Queer Becomes You,” 4.

<sup>75</sup> Rice, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Rice, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*, 61.

category destabilising and disorienting. The identity of lesbians had previously been built on the idea of a women-focused culture and sexual practices. Significantly, the place of separatism put the place of men outside the community. In a way, lesbianism was separated and made distinct from men, understood by their absence. When this was questioned by coalition and queer politics, many felt threatened. The magazines mediated these anxieties documenting the multiple perspectives forming.

### **Transgender Inclusion**

During the 1990s, increasing attention was paid to transgender people and their connections to the broader lesbian community. Discourses around the potential inclusion of both trans men and trans women were developing, though they were limited during this decade. However, the expulsion of trans women from the 1994 Brisbane Lesbian Confest presented an early example of exclusionary politics targeting trans women in the Australian lesbian community.<sup>78</sup> Although discussions of trans identities were limited in the 1990s, the discourse extends to the broader theme of inclusion and exclusion and identifying who is a 'lesbian'. Further, examining this period of trans exclusion reveals the evolving understanding of lesbian feminism and the significance of gender to lesbian identities.

Limited material was published on trans men in the magazines. Jack Halberstam has written extensively on the edges of trans masculinity and butch lesbian identities in the

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<sup>78</sup> Kat Costigan, "Confest Expels Transys," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 1-4.

US, with attention paid to the crossover between the two in the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> However, the policing of such borders between the two identities does not seem to have occurred in the Australian context. The limited extent of the trans masculine community in Australia and the lack of historically defined butch identities as present within the US may explain this difference.

The first article covering trans identity in the 1990s was an interview with Jasper Laybutt, editor of *Wicked Women*, the lesbian erotica magazine.<sup>80</sup> The 1991 interview was published in *Lesbians on the Loose*. Both Sydney-based magazines, *LOTL*, was a straightforward choice for the interview, already having reported on the somewhat controversial Ms Wicked fundraising competitions, proving a connection with *Wicked Women*. Significantly, this interview provided insight into the trans male experience, answering some of the questions readers would have about the transition process. Laybutt openly discussed hormone therapy and the changes that it had produced.<sup>81</sup> Further, Laybutt noted that for many trans men, surgery was neither affordable nor desirable. Laybutt began *Wicked Women* to connect with other sex radical lesbians who wished to explore S/M. Similarly, in this interview, he wanted to connect and communicate with trans men, being a voice for the community. He noted that there was limited support and information available to trans men, and his frank honesty about his transition provided pathways of understanding for cis readers and any potential trans

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<sup>79</sup> Jack Halberstam, "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 287–310, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-4-2-287>.

<sup>80</sup> Julie Price, "Dichotomy: An Interview with Jasper Laybutt," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1991, 14–15.

<sup>81</sup> Price, "Dichotomy," 14.



men. The interview was accompanied by contact details for the support group Boys Will Be Boys, created by Laybutt and friends.<sup>82</sup>

The interview received limited comment from readers in the letters to the editor section. Only one featured disdain for Laybutt. Notably, the letter was published alongside two letters discussing lesbian sex radicalism; one wishing to end the division around the subject, the other berating *LOTL* for featuring ‘SLEAZY DYKES’, which men could easily view. The letter primarily focused on what is included in the ‘lesbian’ magazine *Lesbians on the Loose*. She stated, ‘Initially *LOTL* was about the activities of the Lesbian community’.<sup>83</sup> She followed with an extensive list positioning lesbian sex radicalism as outside such a community. Further, the interview was deemed as letting men into the lesbian community, stating, ‘Now men can be lesbians too!’. This inclusion, while respectful of Laybutt’s identity as a man, ignored the context of the interview, in which Laybutt noted his extensive history with the lesbian community, remaining tied to it while transitioning. The place of trans men within lesbian space was not as heavily debated as trans women. However, in the second piece on trans men within *LOTL*, 1996’s ‘Boychicks’, one interviewee, Sean, stated, “I don’t go to lesbian venues any more. It’s women’s space. I do miss it, but that’s okay.”<sup>84</sup> Pre-empting any pushback against his presence within lesbian spaces, Sean had removed himself. However, like Laybutt, he noted an extensive connection prior to his transition. The boundaries of lesbian identity and community spaces were being discussed concerning trans men, however

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<sup>82</sup> Price, “Dichotomy,” 15; Noah J. Riseman, *Transgender Australia: A History since 1910* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2023), 201.

<sup>83</sup> Debbie Williamson, “*LOTL* Parameters,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1991, 5.

<sup>84</sup> Kirsty Machon, “Boychicks,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1996, 28.

limited. Laybutt's connection to sex radicalism was likely to have been more divisive than his gender identity.

Although experiences of trans masculine identities were not heavily discussed in the magazines, the mid-1990s saw a steep rise in the discussion of trans women. This increased discourse was centred on the initial expulsion of trans women from the Brisbane National Lesbian Conference and Festival in 1994. The National Lesbian Conference and Festival, often shortened to 'Confest', began in 1990, occurring first in Melbourne for the first years before rotating across Australia.<sup>85</sup> The 1994 Confest was held at the University of Queensland and was organised by a committee, including a trans woman, Kathy. Jean Taylor, in her account for her book *Lesbians Ignite!*, described helping organisers and asking after the trans member of the collective, which prompted Taylor to correct her language.<sup>86</sup> Further, Taylor included that she forewarned the organisers of potential trouble, noting 'most lesbian feminists in the capital cities were strictly separatist in their politics'.<sup>87</sup> Aside from the large scenes present within Melbourne and Sydney, the other state capital cities also had smaller lesbian communities. The homophobic policies of the Joh Bjelke-Peterson premiership separated the experience of Queensland lesbians from others across the nation.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *Stroppy Dykes*, 503.

<sup>86</sup> Taylor, *Lesbians Ignite!*, 382.

<sup>87</sup> Taylor, 382.

<sup>88</sup> See: Shirleene Robinson, "Homophobia as Party Politics: The Construction of the 'Homosexual Deviant' in Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland," *Queensland Review* 17, no. 1 (2010): 29–45; Heather Faulkner, "Reframing the Subject/Reframing the Self: Contextualising Lesbian Ontology in North of the Border: Stories from the 'A Matter of Time' Project" (PhD, Queensland, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2014).

Potentially this led them to be more accepting of trans women than lesbians from other parts of the country.

*Lesbians on the Loose* reported that a plenary meeting on the first day of the conference was disrupted by participants demanding the expulsion of trans women participants.<sup>89</sup> As *LOTL* reporter Kat Costigan described, ‘In some of the most aggressive and violent scenes ever witnessed at a lesbian confest, speakers from both sides were booed, heckled, and abused’.<sup>90</sup> The attempts of one trans organiser, Kathy, to be heard were shouted and screamed over. This protest resulted in Kathy and her workshop being excluded from the official program on the second day, though she still held it on the university’s grounds.<sup>91</sup> The *LOTL* report included several quotes from Kathy and an associated article, ‘Always a girl’, on the experience of Leslie Crane, another trans woman. Kathy stated, ‘I’ve had no problem from the lesbian community in Brisbane.’<sup>92</sup> Although the committee expressed that they had lived up to lesbian values through inclusion, they did leave it up to participants to define this. *LOTL* included quotes from three organisers who reinforce their policy of inclusion and reaffirm the lesbian identities of trans participants.<sup>93</sup> Jenny Brown stated, “We respect difference but we didn’t think there would be so much oppression within our own ranks. We can accept what happened but not how it turned into a bloodbath. We can’t accept the violence.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Kat Costigan, “Confest Expels Transys,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Costigan, “Confest Expels Transys,” 1.

<sup>91</sup> Costigan, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Costigan, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Costigan, 4.

<sup>94</sup> Costigan, 4.

Alice Petherbridge's report for *Lesbiana* provided a different perspective on the issue, more supportive of the disruptors, reinforcing the narrative that perceived men were dividing lesbians.<sup>95</sup> Further, according to Petherbridge's reporting, this issue had already caused a rift in the Brisbane organising committee earlier in the year.<sup>96</sup> Both reports emphasised the failure to address the issue in a calm, measured manner and the methods used by some women to disrupt proceedings seen as violent and aggressive.<sup>97</sup> This perception was repeated in some of the letters to the editor in *LOTL* in the next issue.<sup>98</sup> Many of those that did not bring up conflict resolution concluded that trans women should not be included in lesbian space, with one letter suggesting coalition spaces to be more appropriate. Others were supportive, criticising the bio-essentialist perspective of detractors and acknowledging the oppression of trans women broadly. Only one letter was from a trans lesbian, while another was written by the girlfriend of a trans lesbian. Both noted the loneliness and oppression of trans lesbians.<sup>99</sup> Although there was often performed compassion for the experiences of trans women, many upheld the belief that trans women did not belong in lesbian spaces. The place of trans women was significant to the Lesbian Space Project and its imagining of lesbian space.

## **THE LESBIAN SPACE PROJECT**

The Lesbian Space Project (LSP) was one of a long line of experiments in creating lesbian and women's space, broadly defined. The idea bloomed in the early 1990s, with

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<sup>95</sup> Alice Petherbridge, "Dealing with Conflict in Brisbane: The Transgender Debate," *Lesbiana*, August 1994, 5–6.

<sup>96</sup> Petherbridge, "Dealing with Conflict in Brisbane," 5.

<sup>97</sup> Petherbridge, 6; Costigan, "Confest Expels Transys," 4.

<sup>98</sup> Various Authors, "The Trany Debate," *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1994, 10–11.

<sup>99</sup> Various Authors, "The Trany Debate," 10–11.

initial planning beginning in mid-1991 after the Lesbian ConFest had accidentally made a profit.<sup>100</sup> From November 1992, fundraising efforts began in earnest, targeting lesbians across Australia.<sup>101</sup> From there, a series of errors spelled the downfall of the LSP. Influenced by the Brisbane ConFest discussion, trans exclusion divided the LSP.<sup>102</sup> Further, financial issues around securing and maintaining a physical space evolved, contending with Sydney real estate, local council regulations and a fire.<sup>103</sup> Various committees attempted to stem the flow of members leaving the project, leading to a vote for trans inclusion in 1998.<sup>104</sup> However, it was too late, the centre folded, and the building was sold.<sup>105</sup> The remaining money was devoted to community grants.<sup>106</sup> This turmoil, although multi-factored, lingered on the question of what is lesbian space. Through analysis of the LSP and its rise and fall, I will historicise imaginings of lesbian space within Australian lesbian magazines. It will highlight fundamental issues around inclusion, the positioning of queer politics and trans identities outside lesbian communities and setting up a generational divide.

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<sup>100</sup> Frances Rand, "LSP: From Lift-off to Touchdown," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1994, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Georgina Abrahams, "Lesbian Space Project Lifts Off," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1992, 1, 3.

<sup>102</sup> "Lesbian Space for Transys?," *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1994, 1, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Kirsty Machon, "Lesbian Space: Historic Purchase Marred by Dissent," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1996, 4–5; Kirsty Machon, "Chief Source of Income up in Smoke," *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1997, 4; Barbara Farrelly, "Bungle Exposes Lesbian Space to \$100,000 Bill," *Lesbians on the Loose*, May 1998, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Farrelly, "Lesbian Press Muzzled as Trany Vote Passes," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1998, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Frances Rand, "Lesbian Space Sells for \$625,000," October 1998, 5.

<sup>106</sup> "Lesbian Funding Fun," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 2000, 4; "\$10,000 Grant Up for Grabs," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 2008, 9.

Limited histories of the Lesbian Space Project exist, although Baird has highlighted the disunity of Australian lesbian public cultures.<sup>107</sup> Further, the LSP garnered a brief assessment by Graham Willett in his history of Australian gay activism, noting ‘the breakdown of lesbian feminism’s hegemony meant that, for more liberal women, this proposal to restrict LSP seemed harsh, unfeeling and unreasonable’.<sup>108</sup> In this examination, I will further this analysis, locating the conflicting feelings and understandings around what it meant to be a lesbian in Australia during the 1990s. Although LSP histories are limited, there are histories of women’s space in Australia, seen in the Women’s Lands and urban experiments such as the Women’s Warehouse.<sup>109</sup> Frances Rand located the LSP within a legacy of women’s spaces in an article celebrating fundraising achievements.<sup>110</sup> Finn Enke has written extensively on feminist spaces in the US, noting the construction of such spaces always privileges a specific presentation of identities. Notably, Enke states, ‘all feminist-identified spaces constructed a culturally specific version of “woman” as the subject of feminism’.<sup>111</sup> Significantly, the LSP functioned similarly, defining the ‘lesbian’ entitled to lesbian space, to the exclusion of others.

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<sup>107</sup> Baird, “Contexts for Lesbian Citizenships across Australian Public Spheres,” 74.

<sup>108</sup> Graham Willett, *Living out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 261.

<sup>109</sup> Rebecca Jennings, “Creating Feminist Culture: Australian Rural Lesbian-Separatist Communities in the 1970s and 1980s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 30, no. 2 (2018): 88–111, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2018.0015>; Louise R. Mayhew, “‘Volatile, Feral and Glamorous’: Australia’s Women’s Warehouse,” *Art+Media: Journal of Art and Media Studies*, no. 8 (October 2015): 29–34.

<sup>110</sup> Rand, “LSP: From Lift-off to Touchdown,” 6–7.

<sup>111</sup> Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism*, Radical Perspectives (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 37.

The Lesbian Space Project evolved from a lineage of lesbian efforts to secure physical space, particularly in urban areas.<sup>112</sup> Following the Women's Warehouse, the first lesbian space collective tried to find another space, only lasting six months. Another collective in 1985 and 1986 attempted to fundraise; the money was eventually donated to the LSP.<sup>113</sup> At the Black Diamond 1990 Lesbian Conference, Girls Own Space (GOS) was formed by Sand Hall and Anique Lamerduc, folding in August 1991 after rumours of poor financial accountability.<sup>114</sup> Finally, in July 1991, the Lesbian Confest made an accounting error, believing themselves to be in the red, however, through donations made a profit of \$20,000. In August 1991, they decided to ethically invest the money and fundraise for a lesbian centre that was to become the LSP.<sup>115</sup> Plans for the LSP were floated in December 1991 in *Lesbians on the Loose*, defining the project's aims as 'celebrating living as lesbians, giving a high profile to lesbians of diverse backgrounds, strengthening lesbian culture and exploring the politics of living as lesbians'.<sup>116</sup> The official fundraising launch began in November 1992 with a member of the Lesbian Space Group, Georgina Abrahams, explaining the concept in *LOTL*.<sup>117</sup> To incentivise donations, a deadline of 10 December 1993 was chosen to be the final fundraising event, with the goal of \$250,000. If this goal was not met, donations cheques would be ripped up, representing an all-or-nothing approach. Further, a property was to be chosen by then.<sup>118</sup> Abrahams noted, 'it is our wish that every lesbian will be able to express her views and politics freely, and that we can help offer a safe space that encourages plenty

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<sup>112</sup> Rand, "LSP: From Lift-off to Touchdown," 6–7.

<sup>113</sup> Rand, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Rand, 6.

<sup>115</sup> Rand, 6.

<sup>116</sup> Clare Gallagher, "Lesbian Space Plans," *Lesbians on the Loose*, December 1991, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Abrahams, "Lesbian Space Project Lifts Off," 1, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Abrahams, 1, 3.

of options and meets our varying needs.’<sup>119</sup> The following steps included setting up a constitution, structure for effective decision making and co-ordination and seeking tax exemption by becoming incorporated.<sup>120</sup> These goals would be tested throughout the LSP, particularly the major fundraising year of 1993.

The fundraising efforts began in earnest in 1993, with the various mid-1990s Australian lesbian magazines used to promote the cause. Further, the magazines also provided critical space to discuss the LSP, its merits and its pitfalls. Notably, a letter to the editor was sent to multiple interstate magazines to garner interest in the project. The letter by Megan Slinning encouraged lesbians to donate to a physical space for all lesbians, emphasising its non-commercial nature.<sup>121</sup> Further, Slinning noted she was on Austudy and saved for the donation, believing firmly in the project. However, not every reader supported the LSP, and many had questions.

Within *LOTL*, Robbie Wilde’s September 1993 letter to the editor prompted a discussion on the proposed deadline.<sup>122</sup> Wilde stated that she found it odd that they had a deadline, noting that many lesbians were disadvantaged financially. She said, ‘compared to our gay brothers, we are a relatively poor community. OK, OK, some of us are earning mega bucks in the professions and elsewhere.’<sup>123</sup> She asked why the fundraising effort could

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<sup>119</sup> Abrahams, “Lesbian Space Project Lifts Off,” 1, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Abrahams, 1, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Megan Slinning, “Lesbians Deserve a Place to Hang Out,” *Lesbiana*, March 1993, 2; Megan Slinning, “Lesbians Deserve a Place to Hang Out,” *Lesbian Times*, March 1993, 2; Megan Slinning, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lesbian Territory*, March 1993, 4.

<sup>122</sup> Robbie Wilde, “Lesbian Space: Deadline Death,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1993, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Wilde, “Lesbian Space: Deadline Death,” 6.



not take a few years and whether donations could be invested.<sup>124</sup> In the next issue, multiple letters supported Wilde's questioning. Georgina Abrahams wrote to reinforce the LSP's position, stating that the deadline forced action and energy into the project.<sup>125</sup> Closer to the deadline, the LSP announced a two-week extension if they were \$50,000 away from the goal, noting they had received 90 cheques, with a further 300 promised.<sup>126</sup>

Other questions were prompted by the fundraising efforts, particularly from interstate magazines. Inclusion was a significant issue for the Lesbian Space Project. In Adelaide's *Lesbian Times*, the Lesbian Space committee promised that the centre would include 'young, old, mothers, queer, lipstick, wicked, cosmic, feminist, differently abled, sporty, theatrical bar, daggy, coalition, separatist, good time girls.'<sup>127</sup> An earlier article in *LOTL* quashed similar concerns, noting that 'despite the many rumours circulating that SM dykes will not be allowed to use the Centre, the only policy that has actually been decided is that the Centre will be for all lesbians'.<sup>128</sup> The only stipulation that lesbian 'includes only women who were born women' indicated the early adoption of transphobic restrictions.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Wilde, "Lesbian Space: Deadline Death," 6.

<sup>125</sup> Various Authors, "Lesbian Space Deadline Debate," *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1993, 6–7.

<sup>126</sup> "Lesbians Space Project: Not Dumping the Deadline," *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1993, 1.

<sup>127</sup> Lesbian Space Committee, "Lesbian Space Project," *Lesbian Times*, November 1993, 8.

<sup>128</sup> Stevie, "Half Time in the Lesbian Space Race," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1993, 16–17.

<sup>129</sup> Stevie, "Half Time in the Lesbian Space Race," 16–17.

The other question of inclusion included accessibility to interstate lesbians. This issue was highlighted in the discussion of the LSP in the Tasmanian magazine, *Lilac*. An anonymous letter to the editor expressed their concern about funding requests from interstate, noting that ‘here in Tasmania we have a limited number of women who through no fault of their own, on the whole, have limited finances’.<sup>130</sup> The writer believed that it risked local initiatives, which were necessary for the conservative state, with anecdotally, many of the writer's friends either having left or planning to move.<sup>131</sup> In the same issue, a supportive letter promoted the LSP, stating that ‘we need to build on local, national and international support, and we ask you to join forces with us as the potential responsibility for a lesbian space is beyond being Sydney-centric’.<sup>132</sup> New South Wales’s anti-discrimination legislation and Sydney’s resources were noted as significant to the project’s success, not available in Tasmania.<sup>133</sup> The next issue included a supportive letter, refuting the previous negative letter, stating her belief that the LSP could be helpful with Tasmania’s law reform efforts.<sup>134</sup> *Lilac* readers and Tasmanian lesbians did manage to donate to the LSP, with a \$500 cheque sent off.<sup>135</sup> Although, for the most part, the LSP found supporters interstate, tensions would re-emerge after the initial controversial vote for trans inclusion, asking questions of inclusion afresh.

The December 10 fundraising event succeeded, with the LSP reaching their goal. As Frances Rand reported, ‘dreams became reality, prayers were answered and dyke power

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<sup>130</sup> Name withheld on request, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lilac*, November-December 1993, 4.

<sup>131</sup> Name withheld on request, “Letter to the Editor,” 4.

<sup>132</sup> “Lesbian Space Project: Sydney,” *Lilac*, November-December 1993, 22.

<sup>133</sup> “Lesbian Space Project: Sydney,” 22.

<sup>134</sup> Sue, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lilac*, January-February 1994, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Nat & Louise, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lilac*, January-February 1994, 7.

came to the fore as the Lesbian Space Project reached its \$1/4 million target on December 10 at the Sydney Town Hall'.<sup>136</sup> Notably, much of the money was raised in the final moments, including a \$50,000 donation from one woman.<sup>137</sup> A signed Madonna photo was a donation auction centrepiece, jointly sold to lawyer Elizabeth Fullerton and businesswoman Dawn O'Donnell.<sup>138</sup> *Lesbiana's* coverage of the celebrations emphasised that 'this has been achieved without government funds; women have gone out and done this for themselves'.<sup>139</sup> In the coming months, the excitement over the achievement would dull as the financial realities of buying Sydney property sunk in. Further, issues around inclusion would bubble to the forefront, exposed by the Brisbane Confest. These two threads unravelled the Lesbian Space Project, often tied in complicated ways as money and identity intertwined.

The first financial misstep of the Lesbian Space Project was the withdrawal of the \$50,000 pledge. Notably, the woman who donated the amount wished to remain anonymous. However, Abrahams named the donor in an interview with *Capital Q*, which led to her name being widely circulated, including in the lesbian press.<sup>140</sup> This mistake led to an anonymous fax to the LSP calling for Abrahams' resignation and financial accountability from the committee.<sup>141</sup> The LSP vowed to continue fundraising and look at different buying options as soon as possible.<sup>142</sup> The prospect of taking out a

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<sup>136</sup> Frances Rand, "\$1/4 Mil for Lesbian Space: Act of Faith," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1994, 1.

<sup>137</sup> Rand, "\$1/4 Mil for Lesbian Space: Act of Faith," 1.

<sup>138</sup> Rand, "\$1/4 Mil for Lesbian Space: Act of Faith," 3.

<sup>139</sup> "Lesbians Celebrate: We Did It!," *Lesbiana*, February 1994, 7.

<sup>140</sup> Rand, "\$1/4 Mil for Lesbian Space: Act of Faith"; "Lesbian Space up in the Air," *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1994, 1, 3.

<sup>141</sup> "Lesbian Space up in the Air," 1, 3.

<sup>142</sup> "LSP to Continue," *Lesbians on the Loose*, April 1994, 5.

mortgage was discussed, with pushback from the lack of transparency around decision-making, including criticisms of *Lesbians on the Loose* for not following the story close enough.<sup>143</sup> Questions asked in letters to the editor were answered the following month in July 1994, in which the LSP indicated that *LOTL* incorrectly reported on the prospective loan, detailing that the centre had a limited \$300,000 budget to buy in the inner West of Sydney and that over a dozen sites had been inspected.<sup>144</sup> In the August 1994 issue of *LOTL*, Barbara Farrelly reported that LSP was to lease a building, dependent on the outcome of a Development Application to change its zoning.<sup>145</sup> The beginning of 1994 brought on significant financial management questions, with the large donation withdrawal and the potential for loans or leases making some uncomfortable. Further, the LSP had to contend with the increasingly difficult Sydney property market, with Inner West property prices on the rise. However, another event would also push the LSP, with the explosion of trans exclusion discourse driven by the Brisbane ConFest.

Several months after the expulsion of trans women at ConFest, *Lesbian on the Loose* published the first article detailing Lesbian Space Project's position on trans inclusion.<sup>146</sup> The position of LSP had been described prior, with *LOTL* reporting in June 1993 that the LSP had one restriction, that lesbian 'includes only women who were born women'.<sup>147</sup> However, in 1994 there were calls to formalise this position with an

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<sup>143</sup> "Lesbian Space Mortgaged," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 1, 4; Robbie Wilde, "Space Probes 1," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 10; Roz Hanratty, "Space Probes 2," *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1994, 10.

<sup>144</sup> "LSP Mortgage Off," *Lesbians on the Loose*, July 1994, 10.

<sup>145</sup> "LSP Now Leasing," *Lesbians on the Loose*, August 1994, 3.

<sup>146</sup> "Lesbian Space for Transys?," 1, 4.

<sup>147</sup> Stevie, "Half Time in the Lesbian Space Race," 16–17.

amendment to the constitution, voiced by Co-Convenor Sand Hall.<sup>148</sup> Aidy Griffin, part of Sydney Transgender Liberation Coalition, a radical activist group, asked who the LSP was for, “is it a remedial centre for hangover from the seventies?”<sup>149</sup> Hall noted that “the crux of any debate will be the definition of a lesbian,” which LSP member Deni Sevenoaks noted could be ‘profoundly divisive’.<sup>150</sup> The lesbian press contributed, making space for the topic in articles and letters to the editor. The spillage of the issue left the lesbian press and included mixed gay publications, such as the *Sydney Star Observer* (*SSO*). Notably, *LOTL* reported on the dismissal of a complaint against the *SSO*, in which the complainant alleged lesbian vilification in an Aidy Griffin column.<sup>151</sup> Alongside this report, *LOTL* published a transphobic comic dramatising the LSP dispute, reinforcing negative perceptions of trans women as men in dresses.<sup>152</sup> The comic was unsigned and only marginally connected to the story at hand. The division of the lesbian community was exposed by the trans inclusion debate, leading to harsh representations of trans women’s experiences. The place of lesbian media seemed precarious in these debates, with the comic pushing transphobia, but *LOTL*’s proclaimed journalistic aims required objectivity. This uncertain balance can be seen in reporting on the trans inclusion vote of 1994.

Within the same issue as the cartoon, *LOTL* reported on the trans inclusion vote, including their own survey. Significantly, both were present within the same issue,

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<sup>148</sup> “Lesbian Space for Transys?,” 1, 4.

<sup>149</sup> “Lesbian Space for Transys?,” 1, 4; Riseman, *Transgender Australia*, 116.

<sup>150</sup> “Lesbian Space for Transys?,” 4.

<sup>151</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “No Case for Lesbian Hate,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1994, 3.

<sup>152</sup> Farrelly, “No Case for Lesbian Hate,” 3.

speaking to editorial and reader differences in attitudes. The LSP member vote in December 1994 ended with trans exclusion enshrined, however, the actual vote could not reach the required two-thirds majority.<sup>153</sup> Significantly, *LOTL* published a phone survey in November 1994, targeting the Sydney lesbian community more broadly. The division was evident, with 53% for the ban on trans women and 47% against it, indicating that trans exclusion was not evenly supported.<sup>154</sup> Below is the table of results (Figure 6.1), showing the generational split. Significantly, in narrativising the trans debates, a building age divide is evident. As the results show, trans exclusion was supported by the majority of over 40-year-olds, while support for inclusion was high within the younger age ranges.

<i>Should transys be able to become full members of LSP?</i>				
	all callers	under 30	30-39	over 40
<b>Yes</b>	37 (47%)	9 (12%)	20 (27%)	7 (9%)
<b>No</b>	42 (53%)	4 (5%)	12 (16%)	22 (30%)
<b>Totals</b>	79 (100%)	13 (17%)	32 (43%)	29 (39%)

Tally does not include those who called more than once. Only 74 callers stated age.

**Figure 6.1 – Table of results from phone survey on the inclusion of trans women as Lesbian Space Project members, published in the November 1994 issue of *Lesbians on the Loose*, p. 8.**

Alongside this table, multiple quotes were published, contextualising some of the surveyed beliefs. The generational divide was apparent within 30-year-old Brooke’s comment, “Come out of the 70s, this is the 90s and transys are part of us all. We’re all

<sup>153</sup> “Majority Back ‘Genetic Girls,’” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1994, 7.

<sup>154</sup> “Mouthing Off: Poll Shows Split on Trany Ban,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1994, 8.

queer.”<sup>155</sup> Aidy Griffin had similarly placed the LSP’s trans exclusion as a 70s hangover, reinforcing the position of 1970s lesbian feminism as inherently transphobic.<sup>156</sup> The 1990s, in reverse, were built as queer, open and diverse. This framing was a repeated refrain, seen in other issues, such as lesbian dress, discussed in Chapter Five. Those in favour of trans exclusion stressed the need for lesbian-only space, with Zohl de Ishtar, an early LSP committee member, stating, “Tranys have got the rest of the world, we want one space for lesbians.”<sup>157</sup> The fear of encroaching identities emerged again; for de Ishtar, the LSP was to serve as a lesbian space. However, who was included under that label was shifting in the 1990s. The trans debates restricted who was going to define lesbian. Although trans women were at the time often blamed for the division present over the issue, it marked broader changes in lesbian demographics and changing attitudes. This division and change would continue to be discussed the following year, alongside further financial troubles.

In light of the transphobic rhetoric and exclusion, various responses were evident within Australian lesbian media. Former LSP member Georgina Abrahams withdrew her \$20,000 donation before the controversial December 1994 AGM, which voted on trans exclusion.<sup>158</sup> There were calls for the auditors to check the probity of Abrahams’ actions, while a Sydney equity lawyer commented to *LOTL* that Abrahams’ actions were a legal nightmare.<sup>159</sup> The LSP committee stressed that Abrahams’ withdrawal reduced the

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<sup>155</sup> “Mouthing Off: Poll Shows Split on Trany Ban,” 8.

<sup>156</sup> “Lesbian Space for Tranys?,” 1, 4.

<sup>157</sup> “Mouthing Off: Poll Shows Split on Trany Ban,” 8.

<sup>158</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “LSP AGM Calls for Audit,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 3, 5.

<sup>159</sup> Farrelly, “LSP AGM Calls for Audit,” 3, 5; Barbara Farrelly, “A Legal ‘Nightmare,’” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 5.

project's credibility, while conversely, Abrahams believed that the committee's own behaviour had already done so.<sup>160</sup>

Primarily focused on *LOTL*, letters to the editor clarified the ongoing tensions in the face of the LSP division. Zohl de Ishtar, a member of the LSP committee in 1993, noted that trans women had never been members.<sup>161</sup> She mentioned the 1992 survey but noted that trans lesbians were never brought up, even in relation to exclusion, as the issue had not 'gained currency in the community'.<sup>162</sup> de Ishtar noted that 'the committee is obligated to act within the boundaries of the common interpretation of the terms "woman" and "lesbian"'.<sup>163</sup> Significantly the issue exposed the changing 'common' interpretations of both terms within the Australian lesbian community. In the next issue, February 1995, two letters noted the possible exclusion of S/M lesbians. Although not the confirmed division, the debate on trans women could have easily been replaced with the inclusion of sex radicals and S/M lesbians, who had often operated on the fringe of accepted lesbian identities.<sup>164</sup>

Further, the use of interstate proxies for the controversial vote was questioned, reigniting discussion on the accessibility of the LSP to interstate lesbians. *Lesbiana* editor Lilitu Babalu wrote an editorial detailing the exclusion practices of the LSP. She noted that Georgina Abrahams had criticised regional and interstate lesbians who had

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<sup>160</sup> Farrelly, "LSP AGM Calls for Audit," 3, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Zohl de Ishtar, "Tranys Never Members," *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1995, 12.

<sup>162</sup> de Ishtar, "Tranys Never Members," 12.

<sup>163</sup> de Ishtar, 12.

<sup>164</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, "Inclusiveness 'Exaggerated,'" *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1995, 10; Carmela Tassone, "SM Dykes 'Unwelcome,'" *Lesbians on the Loose*, February 1995, 10.



voted by proxy, believing they had ‘contributed little to LSP in terms of money or energy’.<sup>165</sup> Babalu noted her belief that the LSP had hampered fundraising for the Lesbian Centre of Victoria.<sup>166</sup> She ended her piece by stating ‘our reality is that lesbian space, no matter where it is, how temporary it is, or how enduring, always excludes some lesbians whether it is because of their age, race, ability, sexual practice, or because of the way they dress. It was a fantasy to presume that this wouldn’t happen with the LSP.’<sup>167</sup> The Lesbian Space Project’s promised unity was a false hope for Babalu, noting the diversity of tensions exposed within the broader lesbian community.

Following the division over trans inclusion, the LSP never found united footing. The financial pressure of running such a centre was exposed multiple times. The LSP purchased a Newtown building in December 1995, though not without dissent, as members believed they had not been adequately consulted and that the purchase was rushed.<sup>168</sup> The LSP had mortgaged the building, leading to financial uncertainty over time.<sup>169</sup> The LSP changed to Lesbian Space Inc (LSI), leading to a more collective leadership style after the third AGM attended by 30 women. The AGM noted the LSI’s \$10,000 operating loss, the first payment of mortgage principal upcoming.<sup>170</sup> Significantly, in January 1997, a fire gutted part of the building which housed the centre’s primary income source, dealing \$15,000 worth of damage.<sup>171</sup> This loss

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<sup>165</sup> Berkovitch, “Editorial: Is Sydney’s Lesbian Space Our Lesbian Space?,” *Lesbiana*, February 1995, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Berkovitch, “Editorial: Is Sydney’s Lesbian Space Our Lesbian Space?,” 4.

<sup>167</sup> Berkovitch, “Editorial: Is Sydney’s Lesbian Space Our Lesbian Space?,” 4.

<sup>168</sup> Machon, “Lesbian Space: Historic Purchase Marred by Dissent,” 4–5.

<sup>169</sup> Sand Hall, “Lesbian Space at Crossroads,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, November 1996, 9.

<sup>170</sup> Kirsty Machon, “Loss in Space but ‘All Hands to the Bridge,’” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1997, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Machon, “Chief Source of Income up in Smoke,” 4.

furthered the financial instability of the LSI. Over the next few months, members were asked to deliberate on the upcoming mortgage repayment options, including leasing or part-leasing out the building or selling.<sup>172</sup> In October 1997, *LOTL* reported that ‘The Lesbian Space Project’s dwindling membership has again voted against selling the two-storey Sydney warehouse’.<sup>173</sup> The new plan was to lease the building until 2000 when the centre would be relaunched.<sup>174</sup> Financial membership had dwindled significantly after the trans exclusion ban, with only 51 members reported in January 1998, down from a peak membership of 300.<sup>175</sup> Further, an issue with local council regulations resulted in \$100,000 needed to upgrade the property to comply with Marrickville Council standards, with former co-convenors blamed for not securing council approval for the building’s use as a community centre.<sup>176</sup> Finally, in June 1998, *LOTL* reported that the building would be sold only 18 months after opening.<sup>177</sup> It was sold for \$625,000 in September 1998.<sup>178</sup> This did not spell the end of the LSI as an idea, with the limited committee and membership deciding to reimagine the project with the profit of the sale.

Significant to this reimagination of Lesbian Space Inc was the suggestion to include trans women, to be decided by vote. *LOTL* reported on a forum before the new

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<sup>172</sup> Kirsty Machon, “Lesbian Space: Poll to Decide Future,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, March 1997, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “No’ to Lesbian Space Sale,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, October 1997, 9.

<sup>174</sup> Farrelly, “No’ to Lesbian Space Sale,” 9.

<sup>175</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “‘Reconciliation’ for Lesbian Space,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1998, 4.

<sup>176</sup> Farrelly, “Bungle Exposes Lesbian Space to \$100,000 Bill,” 4.

<sup>177</sup> Frances Rand, “Lesbian Space to Be Sold,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, June 1998, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Rand, “Lesbian Space Sells for \$625,000,” 5.

December vote on trans inclusion, following four years of debate.<sup>179</sup> The meeting included the voice of Elizabeth Riley, a trans-woman activist. *LOTL* quoted Riley noting, “Identity is something much more significant than what we are physically.”<sup>180</sup> The opposition voice was Sand Hall, who identified as a lesbian feminist. Hall repeated positions held by trans exclusionists, though pressed to ensure she meant no discrimination, only to differentiate the experiences of trans women and cis lesbians, repeating a performed compassion for trans women, while detaching the group from lesbian identity.<sup>181</sup> Deb Hayes, the now LSI co-convenor, questioned bio-essentialist narratives and aligned herself with trans inclusion.<sup>182</sup>

The outcome of the vote was reported in the lesbian press. The vote passed 43 to 11 to amend the constitution to allow trans women to become members.<sup>183</sup> LSI membership extended to anyone who identified as a lesbian and a woman, ruling out an amendment to restrict to only post-op trans women.<sup>184</sup> However, the larger story was between the two lesbian spaces of the lesbian press and the LSI. *LOTL* reported, ‘After a four-year debate, the Lesbian Space leadership has admitted it deliberately muzzled the lesbian press on the eve of a controversial vote to include transgenders as full members.’<sup>185</sup> This decision was a deliberate strategy, with co-convenor Deb Hayes stating, “We chose to give the story exclusively to the *Star Observer* in light of their positive coverage of the

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<sup>179</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “Low Key, but No Consensus at Lesbian Space Forum,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, September 1998, 23.

<sup>180</sup> Farrelly, “Low Key, but No Consensus at Lesbian Space Forum,” 23.

<sup>181</sup> Farrelly, 23.

<sup>182</sup> Farrelly, 23.

<sup>183</sup> Farrelly, “Lesbian Press Muzzled as Transy Vote Passes,” 5.

<sup>184</sup> Farrelly, 5.

<sup>185</sup> Farrelly, 5.

trany issue”.<sup>186</sup> Further, Hayes criticised *LOTL*’s “negative” reportage of the September forum, which *LOTL* reporter Barbara Farrelly noted that the *SSO* did not cover.<sup>187</sup> The significance of praise for the *SSO* against the lesbian press is notable as the lesbian press was often envisioned against coalition press, which was understood to lack lesbian focus, privileging gay men.<sup>188</sup> *Lesbiana* further criticised this choice, noting that the lesbian media, including interstate magazines, were utilised in the initial fundraising.<sup>189</sup> The imagining of lesbian space within the magazines as a source of lesbian news was questioned by the LSI, furthering divisions. The magazines were their own lesbian space, providing forums for such discussions in their articles, letters and editorials. By excluding the lesbian press from the vote, one type of lesbian space was privileged over another. However, with little ability to promote lesbian-focused discussion outside of the lesbian media, the future of LSI was debated within *Lesbians on the Loose*.

The LSI did continue using the profit from the sale of the building. *LOTL* reported \$306,000 was left over to be invested in a trust fund.<sup>190</sup> Further discussion on what to do with the money was published in the *LOTL* article “Lesbian Space \$300K Ahead”.<sup>191</sup> Co-convenor Deb Hayes asked what is creating lesbian space, “what counts as a cultural space?”<sup>192</sup> Several proposals were suggested for the money. They included: purchasing another building, buying land in rural New South Wales for holiday cabins, setting up a

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<sup>186</sup> Farrelly, “Lesbian Press Muzzled as Trany Vote Passes,” 5.

<sup>187</sup> Farrelly, 5.

<sup>188</sup> Farrelly, 5.

<sup>189</sup> Louise Poland, “Lost in Space,” *Lesbiana*, December 1998, 18.

<sup>190</sup> Farrelly, “Lesbian Press Muzzled as Trany Vote Passes,” 5.

<sup>191</sup> Barbara Farrelly, “Lesbian Space \$300K Ahead,” *Lesbians on the Loose*, January 1999, 5.

<sup>192</sup> Farrelly, “Lesbian Space \$300K Ahead,” 5.

Trust for grants, leasing lesbian space, and creating lesbian cyberspace.<sup>193</sup> For the most part, cultural space was still being translated as physical space, however, there was some reimagining of lesbian space seen in the upcoming significance of cyberspace. This reimagining of lesbian space marked a change in the goals of the Lesbian Space Project. The need for a physical space had lessened, and the division over inclusion and accessibility exposed the difficulty in maintaining lesbian space. It was decided that community grants would be developed at the AGM in December 1999.<sup>194</sup> The first round of funding was awarded in November 2000, with applications submitted from all over Australia, except for Tasmania.<sup>195</sup> By moving beyond physical space, lesbian space was extended across Australia, allowing for a sense of a national lesbian community. The grants program would continue, with *LOTL* reporting in 2008 that the organisation had distributed over \$75,00 since 2000.<sup>196</sup> The Lesbians Incorporated continues to fund community grants, maintaining an inclusive approach to funding programs across Australia.<sup>197</sup>

The Lesbian Space Project represented the ambitions of Australian lesbians. Particularly emboldened by new visibility in the 1990s and solidified community spaces through the lesbian press, the LSP drew on the dream of lesbian physical space. However, as was noted at the time, the utopic imagining of lesbian space was confronted with the reality of varied Australian lesbian communities. Promises of unity could not be delivered as

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<sup>193</sup> Farrelly, "Lesbian Space \$300K Ahead," 5.

<sup>194</sup> "Lesbian Funding Fun," 4.

<sup>195</sup> "Lesbian Funding Fun," 4.

<sup>196</sup> "\$10,000 Grant Up for Grabs," 9.

<sup>197</sup> "Https://Lincgrants.Org.Au/," accessed April 6, 2023, <https://lincgrants.org.au/>.

lesbians debated their own understandings of their identities. The ‘common sense’ definitions of lesbian purported by those opposed to trans inclusion were not as universal as they had imagined. The 1990s represented the articulation of a generational divide. This division has been discussed in the previous chapter, with many younger lesbians casting off older imaginings of lesbian identities and styles to build new ‘queer’ ways of being. The failure of the LSP marked the end of desiring solely physical lesbian space. Instead, the grants scheme continued the national imagining of lesbian space, with the money localised to specific programs. Further, the appeal of the lesbian press as lesbian space was lessening, with the more prominent magazines continuing into the 2000s, but other smaller interstate periodicals, like Tasmania’s *Lilac* and Adelaide’s *Lesbian Times*, folding in the time between the launch of the LSP and the sale of the building. Lesbian space was being questioned and reimagined, with the periodicals not necessarily included in definitions of lesbian space. However, the lesbian press does give us a distinct look into the operations of lesbian space, the medium allowing for the debate and discussion to flow across several years, archiving community divisions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter interrogated lesbian identities as constructed within the magazines, showcasing who was imagined as part of the lesbian community. Primarily analysing the inclusion and exclusion of different positions and identities within the magazines, this chapter noted that by the 1990s, the assumed reader was a cis lesbian in her thirties, most likely white and middle class. However, various discourses and debates interrupted this accepted norm in different circumstances. Early conference workshops evolved into stable support groups where many lesbians of various ethnicities and

religions could connect, though this did not necessarily change the content of the magazines. Further, the political outlook of lesbian feminism meant that they were often attuned to Indigenous issues, although from a white perspective. The unified identity of lesbian was tested, especially in the 1990s. The prevailing separatism of the 1970s had wavered, leading to uneasy coalitions with broader gay groups. The uncertainty of the place of men prompted exclusions of bisexual women, trans men and trans women. However, the debates documented within the periodicals around trans women exposed the limitations of a perceived collective lesbian identity with the unsettled boundaries introduced by queer politics. Shifting generational ground also revealed the growing construction within the magazines of the 1970s as emblematic of restrictive lesbian feminism. Ultimately these debates around lesbian identity within the magazines reveal the constructions and developments of the lesbian community over the decades and how it intersected with axes of different identities. Lesbian identity and community were not static within the magazines, fluctuating over the conversations of readers and editors across articles and letters.

## Conclusion

Let us return to the group of women who began this thesis. They have changed from the 1990s to 2023, moving with the times. They may be dressed in various styles, ranging from workwear to bright, colourful outfits, with op shops still a favoured spot to buy clothing. Haircuts range from long and styled to shaggy, including several variations on the mullet. If they are lucky, they might be sitting in the courtyard of a queer women's bar, though their numbers are limited these days. Instead of brainstorming newsletter ideas, they scroll and recommend social media feeds for the best updates on queer events in their city. The group may share memes poking fun at queer and lesbian stereotypes, with the local intermingled with the global. Others will pass on informative videos, largely on queer history and the experiences of queer people across the world.<sup>1</sup> When they were younger, they experienced Australia's Same-Sex Marriage Survey and the backlash to the Safe Schools program. They witnessed then Prime Minister Scott Morrison's attempt to pass the Religious Discrimination Bill, which failed, alongside the passing of amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act* to remove exemptions that allowed religious schools to expel LGBT students.<sup>2</sup> With recent progress mirrored by a backlash, particularly towards transgender people, the group are aware of their privileged moment with issues still to be fought. Lesbian spaces and communities no longer operate in the same manner. Instead, new forms of media have emerged to foster

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<sup>1</sup> Popular examples include the videos of "Home," RainbowHistoryClass, accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.rainbowhistoryclass.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Noah J. Riseman, *Transgender Australia: A History since 1910* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2023), 267–68.



and maintain queer spaces, the lesbian periodical having served its purpose in the medium's heyday.

This thesis argued that Australian lesbian magazines were significant in developing and maintaining lesbian communities from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Lesbian identities and subcultures were discursively created and expressed within the magazines. In particular, the 1990s was a significant transition point for Australian lesbian publications and the communities they represented. Not only did the number of publications boom during this period, with every Australian capital city having their own publication at some point, but many also folded by the end of the decade. The evolving place of consumerism and advertising ties with emerging queer politics led to a questioning of established lesbian cultural practices, with new expectations developed and expressed.

The medium of magazines was highlighted in facilitating these discussions, imbuing a sense of dialogue between readers, writers and editors across and within periodicals. This thesis has shown the interconnected nature of many of the periodicals, including shared articles and references to each other. Further, the legacy of Melbourne's lesbian print media was invoked by several publications through the transference of subscriber lists. By drawing on Elizabeth Groeneveld and Megan Le Masurier, the letters to the editor were understood as 'archives of feeling', which documented the readers' mediated perspectives to the publications' editorial staff and other readers. Further, the materiality of the sources was not forgotten, tracing distribution points and the passing of material between friends. This thesis focused on the periodicals as the source base,

revealing the complicated discursive networks which operated to create and maintain the readership communities. Although I completed oral history interviews, none were directly quoted. Instead, they influenced my reading of magazines and the selection of material for analysis. Through a close reading of the publications, the multifaceted conversation evoked by Groeneveld was revealed, showing the complexity of Australian lesbian periodicals, as examined within this thesis.

This thesis detailed how the publications were situated within evolving political, social and cultural movements that influenced content and production over time. Complicated discussions over the place of capitalism within the publications illustrated a concept of lesbian economies supported by lesbian businesses and increasing mainstream advertising opportunities. Magazines helped to discursively create lesbian identities, notably seen in the representation of lesbian motherhood and the development of the lesbian sex radical subculture. Lesbian sexuality was further constructed and articulated within the magazines, from debates over sexual practices to marriage and state recognition. Further, the visual aspect of the medium was analysed, allowing for the discussion of lesbian dress, particularly how it was tied to identity construction and renewed advertising opportunities. Finally, as lesbian space, the magazines operated as points of inclusion and exclusion, articulating the anxieties around lesbian identity. This thesis has explored the complex histories of Australian lesbian periodicals, analysing various discourses and their relation to lesbian communities and identities.

The absence of an established Australian lesbian print media showcases the significance of the period under study. The 'golden age', to use Bill Calder's framing, ended by the

2000s, with most magazines ending their run within the 1990s. Only *Lesbians on the Loose* continues with a website with similar material the magazine with book and music reviews, an events page, with a focus on inclusivity with reference to bisexuality and queer sexualities.<sup>3</sup> Most city-based periodicals of the smaller capital cities ended in the mid-1990s, with *Lesbian Times* (Adelaide) and *Lesbian Territory* (Darwin) both ending in 1994, *Lilac* (Tasmania) and *Hot Gos* (Perth) ending in 1996. *Lesbiana* (Melbourne) folded in 2004, and so did the long-running *Lesbian Network*. Starting in 1999, *Women Out West* (Perth) finished publishing in 2008, somewhat an outlier due to its late start and glossy finish from the beginning. Publications did emerge in the mid-2000s, though many did not last more than a few years.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on the 1970s to the early 2000s, this thesis analysed the significant output of Australian lesbian print media, particularly highlighting the 1990s as a transition point through both the growth and decline of periodicals.

Lesbian space shifted within the 2000s with technological developments around the internet shifting attention from material magazines to online websites. The evolving role of what was denoted as ‘cyberspace’ was evident within the magazines themselves, with Lilitu Babalu of *Lesbiana* expressing interest in lesbian online space from the mid-1990s, with *Lesbiana* publishing columns with suggestions of web pages for women.<sup>5</sup> As

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<sup>3</sup> “Lesbian News, Bisexuals and Queer Women, LOTL,” LOTL, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.lotl.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> For example, *Dyknoclast* (Melbourne) lasted from 2005-2006, *Bound* (Sydney) from 2009-2010, and *Cherrie* (Sydney) managed to publish from 2007-2012. Smaller newsletters for regional areas also lasted throughout the 2000s, with *Geelong Lesbian Newsletter* publishing from 1998-2012 and Lismore-based *What’s On For Women* publishing from 1997-2003.

<sup>5</sup> Sheril Berkovitch, “What’s Happening with Lesbiana?,” *Lesbiana*, June 1995, 10; Examples include two different columns Sheril Berkovitch, “Let’s Go Surfing,” *Lesbiana*, December 1995, 10; Sheridan Power, “Net Grrrls,” *Lesbiana*, August 1997, 26.

stated, *Lesbians on the Loose* continues as a website. However, how relevant the *LOTL* website is to Australian lesbians and queer women today is hard to distinguish. Notably, the associated Instagram account has a limited number of followers, 1662 at the time of writing, indicating a lack of engagement.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, it faces competition from diffuse social media accounts, as well as international websites with a more substantial web presence. On a personal note, my engagement with lesbian media began on such social media, including the American website Autostraddle, primarily through visibility politics, searching for media depictions of lesbianism. Although global social media can obfuscate local experiences, universalising queer experiences across the English-speaking world, there are pockets of local attention. However, the centralised city-based newsletter is no longer the centre of a lesbian community, instead, individuals curate social mediascapes with algorithmic intervention and social networks of friends sharing related material.

The current lack of a centralised print culture evident in the Australian lesbian magazines examined within this thesis also speaks to the decrease in Australian lesbian public cultures. The women's dances, lesbian businesses and feminist bookshops praised within the publications largely no longer exist in the same way. As indicated in the brief story introduction of this conclusion, there is a limited bar scene, though night spots are more queer-focused, with only a few focused on female patrons. This absence highlights the magazines as sources for a distinct lesbian culture existing between the 1970s and the early 2000s. The periodicals operate as archives for their lesbian

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<sup>6</sup> The account was checked on 18/01/2024.

communities, representing the debates and discussions that built lesbian identities influenced by the multiple social and political movements of the period under study. This thesis has showcased the ongoing influence of Women's Liberation and feminism on Australian lesbian cultural practices, tied to the significance placed on lesbian space, from the magazines themselves to the many social events. Further, the complexities of Australian lesbian identities were preserved within the many articles and letters to the editor, covering topics such as motherhood, intimate relationships and dress, as examined within this thesis.

The place of Australian lesbian history has ongoing significance as it has been used for political ends. Recently, the growth of trans-exclusionary rhetoric presents an issue, with a vocal group of Australian lesbians utilising lesbian history and space against trans-inclusionary practices. This use of history was seen with the emergence of the Lesbian Action Group (LAG), drawing its name from an unrelated previous 1978-1980 activist group. As a political tactic, the group has filed an application with the Human Rights Commission on behalf of 'the Lesbian community as a whole' to hold a festival for 'lesbian born females' at the St Kilda Pride Centre, excluding 'Heterosexual, Bisexual and Gay males, Heterosexual and Bisexual females, Transgender people and Queer plus people'.<sup>7</sup> It is unlikely that the group will be granted an exemption; a joint application to counter LAG's has already been filed by several LGBT groups and the Pride Centre has stated they would not host the event.<sup>8</sup> As Liz Crash described for *Overland*, the involved

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<sup>7</sup> Liz Crash, "The Truth about 'Lesbian Erasure,'" *Overland* literary journal, September 4, 2023, <https://overland.org.au/2023/09/the-truth-about-lesbian-erasure/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Exemption Applications under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)," accessed November 10, 2023, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/legal/exemption-applications-under-sex->

women utilised a sense of ‘lesbian inheritance’ to justify their exclusionary practices.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, previous to 2003, a stable lesbian community is portrayed by LAG in their Commission application, only to be divided by trans inclusion. As Noah Riseman recounts, the Lesbian Festival organisers of that year successfully applied for an exemption from VCAT to discriminate against trans women, only for the decision to be overturned within a fortnight after a complaint from a trans activist group was brought to light.<sup>10</sup> As explored within this thesis, this was not the first time that debate over trans inclusion in lesbian spaces occurred in Australia. Instead, the Brisbane 1994 Lesbian Festival was a flash point, as well as the years-long discussion around the inclusion of trans women as Lesbian Space Project members. A trans-supportive opposition countered the trans-exclusionary perspective, which did not represent the whole lesbian community. Further, the generational divide indicated in the Lesbian Space Project example has evolved to LAG presenting young women as ‘so desperately in need of guidance’ from the group, positioning themselves as the sole arbiters and givers of Australian lesbian history.<sup>11</sup> Australian lesbian history must not be relegated to the telling from a small group but explored in all its complexity to weather ongoing debates within lesbian cultural practices and identities.

In terms of future research, this thesis touched on interstate examples outside the Melbourne/Sydney dominant focus for scholarship. However, sustained attention to the

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[discrimination-act-1984-cth](https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/victoria-news/victorian-pride-centre-rejects-application-for-lesbian-born-female-event/225997); Shibu Thomas, “Victorian Pride Centre Rejects Application For ‘Lesbian Born Female’ Event,” *Star Observer*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/national-news/victoria-news/victorian-pride-centre-rejects-application-for-lesbian-born-female-event/225997>.

<sup>9</sup> Crash, “The Truth about ‘Lesbian Erasure.’”

<sup>10</sup> Riseman, *Transgender Australia*, 220.

<sup>11</sup> Crash, “The Truth about ‘Lesbian Erasure.’”

smaller capital cities was not completed. When possible, I attempted to complicate narratives of an east coast focus, such as the tension around interstate participation in the Lesbian Space Project. Further research is necessary to expand the understanding of lesbian history outside Melbourne and Sydney. The periodicals of these smaller cities are understudied and could be explored further through oral histories to understand their place in the broader national lesbian experiences. My hometown of Perth complicates narratives around the dissolution of coalition politics in the late 1970s and 1980s, with CAMP WA continuing until 1989, much later than its east coast counterparts.<sup>12</sup> Renewed attention, such as the revitalisation of the WestPride Archives, promotes my hope that the state's unique queer histories will be preserved and told. Lesbian experiences outside the Melbourne and Sydney focus need to be further researched to enrich national narratives of Australian lesbian histories.

Through the process of completing this thesis, I found engagement with the periodicals to produce a type of archival joy. Most of the primary research was completed in 2021, during a period of COVID-19 uncertainty, with Melbourne moving between lockdowns and lessening restrictions. As I sat at my desk each day, I looked forward to reading the magazines, delving into their layers, from letters to the editor, articles, vox pops and advertisements. I laughed at the various comics and the many self-reflexive jokes about Australian lesbian identity. I noted the relevance of continued arguments and politics, particularly the attention to mainstream depictions of queer and lesbian characters. I saved some of the recipes, baking the 'Canadian Lemon Cake' from *Lilac's* lemon-

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<sup>12</sup> Reece Plunkett, "Making Things Otherwise: An Ethnogenealogy of Lesbian and Gay Social Change in Western Australia" (PhD, Perth, W.A., Murdoch University, 2005), 111.

themed recipe column several times over the years.<sup>13</sup> When archives reopened, I enjoyed the actual act of flipping through the pages, feeling the change to glossy pages as budgets increased. Throughout this experience, I have delved into the layers of Australian lesbian periodicals, revealing the complex histories of the publications and the communities they represented. I hope this thesis has brought out at least some of this layered engagement.

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<sup>13</sup> Megan, “Dykes Kitchen: Canadian Lemon Cake,” *Lilac*, May-June 1993, 5.



## Appendix

Key ideas and content from this thesis have been presented at conferences, seminars and workshops, including:

- ‘Lesbian Motherhood: Non-Nuclear Proliferation,’ FEA Arts HDR Network Seminar, 24 February 2022, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne over Zoom.
- ‘Out Law: Australian Lesbian Periodicals on negotiating the legal system,’ Women and Structures of Power Workshop, 15 November 2022, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.
- “‘From Docs to Stilettos’: the Exploration of Fashion and Dress within Australian Lesbian Periodicals (1980s-1990s),’ International Australian Studies Association Biennial Conference, 1 December 2022, Australian National University.
- ‘Just Married? Shifting Representations of Commitment within *Lesbians on the Loose*,’ Melbourne Feminist History Group, 9 May 2023, Melbourne over Teams.
- “‘About the February Cover’: Australian Lesbian Periodicals Negotiating Community Tensions,’ Gender, Sex and Sexualities Conference, 15 June 2023, University of South Australia over Zoom.
- “‘FOR THOSE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN JUST WHAT IT TAKES TO PRODUCE A NEWSPAPER...’: Publishing 1990s Australian Lesbian Periodicals,’ Australian Historical Association Conference, 6 July 2023, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.
- ‘Pics from the Bars: Representing Lesbian Joy in Australian Lesbian Magazines,’ *Lilith* Symposium on Gender and Joy in History, 11 September 2023, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.

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Lesbian Network  
Lip  
The Laughing Medusa  
Wicked Women

##### **WestPride Archives (formerly Gay and Lesbian Archives of Western Australia)**

Australian Lesbian Diary  
Grapevine  
Hot Gos  
Lip  
Women Out West

##### **Victoria Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives**

Fernbacher, Sabin, VWLLFA No.89, 2000.0237, Box 1-2, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Australia.  
Labrys, VWLLFA No.86, 2000.0254, University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne, Australia.  
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##### **Gale Primary Sources – Australian LGBTIQ Periodicals**

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Brother Sister [Victorian Edition]  
Daughters of Bilitis Newsletter  
Gay and Lesbian Immigration Taskforce (GLTF) Vic Newsletter  
Lesbian Newsletter/ News  
Lesbian Territory  
Lesbian Times  
Lesbiana  
Lesbianon  
Lesbians on the Loose  
Lilac  
Westside Observer

## **Trove**

Lesbians on the Loose  
The Canberra Times

## **Oral Histories**

*Activism: CAMP Inc — PRIDE HISTORY GROUP*. Accessed October 14, 2021.  
<https://www.pridehistory.org.au/activism/camp-inc>.

## **Interviews conducted by the author**

Lavender: Over Zoom, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022  
Founder of *Lesbian Network*.

Marr, Beth: Over Zoom, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022  
Involved with Sybylla Press and contributor to *Lesbian Newsletter*.

Sitka, Chris: Melbourne, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022.  
Contributor to multiple Australian lesbian publications.

Taylor, Jean: Over Zoom, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2022.  
Contributor to multiple publications, including regular column with *Lesbiana*. Author of works detailing Women's Liberation and lesbian feminism. Involved with Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive.

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