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7

WHEREVER I LAY MY GIRLFRIEND, THAT'S MY HOME

the performance and surveillance of lesbian identities in domestic environments

Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine

WANTED: LESBIANS TO LIVE IN AN ALL-DYKE HOUSE.
VEGETARIAN AND NON-SMOKING PREFERRED. 40 DOLLARS
PER WEEK. FREE SUZANNE CLIPS TO THE FIRST THREE
APPLICANTS.

Home is a word that positively drips with associations—according to various academic literatures it's a private, secure location, a sanctuary, a locus of identity and a place where inhabitants can escape the disciplinary practices that regulate our bodies in everyday life (Allan and Crow 1989; Saunders 1989). Above all the home is often presented as being synonymous with the heterosexual 'family' and the ideal of family life (Allan 1989; Madigan *et al.* 1990; Oakley 1976; Saunders 1989). But not all homes are exclusively occupied by heterosexuals. 'Home' can take on very different and contradictory meanings for sexual dissidents who share a house with heterosexual family members (Bell 1991; Valentine 1993a) and for those, like the lesbians who placed the advertisements above, who create their own domestic space. 'At home' sexual identities are both performed and come under surveillance. Whilst 'the home' may be taken for granted or appropriated as the terrain of heterosexual family life and therefore be regarded as normative, it is also a possible site of challenge and subversion. This chapter draws on research carried out in New Zealand and the UK¹ to explore the experiences of lesbians in the parental home; and to examine how lesbians create and manage their own domestic environments.² The chapter does not seek to reify the idea of 'lesbian identity' or 'lesbian homes' in a universal sense. Rather, it suggests that lesbians' experiences from different cultures be part of the wider debate of geographies of difference. The local politics of lesbians in NZ and the UK are brought together to highlight the fragmented nature of difference.

HAPPY FAMILIES: LESBIANS IN THE PARENTAL HOME

The word 'home' has multiple meanings. In an attempt to clarify the concept, Somerville (1992) has picked out seven key dimensions: shelter, hearth (i.e. emotional and physical well-being), heart (loving and caring social relations), privacy, roots (source of identity and meaningfulness), abode and paradise ('ideal home' as distinct from everyday life). This is, he claims, a classification that can be supported by Watson and Austerberry's (1986) empirical findings. Of these seven meanings, it is the notions of privacy and heart that appear to have received most academic attention.

Being in a private space is at the heart of what it means to be 'at home' according to Graham Allan and Graham Crow. They argue that 'A home of one's own is...valued as a place in which members of a family can live in private, away from the scrutiny of others, and exercise control over outsiders' involvement in domestic affairs' (Allan and Crow 1989:4). This ability 'to relax' and 'to be yourself' away from the gaze of others, was also identified as one of the most important meanings of home by participants in Peter Saunders' (1989) research. As one of his respondents explains:

'I can dress how I like and do what I like. The kids always brought home who they liked. It's not like other people's place where you have to take your shoes off when you go in.'

in Saunders 1989:181

Peter Saunders summarises such sentiments when he states: 'The home is where people

are offstage, free from surveillance, in control of their immediate environment. It is their castle. It is where they feel they belong' (ibid.: 184).

But although the home may be a more or less private place for 'the family' it doesn't necessarily guarantee freedom for individuals from the watchful gaze of other household members: 'the public world does not begin and end at the front door' (Allan and Crow 1989:5). Rather, the ideology of 'the family' actually emphasises a form of togetherness, intimacy and interest in each others' business that can actually deny this privacy. Linda McDowell (1983) is one of many authors to have argued that women have little access to private space within the family home. Likewise, children's space (usually a bedroom), is often subject to intrusion and violation by parents (Hunt and Frankenberg 1981) and young people usually have less power than other members of the household to make decisions that determine the 'family lifestyle' (Madigan *et al.* 1990). The privacy of a place is not therefore necessarily the same as having privacy in a place. In this sense the distinction between public and private is complex and hard to draw, being simultaneously articulated at a multiplicity of levels.

Lesbians living in (or returning to) the 'family' house, who haven't 'come out' to their parents can find that a lack of privacy from the parental gaze constrains their freedom to perform a 'lesbian' identity 'at home'. Home is not for them, the place where they can, in Peter Saunders' words, establish the 'core' (Saunders 1989:187) of their lives. It does not, to use Somerville's (1992:533) classification, have any meaning as a source of identity or 'Wherever I lay my girlfriend, that's my home' 89

'roots'. Rather it is a location where their sexuality must often take a back seat. The most obvious expression of their identity—lesbian sex—is definitely off limits (at least when parents have them under surveillance) as Janice and Sharon, a New Zealand lesbian couple, explain:

'Well it makes me sad 'cos I can't take Sharon home, that's my problem 'cos I never came out to my parents.'

Janice, New Zealand lesbian

'She took me home, and it was really uncomfortable. We didn't do anything. We slept in the same room but in separate, single beds. And your mother sounded confused 'cos Janice was going "Oh we'll just use the double bed, we'll just sleep in there, that's all right". Your mother [Janice's] was going "Um, are you sure? Look we've got the two single beds, how about you sleep in the single beds, come on Janice?"'

Sharon, New Zealand lesbian

One option to try and get round these moments is to 'come out' to the family. But this means running the risk of taking on parental pain, anger, disgust and even rejection. And so fear of being 'found out' or of giving themselves away drives many women to use time/ space strategies to separate the performance of their lesbian identity from the performance of their identity as a daughter (Valentine 1993b).

'My sister knows, my parents don't... I moved away so there didn't seem any point in saying anything. I mean I got a job here away from them and they were back in Cardiff, so there was no need for them to find out. But now they've moved to Redcar [a few miles away] which is a source of irritation to me.'

Sandra, English lesbian

Unlike Janice and Sandra, Julie is 'out' to her family, but in practice it makes little difference to her experience of the asymmetrical family home, as her sexual activity is still policed by her vigilant parents.

'When I came out to my parents, my mother said "there's only one stipulation, you can bring your girlfriends home but they can't sleep in the same room with you"... That was it. When I have taken a lover home there she has just been really different. It's felt really uncomfortable.'

Julie, New Zealand lesbian

Whilst some parents may also feel squeamish or prudish about their daughter having sex with a male partner under the family roof, within the discourse of heterosexism, a male partner is at least the established 'norm' and although 'sex' may be banned, kissing,

holding hands and other expressions of (hetero)sexuality are usually accepted as part and parcel of 'normal' relationships. For many lesbian couples, the expression of anything beyond 'friendship' is tantamount to 'flaunting it' and so they modify their behaviour to Mapping desire 90

such an extent that their relationship is virtually invisible.

It is not only sexual activity that is inhibited by the hegemony of heterosexuality; there are many other moments when a lesbian identity cuts across the grain of the heterosexual 'nature' of the 'family' home. The home is supposed to be a place where family members participate in communal activities, socialise and share their feelings. These basic patterns of social relations are often underlain with a heterosexual ethos. At the kitchen table and round the TV the asymmetrical family can serve up a relentless diet of heterosexism and homophobia—'Have you got a boyfriend?' 'Don't you fancy him?' 'Letting those poofs on telly, it's bloody disgusting.' Not surprisingly this cultural web of heterosexual norms can inhibit the performative aspects of a woman's lesbian identity.

'the comments Dad makes about queers and lezzies. I mean, he said it in front of me. Michelle [her partner] and I have been sitting there and I'd feel sick.'

Catherine, English lesbian

According to James Duncan (1981:2–4), the home is a medium for the expression of individual identity; a site of creativity; a symbol of the self. Such that Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1979) describe the contents of the house and garden as 'the visible bit of the iceberg' (quoted in Duncan 1981:175). These semi-fixed domestic items, from curtains and wallpaper to pictures and books, are all supposed to help inhabitants to communicate an identity and outsiders to read it (Rapoport 1981). Many asymmetrical family homes are impregnated with 'heterosexuality'. Its overwhelming presence seeps out of everything from photograph albums to record collections. But the love that dare not speak its name in the family house can hardly cover the walls and smile down from the picture frames. And so lesbians restrict the performance of their sexual identity in their own physical surroundings, hiding pictures of lesbian icon kd lang under the mattress and gay fiction behind the bookcase, ever cautious that the privacy of their bedroom may be subject to the gaze of brothers, sisters and parents.

The constraints on the performance of a lesbian identity don't stop at the bedroom door. Judith Butler (1990) has critiqued gender, sex and the body as categories, suggesting that they are discursively produced by the effects of various institutional practices and discourses. She argues that the body is not a ready surface awaiting signification but a set of boundaries, 'a surface whose permeability is politically regulated and established' (1990:139). As these women describe, the parental home can inscribe the lesbian body. While still 'be-ing' a lesbian, for these women there is not the repetition or redoubling of the role that is necessary for the lesbian category to be expressed in a heterosexual environment.

'[I] cover my tattoos up when I go home, especially if mum and dad have company coming over. I do that, it doesn't worry me, that's it.'

Jackie, New Zealand lesbian

'[I dress more] conservatively...kind of straight and less scruffy.'

Hayley, New Zealand lesbian

Wherever i lay my gitrlfriend, that's my home 91

The home can therefore be a site of tension for women who identify as lesbians—a place where the ideal of the home as a place of security, freedom and control meets the reality of the home as site where heterosexual family relations act on and restrict the performance of a lesbian identity. Rather than being 'where above all one feels "in place"' (Eyles 1984:425), 'at home' is where many lesbians feel 'out of place' and that they don't belong or fit in. In Somerville's (1992) terms, home may have meaning as a 'shelter' and an 'abode' but not as 'roots' or 'paradise'.

'I mean, as much as I love my family I always feel I don't fit in. The only place I feel at ease is with gay people... I feel I sit in a room full of my family and I feel I'm just not part of this, I don't fit in.'

Jane, English lesbian

This lack of ontological security can also be accompanied by a lack of actual physical security. Research shows that whilst lesbians experience less abuse at the hands of strangers than gay men, they are at the receiving end of more domestic violence perpetrated by family members ‘disgusted’ by their sexuality (Berrill 1992; Comstock 1989). This violence, which can range from physical assault to verbal intimidation and harassment, contributes to shattering the myth of ‘home as a haven’.

But the heterosexual family home isn’t only a site of oppression, but also a site of subversion—a place where a lesbian identity can sometimes be discreetly performed so that it is not read as such by other family members. For example, by dressing in a way

Mapping desire 92

Plate 7.1 A self-portrait by a New Zealand lesbian

Source: Lynda Johnston

that has lesbian meaning for them, wearing discreet lesbian jewellery, or more subtly by listening to the music of lesbian icons like kd lang (Bradby 1993), women can eke out a lesbian identity in a home environment that is constraining and repressive. This is most

Wherever i lay my gitrlfriend, that's my home 93
easily done when women appropriate musicians, athletes, TV programmes and so on who have at least one foot planted squarely in heterosexual culture, thus allowing a lesbian audience to read them in one way whilst having a quiet laugh at the obliviousness of friends and relatives to their alternative meanings (Plate 7.1). In this way lesbian culture can effectively take symbols of heterosexuality and throw them back in its face. Other acts of subversion are less subtle with women having sex in the marital bed when their parents are out or sneaking ‘friends’, who are to all intents and purposes innocently staying over for the night, into their own bed.

Home is supposed to be where your heart is. It is supposed to provide a space for individuals to be themselves. The parental home may meet the needs of a ‘daughter’, and most of the women interviewed did talk of their family home as ‘loving and supportive’, but this was only when their lesbian identity was not being ‘performed’. The parental home seems largely incapable of meeting the needs of the ‘lesbian daughter’—except in a material sense. It may have the meanings ‘shelter’, ‘abode’, ‘hearth’, but it doesn’t appear to have the meanings ‘privacy’, ‘roots’ (identity) and ‘paradise’ (ideal home). Rather the freedom to perform a lesbian identity (Plate 7.2), to relax, be in control and to enjoy the ontological security of being ‘at home’ appears to be best met when lesbians can create and manage their ‘own homes’.

Mapping desire 94

Plate 7.2 ‘Being oneself’—a New Zealand lesbian ‘at home’

Source: Lynda Johnston

Wherever i lay my gitrlfriend, that's my home 95

AT HOME: MAKING LESBIAN SPACE

Housing in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain has been and is ‘primarily designed, built, financed and intended for nuclear families—reinforcing a cultural norm of family life with heterosexuality and patriarchy high on the agenda’ (Bell 1991:325). As Louise Johnson argues:

What is being offered to both women and men is a set of recognisable cultural symbols (chief of which is the suburban home and its ownership)...[but housing] also allows the subversion of dominant social relations. For there is no reason why ‘Bedroom 1’ should not be occupied by children or a gay couple.

Johnson 1992:44

Lesbians occupying a home built on these traditional cultural symbols often do subvert them by making structural changes to the house to express a non-heterosexual identity or lifestyle, as this woman explains.

‘I’ve made my room...I’ve built a mezzanine bed, and I have lots of things of comfort around me in my room... Things which reflect me and reflect the things that I’ve done in my life, or the people that are important to me and my lifestyle.’

Mary, New Zealand lesbian

Louise Dooley (1985) argues that there may be connections between the self which is invested in private and personal things and the home, because the home as the house of these things automatically assumes a sacred nature. Notwithstanding this, women also make more conscious efforts to produce a space within which they feel 'at home'. Posters depicting famous lesbians, pictures, personal photographs, music collections and colour schemes (and the compulsory cat and/or dog)³ are used to make the house a 'lesbian' space. Some women living in shared houses, particularly those influenced by lesbian feminist politics, also attempt to create different ways of living within the framework of the house, for example by producing combined living spaces and by organising daily activities on a collective basis (Egerton 1990; Ettore 1978).

But our identities are not singular; they are multiple and often contradictory. Identities performed by lesbians in their homes may produce discordant spaces and odd juxtapositions; on the one hand, spaces may resonate with lesbian identities, on the other hand they may resonate with childhood things that reflect the identities of the 'child', 'the daughter' and 'the biological family'. This interface of needs and desires between the lesbian home and the parental home is captured by this woman, who expresses a need to have artistic objects around her that remind her of her upbringing, and her attachment to her 'family' home:

'Pictures, colours and comfortable things from my family, like, my mum, my
Mapping desire 96

grandmother and my aunty all paint and they've always had paintings around them. That's been their hobby, and I pick up from that.'

Elaine, New Zealand lesbian

Tensions between parents and a daughter's lesbian identity can resurface even when she has fled the heterosexual nest. Having a home of one's own may allow a woman enough control over the space to express her sexuality in the physical environment but it doesn't necessarily guarantee freedom from the prying eyes of parents, relatives and neighbours. Discouraging people from popping in and trying to arrange planned rather than spontaneous visits can buy enough time for the home to be 'prepared' for visitors.

Alternatively, visitors can be limited to one or two rooms that are 'produced' for public scrutiny to symbolise the whole home (Allan 1989; Mason 1989). For example, the living room and dining room provide a formal statement about the home for outsiders whereas the bedroom has a greater aura of privacy and is an easier space in which to perform a lesbian identity. One New Zealander explained that she restricted her parents' movements within her home in order to stop them entering rooms covered with lesbian posters, but unfortunately the off-limit rooms included the toilet. In the event, her parents didn't need to use the bathroom during their visit. If they had she would have been forced 'to come out' or be found out. Her flatmate recalled the experience as being 'quite nerve racking'. One way to take the tension out of these fraught occasions is to change the performance of the home according to the identity of the visitor. Whilst some women 'de-dyke' the house completely, others make more subtle changes depending on the level of discomfort likely to be expressed by visitors or experienced by the occupants.

'Things like *Macho Sluts* [a book] would go down like a cup of cold sick. I freak out and run round and de-dyke the whole place.'

Joanne, New Zealand lesbian

'[If her mother was feeling] really uncomfortable... I mean there would probably be some things that I'd remove so that it [lesbianism] wasn't so blatantly obvious.'

Sarah, New Zealand lesbian

'My parents came to stay and they slept in my room, and I was really aware of the poster I had on the wall which has got a picture of myself and [the word]

Wherever i lay my gitrlfriend, that's my home 97

Plate 7.3 'My home'

Source: Lynda Johnston

"lesbian", and it's got heaps of positive words for lesbians around it. And I was really aware of that picture all the time and I really wanted to see what their

reaction was... I wondered if they even think about why I had it there.'

Janice, New Zealand Lesbian

Despite these moments the lesbian home can be more than a place of arrival and departure and a location for shuffling a pack of identities and laying out a different hand. It can also be a focal point of lesbian activities, a place of support, a sanctuary and a secure area where a lesbian identity can be maintained usually without threat from other occupants. In Somerville's terms it can embrace 'roots' and 'paradise'. This is reflected in Plate 7.3, a drawing of 'home' by a New Zealand lesbian; and by these quotations:

'It's comfortable for me as a lesbian, 'cos I know I can come home after a day ...and it could be a really challenging day, and I'm able to talk it out. I can just be me, I don't have to face challenges unless it comes on the television or the radio. And then we [lesbian flatmates] can all stand round and yell at the TV.'

Sue, New Zealand lesbian

'It's like when with my parents, I have to live a separate life and with work it has to be a separate life and it gets sort of hard work at times, keeping

Mapping desire 98

everybody happy, everybody in their place, being one thing to one person, not ever being your *whole self* except obviously *in the home*.'

Stacey, English lesbian

As this last quotation explains, juggling multiple identities in public space in this way, so that a lesbian identity is not performed to the 'wrong' audience, can be nerve-racking. To be seen by family, friends or colleagues going into a gay bar or holding hands in the street with another woman can rupture a carefully cultivated illusion of heterosexuality. 'The home', particularly for those who are very wary about the personal and employment consequences of being 'outed', can therefore take on a vital role as a lesbian social venue and meeting place. Indeed, in many provincial towns and rural areas, informal networks of private homes fill the entertainment gap created by a complete absence of lesbian institutional spaces. And, in other places, homes become alternative focal points for groups of women alienated from gay bars and institutional spaces because of political or personality clashes.

'Most of the lesbian bit of my life is home-based I suppose, with supper parties and things.'

Sara, English lesbian

But this is not to suggest that the lesbian home is anymore the idyllic romanticised haven than the heterosexual nuclear family home was before it fell from grace under the weight of feminist critiques of domestic violence and so on. Like the heterosexual home, the lesbian home is also a site of conflict and disagreement. It is a site where a lesbian identity must be performed, but it is also a site where this identity comes under surveillance from other lesbians. 'Political correctness', which has come to haunt the lesbian feminist landscape, or other 'orthodoxies', can be invoked by some women to regulate the performative aspects of others' lesbian identities within the domestic environment.

Children can also be at the heart of domestic conflict. Anyone replacing 'Dad' in mother's affections is liable to run the gauntlet of children's anger and jealousy but this hostility can take on a new edge when Mum's new partner is another woman. Children's aggression and rejection can also be accompanied by overt attempts to exaggerate their own performance of heterosexuality. Not surprisingly, being constantly under surveillance in this climate can limit the performance of lesbian sexuality in a 'lesbian home', by inhibiting women from being affectionate to each other, sharing a bed and so on. Ultimately the clash of identities under the same roof can come to a head with either the 'child' deserting the 'lesbian home', often to take up residence in the heterosexual environment of a grandparents' home; or the mother's lover being driven out as the children struggle to reproduce the space as a 'normal family' home.

'She [daughter, aged 6] gets very upset that we live together. She gets very jealous. She heard me saying to Pat that I love her. And she said "Don't say that, I don't want to hear it". She's very set that she's gonna get married... So it's

very difficult to be a couple and relax together when Tracey's so hostile.'

Wherever i lay my girlfriend, that's my home 99

Maria, English lesbian

'when the relationship before this one, was breaking up, I did have a conversation with them both and she [daughter] did say "Does that mean we are going to be back to normal?" and what she meant was that would I no longer be a lesbian. So of course I found that quite upsetting.'

Lesley, English lesbian

The privacy of the home is not always the same thing as privacy from the neighbours. Prying eyes over the garden fence, eavesdropping through badly soundproofed walls, and the efficiency of local gossip networks can expose the most 'closeted' of couples to neighbourhood surveillance. Usually, this evokes nothing more than a few snide or petty remarks but occasionally lesbian and gay homes can become the target of hate campaigns or vicious attempts to restore the 'respectability' of the neighbourhood by driving the occupants out of the street (Harry 1992). In studies of anti-gay attacks in Pennsylvania State, Anthony D'Augelli (1989) found that of 125 incidents of victimisation recorded by participants, 17 per cent involved property being damaged or destroyed. The 'home' is not always therefore a place of emotional and physical well-being.

'When we first moved in the person who lives the first house round the corner said "Are you sisters?" And I said "no, just friends" and I think we got known as the couple of dykes on the corner... One night... we were in bed and it woke me up and one of them said "Queers live here". But I didn't hear anything else and there was a bit of giggling and I felt like hanging out the window and saying "Yes, and they're trying to get some sleep!"'

Chris, English lesbian

'There's a neighbour who's a bit of a worry... I walked past them [neighbour and his son] and they said "fucking dyke". I just ignored it and carried on walking. When they started giving Mike [another neighbour who the two men have accused of being gay] trouble and wrecking his car and things [by pouring acid on it], I got more careful about kissing Emma goodbye at the door and whatever because I don't want to be victimised.'

Chris, English lesbian

Ironically, the more lesbians withdraw from local and family life and put up barriers against outsiders, the more this privacy can become an isolation that suffocates the relationship or facilitates one partner's ability to emotionally manipulate or physically abuse the other (Hall 1992; Mann 1993). This isolation from heterosexual friends, neighbours and family can often be compounded by a lack of contact with other lesbians, particularly in provincial towns and rural areas where there are few places and opportunities for gay women to meet. Thus two women in a lesbian relationship can often become very dependent on one another. This dependence can give one the power to control or dominate the other, especially if one woman is just 'coming out' or has less experience of a lesbian lifestyle than the other. NiCarthy (1982:234) argues that: 'An Mapping desire 100

abusive lesbian might insist she knows what is "correct" about the lesbian lifestyle, as if there is only one.' Emotional abuse, about how a woman dresses, behaves and what she should do to be a lesbian, is, according to Lezli Mann (1993), often the prelude to actual physical harm. For lesbians trapped in these relationships the difficulties of telling a friend, colleague or relative about the abuse and seeking help are often compounded by the trauma of having to simultaneously 'come out', concern about how this information will be received and a fear that not only one's relationship but also one's sexuality will be judged negatively (Mann 1993).

While a lesbian home may become almost a prison or a very static and stifling place to be, lesbian homes can also be very fluid and unstable environments. Because of the limited opportunities lesbians have to meet one another in everyday environments, lesbian social networks, particularly in provincial towns, can be very incestuous (Valentine 1993c).

'It would be fascinating to do a genogram, not of parents but of ex-partners. It would be like this [hand action]—so jammed and intertwined. It's like a family. It's a lot more interwoven than a comparable heterosexual set-up. We used to have a saying "sisters-in-lust" because so-and-so's slept with so-and-so, so we're all indirectly related.'

Vicky, English lesbian

As this quotation implies, as women shuttle between relationships so the ownership and occupation of lesbian homes can become fluid and complex as women hop from living in one 'lesbian home' to another. This movement can also produce different sorts of living arrangements and alternative conceptions of what constitutes 'home' that may have greater meaning in terms of 'identity' or 'privacy' but less in terms of material security as 'shelter' or 'abode'.

CONCLUSION

We all have a multiplicity of subject positions and identities. 'Home' is one site where our identities are performed and come under surveillance and where we struggle to reconcile conflicting and contradictory performances of the self. 'Home' itself is also a term laden down with a baggage of multiple meanings: shelter, abode, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, paradise and so on. For women who identify as lesbians, the parental (or 'family') home is often a site where they have to manage the clash of their identity as a lesbian with their identity as 'daughter' from a heterosexual family. The struggle to control how their identity is read and received under the surveillance of vigilant parents can rob the parental home of its meaning as a place of 'privacy', 'roots' and 'paradise'. Whilst being a place of material and emotional comfort ('shelter', 'abode', 'hearth' and even 'heart') that can meet the needs and desires of the 'daughter', the parental home does not appear to meet the needs and desires of the 'lesbian'. It is a location where lesbianism and heterosexuality do battle. The heterosexuality of the home can inscribe

Wherever i lay my girlfriend, that's my home 101
the lesbian body by restricting the performative aspects of a lesbian identity but it can also be subverted itself by covert acts of resistance.

The 'lesbian home' is one site of lesbian identity construction and maintenance.

Constituted to meet the needs and desires of lesbians, it appears to be a place of significance, of 'roots' and even 'paradise', for many women. But despite the greater freedom to perform a lesbian identity within the boundaries of a 'lesbian home', it is still a location where this identity comes under the surveillance of others, especially close family, friends and neighbours. It is not necessarily a place of 'privacy'. In some cases the physical site of the home is actually altered depending on the relationship of the visitor to the occupants so that a lesbian identity is not performed in the physical environment to the 'wrong audience', thereby disguising the identity of the occupants. Alternatively, in an attempt to create the privacy necessary to conceal a lesbian relationship, couples can often withdraw from family, friends and the local neighbourhood and become isolated. This isolation can become stiflingly claustrophobic, smothering relationships and enabling abusive domestic situations to develop unnoticed under this cloak of privacy. Thus a lesbian home is not necessarily a place of emotional and physical well-being ('hearth' and 'heart'). Neither is it always a stable 'shelter' or 'abode'—domestic conflicts between women and their children and the usual ebb and flow of sexual relationships can all contribute to a fluidity in the membership and constitution of lesbian households.

The meanings of 'home' to the lesbians involved in this research are numerous and beset with contradictions. They are perhaps most neatly summed up by Massey when she writes about the home (in a different context): 'each home-place is itself... a complex product of the ever-shifting geography of social relations present and past' (Massey 1992:15).

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NOTES

1 This paper is based on findings generated by everyday places that were carried out in the UK focus group discussions exploring the meaning by Gill Valentine. The drawings used in this text of home conducted by Lynda Johnston with are selfportraits and sketches of the lesbian lesbians in New Zealand and by forty in-depth home made by participants in Lynda Johnston's taped interviews about lesbians' perceptions of research.

2 Gay women obviously also live in many other forms of 'home', for example with male partners in marital homes, in rented accommodation and so on, and are of Mapping desire 102

course also 'homeless'. These issues, however, lie beyond the scope of this chapter.

3 In the UK within lesbian culture it is joked that the stereotypical lesbian has at least one cat. In New Zealand 'she' owns dogs!

Wherever i lay my gitrlfriend, that's my home 103