



Abstract

In the 1970s, radical lesbian feminists identified heterosexuality as a socially glorified state of being, and organised to resist social pressure to conform to heteronorms. Decentring of radical feminist discourse has been linked to a 'shrinking lesbian world', with implications for the health and wellbeing of young women who identify as lesbian. This article employs a poststructural feminist perspective, and Foucault's notions of discourse and genealogy. Two sets of data were analysed: issues of Aotearoa New Zealand feminist periodical *Broadsheet* published 1972-1976, and interviews with 15 young lesbian women conducted in 2012. Findings explore how radical lesbian discourse was marginalised, and some of the implications for the health and wellbeing of young lesbian identified women. Compulsory heterosexuality persists as a health and wellbeing issue which produces 'sexual minority stress' and legitimises discrimination, violence and harassment. Marginalisation of radical lesbian discourse via compulsory family status operates to limit opportunities for collective and public lesbian resistance.

Key Words feminist discourse analysis, Foucault, young lesbian health

A genealogy of lesbian feminisms in New Zealand: Some implications for young lesbian health and wellbeing

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Introduction

Drawing from radical feminism the idea that 'the personal is political', lesbian feminist theory shaped the conditions of possibility for identifying and targeting the political and socially embedded nature of women's and lesbians' wellbeing. This lesbian feminism de-naturalised heterosexuality, analysing the oppressive effects of its systems, institutions, structures and practices on women.[eg. 1,2,3] Analysis of heteronormativity, or the ways in which heterosexuality is produced/enforced/assumed as the norm and natural in society, has thus become vital in making sense of lesbian

health and wellbeing.[eg. 4,5,6] Poststructural feminist writers have been concerned with articulating how, despite the emergence of discourses of gay rights and equality,[eg. 7,8] power relations produce possibilities for, and constraints on, lesbian health and wellbeing. For example, as Kitzinger[6 p478] describes:

While LGBT activists are campaigning against blatant oppression and overt discrimination, at the same time all around us a heteronormative social fabric is unobtrusively rewoven, thread by thread, persistently, without fuss or fanfare, without oppressive intent or conscious design.

Research shows that women who self-identify as lesbian continue to be marginalised by society.[4, 9-11] Indeed, as posed by Aotearoa New Zealand academic lesbian feminist Te Awekotuku: "Lesbians can get married, but does that make the world a safer and better place for women?"[12] Marginalisation associated with sexual minority status has been linked to lesbian women's lower levels of health and wellbeing and a higher uptake of behaviours that are injurious

to health and wellbeing.[4,5,9,11]

Recent scholarship suggests that there has been a decentering of lesbian feminisms in relation to lesbian wellbeing. Stein links this to what she calls a 'shrinking lesbian world' in the absence of feminist unifying ideology: "What we are seeing, quite possibly, is the exhaustion of particular historical construction".[13 p24] Further, young women's performances of 'feminist disidentification' have been documented internationally, and linked to processes of sociosexual power relations which reflect and reproduce male dominance.[eg. 14,15,16]. The theory and politics of trans, queer and non-binary genders/sexualities have challenged the notion of a singular truth of lesbian sexuality, bound to fixed normative characterisations of womanhood or lesbianism.[17] Vicinus[18] argues that a positioning of lesbian subjects as women, constituted through discourses of gender and sexual politics, is not adequately theorised through discourses of queerness and non-normativity. Critical race scholars have identified some lesbian and feminist identities as Western, white and exclusive standards to live up to that elide the context and culture of black and working class women's lives.[19,20]

There are many ways in which sexuality between women has been practiced and understood. These are not stable and have shifted over time according to the norms and practices prevalent at different historical moments.[21,22] The term 'lesbian' is one of many terms used by women today to position their non-heterosexuality in instances where they choose or are required to do so. Some women engage in sexual activity with women, yet refuse any form of sexual identity and may or may not be connected to a lesbian community. There is a tendency in the literature to blur lesbian identity with same-sex attraction and behaviour among women. In this paper the terms 'lesbian' and 'lesbianism' and 'lesbian sexuality' are explored particularly in relation to feminist discourse, and as deployed by women in the 1970s and 2012.

Aotearoa New Zealand is regarded internationally as a forerunner in terms of political gains in gay rights. Since the Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed in 1986 decriminalising consensual sex between men, the Human Rights Act[23] and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act[24] have outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation. Commensurate state recognition and protection of lesbian and heterosexual intimate relationships has taken place with the Civil Union Act[25] and the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act[26]. Yet health and wellbeing issues persist. For example, in recent years, young lesbians have been held to "warrant special vigilance" by health professionals and

promoters in relation to suicide and depression,[27] and health risk behaviours in the areas of sexual health, smoking, alcohol and drug use.[eg. 28,29-35]

Given that particular health issues for young lesbians continue to be identified, and lesbian feminisms have historically been so integral to the articulation and practices of lesbian health and wellbeing, we asked: To what extent and how has radical lesbian discourse been marginalised in New Zealand? What are the implications for young lesbian health and wellbeing?

Methodology and method

Foucault's genealogical work used historical constructions to dissect, disrupt and render the familiar strange by interrogating truth claims.[eg. 36] Bringing historical constructions to bear on the present can function as "counter-history" opening up "critical, resistive potential".[37] The construction of critical present-centred histories, uses what today appears "marginal, eccentric or disreputable"[38] to try and tease apart the systems of the present that have made them appear so.

This article draws on data from a recent genealogical study of young lesbian health and wellbeing in New Zealand.[39] The 1970s second wave feminism and women's health activism created conditions of possibility for the emergence of *Broadsheet*, a national New Zealand feminist periodical with strong health and wellbeing emphasis, which ran from 1972 until 1997. *Broadsheet's* early issues (published 1972-1976) provided one of the first widely accessed spaces in New Zealand that allowed lesbianism to be spoken of and acknowledged.[40,41] Hence the decision to choose *Broadsheet* as a key historical data source. In 2012 there was considerable national discussion and campaigning around the legalising of gay marriage, which was subsequently enacted in New Zealand in 2015. The second historical set of data are interviews with 15 lesbian identified young women aged between 18 and 24, recruited via social media in 2012. The women were predominantly white and middle class. Interviews were conducted in three major New Zealand cities, where the young women were studying at university (n=7), in fulltime work (n=7) or working and studying part-time (n=4). Most interviewees identified their ethnicity as New Zealand European (n=14), and the remaining four participants identified as New Zealand Māori, Pacific, Asian/New Zealand and Middle Eastern. The interviewees were asked by the first author (KP) to talk about how they identified as young lesbian women and their health and wellbeing. Ethical approval to conduct the interviews was obtained from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC Reference number 11/325).

Foucault's genealogical investigations of objects and phenomena explored ruptures, sudden changes in thought and links with the maintenance and shift of power.[42] This allowed him to chart the disjointed movements of history, as neither progressive nor rational but only the "endlessly repeated play of dominations".[43] Broadsheet, and the interview encounters were considered as surfaces of emergence[44] for discourses constituting lesbian feminisms and health and wellbeing, around times of significant shift in social thought in New Zealand (the rise of feminism, the possibility of 'marriage equality'). The analysis presented was informed by feminist poststructuralist work employing discourse analysis and Foucauldian concepts of genealogy and the history of the present.[notably 45,46-48] Analytical steps taken were to identify and examine the terms and concepts that were routinely used to differentiate, delineate and impact on phenomena and practices of lesbian feminism and health and wellbeing. For example, in Broadsheet, rupture emerged between those who constructed lesbian sexuality within the minoritising terms of liberal feminism and sexological discourse, and those women who championed the relevance of lesbianism to helping transform the gendered status quo.

The subject positions and spaces created for young women by various discourses of feminism and health were defined and explored. Discourses and discursive practices were identified in the texts that construct categories such as 'lesbian' and 'straight', 'healthy' and 'sick', 'feminist' and 'square' looking for how these constructions came into being, who was authorised to speak about them and who are the subjects. Positions offered by these discourses were considered in terms of the possibilities and constraints of these for young lesbian health and wellbeing.

Findings

Broadsheet feminist magazine 1972-1976

Two dominant discourses were identified in the Broadsheet set of data. A radical feminist discourse brought a very particular and collective notion of lesbianism into being and circulation in Broadsheet at this time. Radical feminism developed a political theory of heterosexuality as a practice of patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family, and patriarchal ideologies of masculinity and femininity. Radical lesbians identified heterosexuality as a socially glorified and enforced state of being, with health and wellbeing effects on women. Simultaneously, a liberal feminist discourse operated to produce women's health issues in a heterosexual framework, as informed reproductive choice and reducing

sexism, to the exclusion of identified lesbian health issues (e.g. homophobia, heterosexism). This liberal feminism constructed young women as knowing: empowered to practice a protected heterosexuality.

Radical feminist discourse

A radical feminist discourse rejected liberal notions of 'tolerance', and identified these as restricting the visibility of lesbians and their health and wellbeing issues within the women's movement. Māori women were leaders in this regard, e.g. in 1971, academic Ngahua Te Awekotuku spoke at the first New Zealand National Women's Liberation conference, and identified herself as a lesbian by stating that she "defied the concept of submission to the inimitable cock".[49] In 1973, Sharon Alston addressed a women's liberation seminar, by identifying herself as lesbian and giving a passionate speech in favour of lesbian liberation:

Sharon Alston attacked "straight liberals" for offering at best condescension and sympathy to female homosexuals and at worst avoiding them. She pointed out that civility [to lesbians] won't be an invitation to an attack in the ladies' loo and that what Gay Liberation was interested in were human rights and not mere tolerance.[50, Broadsheet]

Alston positioned herself within a radical feminist discourse to critique liberal notions of 'tolerance', and identify these as restricting the visibility of lesbians and their health and wellbeing issues within the women's movement. An expansion of the notion of health and wellbeing to holism, including sexism and women's social and economic oppression, created space for lesbians to begin to position themselves as subject to additional oppression as lesbian. Alston[51, Broadsheet] argued that:

...gay women are not subjected to exactly the same oppression as heterosexual women... and this still stands as a valid reason for allowing the lesbian to express herself and her problems in terms of her own lifestyle...

Critiquing the assumption of a rigid separation between sexuality and the public spheres of life, radical feminist discourse constructed political lesbian subjects, and a particular practice of lesbian visibility and challenge. Drawing on the writing of international feminists such as Charlotte Bunch[2], Adrienne Rich[3] and Monique Wittig[52], sexuality was seen as socially constructed, systematically and institutionally enforced, in ways that benefit men, damage women's relationships with each other, and their own self-concept:

Many women will elect to either become celibate or

lesbian in order to break the chains of sex domination which surround our lives. This is a perfectly valid reaction to the constant 'put downs' that women face.[53, Broadsheet]

Identifying heterosexuality with "chains of sex domination" enabled radical feminists to question, "How can heterosexual feminists maintain sexual relationships with males and stay sane?" given that "sexual behaviour is political".[53, Broadsheet] In this discourse, heterosexuality was a regulated and enforced state of mind and body, which worked to support the subordinate status of women to men.

Radical feminism legitimised the creation of women's and lesbian space – a 'room of one's own' – to contemplate, strategise and act collectively:

Why separate from men?... [to] learn the myriad ways in which women are put down... to learn to like each other; we have to discover an essential relationship which we have been taught to deny... women have been in competition not cooperation... We can rationalise and we can explain individual cases, but no analysis of the structural position of women can reveal anything but psychological oppression.[54, Broadsheet]

In the space opened by this radical assertion, lesbianism could perform an important role in promoting women's psychological health and influencing wider social change:

'Lesbian Nation', subtitled *The Feminist Solution*, is the evolving political reactionary consciousness of an oppressed lesbian... eventually exploding into the feminist movement with the solution... Jill Johnson advocates that the only true feminist is a lesbian.[55, Broadsheet]

The notion of Lesbian Nation, articulated by Jill Johnson[56], offered practices of collective radical lesbian rebellion – demanding cultural and ideological transformation. Drawing on this framework, lesbianism took on significance far beyond the individual – becoming a practice of the feminist movement: a lifestyle opposed to liberal notions of tolerance and equality. These issues of Broadsheet actively promoted lesbianism as a political strategy in the struggle against patriarchal oppression. The Gay Feminist Collective argued in Broadsheet that: "We feel it is valid to call oneself a lesbian prior to any homosexual (sexual) experience".[57 p17]

Lesbianism is a total lifestyle that is valid in itself, not simply a matter of a sexual union...lesbians are women who survive without men emotionally, financially... who battle day by day to show that women are valid human beings, not just appendages.[53, Broadsheet]

Lesbianism held a countercultural connotation in excess of sex and desire. Lesbian separatism and heterosexual surveillance were discursive practises of radical feminism that emerged to challenge the meaning and norms of womanhood, heterosexual femininity, and female emotional and sexual dependency on men. This involved claiming public space for women and lesbians: holding conferences, meetings and rallies, drawing attention to lesbian issues. Broadsheet writers advocated lesbianism for women, and lesbian health and wellbeing. The first Lesbian Conference was held in New Zealand in March 1974, advocated publication of lesbian content to make women "aware of the validity of lesbian relationships", and actively "fighting oppression" via the media: "to publish articles we write on Lesbianism... get on talk-back radio shows" as part of a "wide-spread public re-education programme".[57, Broadsheet]

While Broadsheet offered a space for a radical feminist discourse to be articulated, it also offered a space for what we have identified as a liberal feminist discourse. However, the ways in which feminism and sexuality were constructed were quite different to those of radical feminism

Liberal feminist discourse

Radical lesbianism was strongly contested by liberal feminist discourses of human sexuality at this time. Aligned with a dominant sexological model,[21] liberal feminist discourse produced sex as an expression of individual identity, intimacy and love of the kind that is healthy for relationships and individuals. Writers argued for the sexual liberation of women, whose natural 'sexual capacity' had been suppressed by restrictive gender roles and norms:

We must all be strong enough to examine the 'cruel and conquering' in the sexual behaviour of our bedfellows. To examine also our personal responses in terms of the myth of submission... As long as women continue to respond to men by desiring them when they force submission then we don't allow them to see their manhood defined in any other terms.[53 Broadsheet]

... for now it is still problem enough convincing our husbands and lovers that we have sexual appetites, too, which may have a different rhythm from theirs but which are every bit as urgent.[58, Broadsheet]

Liberal feminism did offer a space for lesbian sexuality. Lesbians were produced as 'natural variants', in opposition to the prominent medical construction of female homosexuality as deviance and illness. Drawing on sexological theory and research, the liberal feminist discourse reified positions of

naturally occurring majority (heterosexuality) and minority (homosexuality) sexualities, inborn and largely fixed. The Gay Liberation University Manifesto, published in Broadsheet in 1973, argued:

We are not going to be treated as sick, disturbed or perverted. Scientific evidence supports our claim - research has shown homosexuality is both natural and common... Society's anti-gay prejudices force thousands of us into hiding.[59, Broadsheet]

That sexual behaviour was constructed as a personal choice with reference to innate sexological sexuality, limited the positioning of lesbian identity in the women's movement to one of acceptance, rather than challenge:

...the feeling of some gay women that no woman can be truly feminist if she lives in a heterosexual relationship, or has any emotional relationships with men... is a demand for me to deny myself which I am unprepared to accept. To me feminism is a freedom from male attitudes...a movement to give women choice.[54, Broadsheet]

Acceptance is acceptance... What we all do in the bedroom can then, hopefully, begin to return to being our own business.[60, Broadsheet]

While creating a space for liberal feminists to identify as lesbian, the liberal feminist discourse also placed limits around acceptable lesbianism. Liberal feminist discourse limited healthy sexuality to the breakdown of gender stereotypes and the quest for equality in heterosexual relationships. This had the effect of marginalising lesbian women and their issues within the women's movement in New Zealand. Because heterosexuality was assumed as the position of most women, within liberal feminist discourse relating to men was articulated as a key feminist project for change:

By extending the tactic of separatism to exclude all possibility of relating with men and implicitly questioning the commitment of women who attempt such relationships, radical feminists are refusing to deal with an area crucial to the developing feminist world view of the majority of women.[53, Broadsheet]

An 'area crucial to the developing feminist world view', women must work at achieving equality in all spaces with men (e.g. sexual and intimate relations, division of housework, childcare, through to the ability to take up interests outside the home). Liberal feminism took up informed choice for women as a key point of departure for sexuality and health and wellbeing. It picked up issues of women's access to sexual and reproductive health information and empowerment in this domain. In this context abortion was discussed as the critical health issue for women. As such, a liberal feminist discourse

worked to produce a dominant heterosexual position in relation to health and wellbeing. This focus effectively silenced issues that lesbians faced in relation to health at this time.

Young lesbians in 2012

The dominant subject positions taken up by the young women were informed by postfeminist and heteronormative discourses. Postfeminist discourse posits that equality has been achieved and therefore there is no need for feminist activism.[15,16,61] Certain practices and experiences the participants described were brought about by their being positioned as subjects of heteronormative discourses which produced them as women who are sexually available to men. Participants were marginalised socially and politically and, as a result, could be rendered vulnerable in social spaces and made to suffer abuse and violence.

Post-feminist lesbians: Wives, mothers and deviant others

Participants in 2012, drew on a postfeminist discourse that positioned lesbians as equal to heterosexual women and men in a private sphere: emphasising finding committed love, family, marriage and having children with another woman. To position their sexualities in relation to maintaining their health and wellbeing, these women constituted acceptable lesbians as living private, quiet and domestic lives, apart from the 'spectacle' of gay pride. Broadly post-feminist discourses critiqued the relevance of visibility in lesbian lives, as Mini describes:

I don't do much of the like rainbow flag waving and the unicorns, I just can't deal with it. The thing I try and do least is make a spectacle of myself about it... People are gonna find it less offensive if you're just two lesbian women living quietly in your own little home, you know? Just doing what everyone else does, which is exactly what you want, equal rights means doing what's equal to everyone else, not more. (Mini)

Within post-feminist discourses, Mini positioned the notion of lesbian visibility as 'excessive' and as threatening to society. Acceptable and 'equal' lesbian lives as able to be lived safely in the home, simply doing 'what straight people do'. This represents a liberal conception of equality as sameness, though it also restricts possibilities for lesbian lives to those well-worn heteronormative paths already in existence. The kind of relationship practices and families that they held to be ideal were: long term, stable, monogamous, coupled, with children. Ruby draws out a construction of long term lesbians' relationships, and notions of love, commitment (being 'long-term-lovable') as important.

There is nothing different about me because I'm gay... I have a list of goals I have in life. I would give up the rest of them for the one thing and that's to be married and have kids (Ruby, 24).

The participants drew on notions of romantic love and relationships that were similar to those articulated by heterosexual women in other studies. For example, Hollway[62] has explicated a 'have-hold' discourse (linking to phraseology used in Christian weddings) as playing an important role in constructing women's sexuality in relation to men. This discourse constructs women as primarily interested in securing long-term commitment in relationships. Participants drew on and expanded the 'have hold' discourse to include lesbians as wives and mothers: they positioned themselves as valuing closeness and relational connection more highly than sex. One participant shed particular light on the acceptance and status within her family that she could achieve through positioning herself, through the postfeminist discourse, as a 'lesbian wife':

Staying together kind of showed [my family] that it wasn't really a joke. We've been together for a few years now, and they like the fact that we are quite secure for our age. In their eyes, nothing bad has come out of it. (Carmen).

Postfeminist discourse also placed boundaries around acceptable feminine identities through a construction of less acceptable lesbians as 'radical' and/or 'feminist'. These positions were described as undesirable and untenable because they are anti-men. An insistence on not being anti-men was common to the talk of most of the young women interviewed who positioned themselves within this discourse:

Lesbians can't be obsessed with politics you know? A lesbian feminist is really extreme, it's over-consuming for them. They just get too caught up in the negative views of other people... it takes a toll on their mental wellbeing. I don't think it would be good for society if you had an extreme lesbian feminist because they are anti-men. It would also create a negative stereotype in society as all lesbians being like that (Summer).

For Summer, lesbian feminism constituted a risk to individual lesbian health. A careful 'pro-men' position adopted by the women who drew on postfeminist discourse, links with McRobbie's[15] assertion that the 'post-feminist masquerade' functions to diffuse any threat posed by women and lesbians to discourses of masculinity:

I think that truly lesbian women would rather be in a committed relationship than kind of be radical about it or like a guy, that doesn't want to be in a committed relationship, from my experience that's hurting you and other people (Carmen, 23)

Subject positions offered by dominant liberal and postfeminist discourses produced 'true lesbians' as 'definitely women'. The lesbian lifestyle discourses allowed participants to take up acceptable positions in relation to traditional hetero-feminine ideals of wife and mother. They also legitimised practices of surveillance of self and other lesbians in relation to these ideals, marginalising lesbians who were unable or unwilling to participate in heteronormative practices and relationship forms. When talking about relationship between being lesbian and health, a particular portrayal of radical lesbianism came to the fore: as unhealthy, extreme and negative. Radical lesbians were identified as man-hating-lesbians, seen as divisive trouble makers and bad for society. There was a strong rejection of lesbian practices identified as radical: e.g. feminist organisation, non-monogamy. It was striking how strongly the young lesbian women spoken to positioned themselves in opposition to a particular version of 'radical lesbian feminism'.

The young women also provided many examples of being forced to engage with negative views of lesbians, which was constructed as a drain on their wellbeing. That being 'pro-men' and 'not angry' were constructed as the healthiest subject positions to take up also reflected the power of heteronormative discourses through which femininity and homosexuality were consistently constructed as second order to masculinity and heterosexuality. A position of acceptance, as a 'lesbian wife' within one's family, was a compelling alternative to positioning outside acceptability, as 'other' lesbians were held to be. However, even as the women celebrated shifts in gay rights and increasing acceptance of lesbians in society, the women could still be subjected to exclusion, violence and victimisation when they did not fit the heteronormative mold:

You just try to be like everyone else, but people won't let you be (Mini, 19)

I can never hold hands in public... You just feel like a spectacle and you just want to blend in... I try not to stare at the barrel by making public displays of affection (Sally, 25)

I said "I'm gay, I'm not interested, can you please just leave me alone," and he got really, really aggressive... I went to the bathroom and he cornered me in the bathroom he just said that he can do anything to me because I'm a waste (Summer, 22).

Compulsory heterosexuality operated in these young women's lives in a way that meant they felt extremely unsafe to identify themselves as lesbian, particularly in public spaces. They described feeling punished for identifying a lack of sexual interest in men, and lacked supportive space to be comfortable being open about their lesbian identity. A post-feminist position offered little protection for these women - try

as they might to 'not be a spectacle' they were still targeted.

Queer feminist lesbians

Two women, both university students, positioned their lesbian identities within a queer feminist discourse, drawing on poststructural notions of gender and sexuality. They drew explicitly on Judith Butler's influential book *Gender Trouble*, [63] cited as a key text of queer theory. [64,65] Queer discourse views homosexuality as socially constructed in a binary and subordinate relationship to heterosexuality. It also posits that this binary opposition of sexual identities is dependent on and supportive of, a culturally constructed fiction of the relationship between sex and gender. [64] These notions challenged heteronormative insistence on congruence between sex, gender and sexuality and the binary positions of male/female, masculine/feminine, homo/heterosexual that this creates. For these women, a queer lesbian feminist was a non-binary subject, capable of exploring non-normative relationship possibilities:

For me lesbian is inclusive of multiple women in relationships as well as trans women as well, to clarify. So it's basically just people who identify as women attracted to people who identify as women ...I would say that the relationship I was in with my ex was a lesbian relationship, but then I might say that a sexual encounter I had with someone recently was a queer encounter and I don't really know why I make these distinctions, but I do (Jennifer).

A queer feminist positioning opened up possibilities for the women to shift and to play with gender identity and relationship forms.

I'm definitely not opposed to other forms of relationship other than extended monogamy... polyamory is really interesting to me, the complexity of everything. The notion that we shouldn't necessarily, it's a lot of pressure to put on one person to say that they have to meet all our needs. (Jennifer).

It just seems like "lesbian" and "gay" and stuff is just things you have to come out as to say that you're not straight... It seems like your sexuality is just a collection of things that you like. And of course no one's going to have the same collection of things that they like. And it's silly that it seems to always be divided along lines of gender like: "Do you like to sleep with men or women?" rather than: "Do you like to have sex with the lights on or the lights off?" (Tegan)

Tegan and Jennifer positioned 'lesbians' (un-Queered) as 'cis women desiring cis women'. 'Cis-gender' is a term produced by queer discourse to position people for whom sex and gender are normatively aligned i.e. female sex plus identity as

a woman. For them, heteronormative discourses had imbued the term lesbian with a 'normality', stability and permanence in relation to gender and sexuality which did not resonate with their experience or political goals.

Queer feminist discourse allowed these women to position women as subject to patriarchal oppression, e.g. they discussed as relevant to women's health: racism, imperialism, violence, strict rules about gender and sexuality, blaming and shaming of trans people, queer people, prudes, sluts, and anyone who does not fit a narrow and arbitrary body standard, rape culture, as well as a tendency to claim that liberal politics fixes all ills.

Health is about reducing and removing oppression. That comes back to my philosophy of an intersectional feminism. I'm pretty vehemently anti-racist and anti-classist, and anti-sexist I guess, but anti-cissexist, anti-heterosexist, all those kinds of labels... they are really inherently linked into how society's structured and run... queer politics is firstly about helping queer people, but through doing that and through dismantling structures which are harmful to queer people's health, you are helping everybody else as well, because you are removing something which is harmful from society, and allowing everybody to be a bit less oppressed. (Jennifer).

Queer feminist lesbians were positioned in opposition to power dynamics that constrain or limit their wellbeing. Tegan referred to the disciplinary power that flows through heteronormative discourses to allow people to comment on, stare at and seek to re-align individuals they perceive as outside the norm with their normative understandings. She argued that the "little looks that you get from people and comments that people make" have material effects in queer people lives, because they make them feel like lesser human beings and cause them anxiety and depression. In this understanding, it is society and its promotion of heteronormative practices of violence and surveillance that are made problematic in relation to lesbian health.

The participants who drew on a queer feminist discourse, critiqued the ways in which those advocating for 'marriage equality' equated having access to the institution of marriage with 'equality'. They argued that a narrow focus on the right to marriage could obscure the broader issues of heteronormativity that are in play affecting their wellbeing:

The other thing that annoys me about the marriage equality thing is that I know a few people who have died because they're gay or transgender and I know there are a whole lot of horrible issues with being able to be who you are... it seems like all of a sudden all of these activists are putting all their energy into being

able to get married and it's like, well, if people are still dying because of who they are, maybe that's more important (Tegan).

Tegan and Jennifer both talked about heteronormativity as an unhealthy environment for those queer people who do not fit in. These notions resonated strongly with the radical feminist catch cry of 'the personal is political', meaning that personal issues can and do have political relevance and connection to broader social issues. Jennifer stated this explicitly:

Being queer for me is both a personal experience and a political thing in relation to my wellbeing, because it affects and impacts so much of how I spend my time in the world and how I am treated by the world, and how I respond to the world, and so of course yeah it comes up a lot. (Jennifer).

Queer feminist discourse allowed women to articulate and critique social context, particularly heteronormativity, as a key determinant of lesbian health and wellbeing. However, the notion of 'ivory tower ideas' was repeatedly invoked to discuss how Queer feminist discourse tended to be confined to academic spaces and communities:

You get always kind of like ivory tower ideas about gender and how to talk about people and stuff. It would be really frustrating [in a non-university environment]. I'm really used to the academic environment where everyone's either studying or teaching about a lot of critical stuff. (Tegan)

We note that both participants were white and privileged enough to be involved in university classes in specific contexts (media studies, cultural studies) where queer discourses came into play. Difficulties of translating a queer subject position into practice, and for informing collective political and progressive change, have been identified as contributing to Queer theory's limited circulation outside of the academy.[63-66]

Discussion

The results of this analysis have explored how feminisms are not monolithic or univocal.[19]

As Zita[70] holds, 1970s radical feminist discourse operated to "expand the meaning of 'lesbian' beyond genital sexuality",[p310] and produce lesbianism as "prima facie resistance to male dominance"[p312]. Broadsheet at this time, was a space where lesbians began to challenge public/private divisions of sexuality as they came to see themselves as a politicised interest group with rights to visibility, space, self-determination and difference in the interests of all women's wellbeing. A liberal feminist discourse refuted the notion that lesbianism could provide a strategic position

from which to view/analyse the patriarchal power in play in heterosexuality, by upholding informed individual choice and self-expression as key to women's wellbeing. Radical lesbians could be charged with disrupting this movement for women's equality and wellbeing. Visibility of lesbians and lesbian issues could be cast as incoherent, and as misdirected.

In 2012, we found radical fervour in Queer feminist existence, where women fought to expand the boundaries of acceptable lesbian femininities and relationship forms. Queer feminism was constrained by a dominant postfeminist insistence on lesbian integration, and equality, neatly encapsulated by the aspirational position of lesbian wife and/or mother. With shifts in gay rights, family status is now possible for more lesbian women, who are offered inclusion, dignity, safety in private spaces. However inclusion seems largely contingent on de-radicalisation. The denigration of lesbian feminism has been discussed as a "cornerstone" of heteronormative dichotomies of "the good/bad lesbian"[61] Good lesbians are 'feminine chic' or 'family women', who are both defined positively against the 'masculine feminist lesbian' (61). Radical dissent is 'domesticated' when radical energy is redirected into a much more palatable and culture affirming activity: "In other words, the potential for the emergence of radical critique [can be] confined in terms of what would reinforce the status quo's most fundamental institutions and assumptions.".[71] Despite feminisms and equality gains, heterosexuality continues to be enforced on young women.[eg. 72,73-75] Lesbian women seem also to be participating in a version of McRobbie's[15] 'post-feminist masquerade' which holds that equality with men and heterosexual people has been achieved, and therefore positioning oneself within traditional femininity and relationship forms is unproblematic.

Sedgwick[76] distinguished between "minoritizing" and "universalizing" accounts of sexuality. Minoritising accounts hold that issues of sexuality are of concern to a minority of people who are not heterosexual. Universalising discourses construct issues of the divisions between sexualities as relevant to all people. In early issues of Broadsheet, ruptures emerged between those who constructed lesbian sexuality within the minoritising terms of liberal feminism, and those women who championed the relevance of lesbianism to helping transform the gendered status quo. In 2012, a dominant post-feminist discourse held that remaining differences between wellbeing for women and men, and lesbians and straight women, should be understood as a result of the free exercise of 'choice'. This discourse explicitly rendered radical challenge unpalatable. Queer feminist lesbians challenged this narrative by highlighting and resisting

structural determinants of women's wellbeing, including heteronormative expectations and practices. We have shown how modern understandings of sexuality continue to be a complex and contradictory conversation between minoritising and universalising discourses which produce different answers to the question: "In whose lives is homo/hetero definition an issue of continuing centrality and difficulty?".[76]

Considering 1970s lesbian feminisms in conversation with young women's articulations in 2012 showed how post-feminism and liberal feminism helps make heteronormative processes through which status and acceptance is achieved, invisible, even to the people who are constructed by them. Foucault cautioned us to be deeply suspicious of narrowing constructions of intimacy.[77] Feminisms have long argued that marital status should not define women's access to social justice and forms of belonging.[78] Foucault[79] suggested that struggle must look beyond the law (protection or prohibition), and address the deeper cultural norms, ethical categories, and emotional practices that ground and limit our sexual choices: "...it's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into pre-existing cultures" it is a matter of having access to the construction of cultural forms.[79]

Expanding Queer feminist practices of lesbian space making, beyond the university environment, could hold possibilities for lesbian health and wellbeing. Queer feminisms, though hotly contested, are continuing to name heterosexuality as a political institution.[80] Women's collectives can be important spaces from which to expand relational forms and engage in practices of self-transformation in ways that are aligned with Foucault's critiques of normative power.[81,82] 1970s radical feminist discourses invoked a strategic essentialism that enabled the organisation of women's oppositional practices and communities.[70] Radical lesbian space may exist today where "a smaller minority, are nostalgic for that movement's radical imagination... who appreciate lesbian feminism for its cultural manifestations – women's land".[83] Separatism as a material, economic practice continues to produce possibilities for lesbian lives outside of structures dominated by heterosexuality and capitalism.[84] Elements of radical feminism remain useful in drawing attention to the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality continues to operate in ways which restrict women, and to support radical practices of resistance.

Conclusion

Foucault's concept of a history of the present offers the opportunity to render the present strange. This genealogical

analysis has shown that a shift in that ways in which lesbian identity was constructed in the 1970s to how some young lesbian women constructed themselves in 2012 has occurred. The radical lesbian challenges and practices deployed in the 1970s regarding hetero dominance have been marginalised. Instead, compulsory family status has emerged as a normative relationship ethics, limiting some women's resistance. Bringing historical constructions to bear on the present can function as "counter-history" opening up "critical, resistive potential".[85] Rethinking radical lesbian possibilities for women's health could involve examining the political implications of 'personal issues', and supporting women's collective space-making and relational creativity.

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