

strategies in their use of folklore. Humor is pervasive. Ambiguity is also common, allowing covert messages to be conveyed through the use of double meanings. If someone receiving a message takes offense, the sender can protest innocence by insisting that the receiver misunderstood. Since gay men were brought up in the heterosexual culture, they have a background from which they can draw double meanings.

In the following *double entendre*, the ambiguity is rather obvious. Feeling his attempt at finding a sexual partner for the evening to be futile, one man said, "Well, I guess I'll go home and do something constructive, like knit." Another man responded, "But you only have one needle." The first replied, "So I'll crochet." The exchange was spontaneous and the reactions were quick; nothing was laboriously thought out. The humor goes a bit deeper than it first appears, for it plays upon the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual male: both knitting and crocheting are associated with women. A man with only one needle (or penis) cannot engage in a cooperative endeavor like knitting, which requires two needles working together. Thus he must make do with the equipment at hand: having but one needle, he must crochet (masturbate). Since this encounter took place between two men, each of whom knew the other was homosexual, and because it occurred within a gay context, both intended meanings were clear to those who heard the exchange. The two men were simply engaging in a bit of word play. Had the men continued the conversation along similar lines, the double entendres could have been used to lay the basis for a sexual proposition.

Inversion is a third strategem used by homosexual men. In taking words like *faggot* that heterosexual people have used as tools of oppression and turning them into statements of pride and defiance, gay men state their refusal to be labeled as sick, immoral, and evil.

*Conclusion.* The folklore of homosexual men functions in many ways—as a means by which gays can identify and communicate with one another without other people's awareness, as a tool to help create a sense of "group" and belonging, and as a way of coping with and expressing conflict. Most of all, folklore helps homosexual men gain cultural competence, that is, to function as gay men with other gay men. As long as schools, families, churches, and other institutions fail to fulfill this role, folklore will continue to meet such needs.

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Joseph P. Goodwin

## FOLKLORE, LESBIAN

Lesbian folklore is the collection, documentation, and analysis of the traditional cultural products and experiences of lesbians learned through face-to-face interaction and through observation and imitation. The following presentation utilizes examples of contemporary American lesbian folklore collected by the author from a cross-section of the Bloomington, Indiana lesbian-feminist community during the first half of 1988. Bloomington, a small Midwestern town and home of Indiana University, is a "gay mecca" because of the large homosexual population.

Bloomington lesbians belong to three lesbian communities: national, regional, and local. Within the local lesbian community diverse groups exist such as factory dykes, academic dykes, and bar dykes. It is within these informally struc-

tured community networks that the majority of lesbian folklore exists. That folklore can be classified into three categories: verbal folklore (oral), customary folklore (verbal and non-verbal), and material folklore (artifacts).

*Verbal Folklore.* One particularly fertile area in this realm is folk speech, including a specialized vocabulary and expressions which are circulated by word of mouth within the folk group. Folk terminology utilized by lesbians is vast. **Dyke**, formerly a derogatory term, is now a reclaimed term of pride. Numerous derivations of dyke exist: "baby dyke," "blazer dyke," "psychodyke" (in therapy), "execudyke" (yuppie), "softball dyke," "back-to-the-land-dyke," and "the dyke of life" (stereotypical lesbian). Formalized phrases also make liberal use of the word dyke: "it was dykes for days" means seeing a lot of dykes, especially in unexpected places such as the grocery store. "Dyke detector" means picking out another lesbian. Another example is the term "queer," which can be comfortably spoken in a group of lesbians, thus serving as a camaraderie word. The traditional toast "cheers for queers" shows the friendly way queer can be used in an in-group context.

The lesbian lexicon contains a wealth of other folk speech items: initial-ized terms such as "p.i." (politically incorrect), "d.p." (dyke potential), and "p.h.d." (pretty heavy dyke); expressions to refer to outsiders (heterosexuals) such as "hets" and "breeders"; and word play such as "no homo" (when someone is not home when the phone rings), "forward gaily" (when giving directions), and "straightening up" (the house). One fascinating area of folk speech concerns coding or the way one lesbian communicates information when lesbian identity is concealed. "She goes to my church" (she's a lesbian) is a phrase of black lesbians. Folk speech demarcates the lesbian community's uniqueness and separateness. Use of folk speech helps maintain group solidarity.

Personal experience narratives are a significant part of many lesbians' repertoire. These stories are about an experience in the narrator's own life that one recounts frequently. Two types of personal experience narratives in the Bloomington lesbian community are "coming out" stories and humorous tales of lesbian life. Coming-out stories are the best known of all lesbian narratives and are so firmly ingrained into lesbian culture that a lesbian may request another lesbian to share her coming-out story. Coming-out stories are now available in printed form. Two collections are *The Coming Out Stories* edited by Julia Stanley and Susan Wolfe and *Testimonies: A Collection of Coming Out Stories*, edited by Sarah Holmes. Each lesbian's story is unique and chronicles the transitional stage of a lesbian's life when she solidifies her lesbian identity to herself and to others. Since coming-out is a process, many lesbians have several coming-out stories. Telling and retelling one's coming-out story or stories serves to reinforce one's lesbian identity.

Humorous tales of lesbian life are experiences after one has established her identity. Common themes in these humorous tales are: visiting parents, especially during holidays; asking another woman for a date; detailing of a situation where the lesbian is for the first time being open with non-lesbians failing to understand; situations in the workplace and ironic situations (e.g., a lesbian teacher of sex education meeting a lesbian worker at Planned Parenthood). More often than not the core of these humorous narratives points to the painful aspects of living day-to-day as a lesbian in a homophobic world. Telling these tales provides an avenue for the narrator and her audience to laugh at herself and lesbian life.

*Customary Folklore.* This area encompasses both verbal and non-verbal traditions. Customary folklore can be found within celebrations and festivals. Within the lesbian community, relationships

provide a framework for the creation and perpetuation of celebratory customs. One celebration frequently observed is the anniversary, acknowledging the day a couple made love for the first time; the celebration serves as a marker for the longevity of the relationship. Anniversary celebrations are private, quiet times. Many couples go out to dinner or make a special dinner at home and exchange gifts. When a major relationship landmark has been reached, such as the fifth anniversary, a couple may have a big party.

Joinings or bondings are another relationship celebration with traditional customs which, although not legally recognized, acknowledge the couple's pairing. A local park or other natural setting is a frequently chosen site for a bonding. A couple write their own vows and may exchange rings. Following the ceremony food (including vegetarian selections), music (women's), and games (volleyball is a favorite) may complete the celebration. One relatively new addition to the lesbian community's expanding list of celebrations is baby showers, as more and more lesbian couples choose to have children. Lesbian-feminist community values are reflected in these folk celebrations and customs.

Festival season (summer) is many a lesbian's favorite time of year. Strength and energy gained during "festi's" helps one get through the rest of the year. In the Midwest, two festivals are frequented: The National Women's Music Festival and the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Festivals bring together diverse groups of lesbians as well as a few heterosexual women. When in progress, festivals become temporal lesbian communities. Over the years (both mentioned festivals are now in their teens) a variety of customs have developed. It is customary, for example, to make sure that the festivals are accessible to women with disabilities. Sign-language interpreters for women who are deaf or hearing impaired are provided for major concerts and for other activities upon

request. At the concerts it is becoming customary for performers to recognize interpreters in a lovingly humorous way, behavior which brings loud applause from the audience. These annual music festivals with their attending customs hold special significance for lesbians as times to escape the daily oppression of a homophobic culture and as times to celebrate one's lesbianism communally.

*Material Culture.* Among the tangible objects of material culture are items of folk costume. In pre-feminist days describing a lesbian folk costume was a relatively simple matter, as several older Bloomington lesbians recalled. Plaid flannel shirts or work shirts, bib overalls or jeans, and heavy work boots were standard pieces of apparel. A lesbian might wear a pinky ring (a symbol of one's lesbian identity recognized by other lesbians) and cut her hair short (Ann Bannon's novels about Beebo Brinker and Lee Lynch's novel *Swashbuckler* are excellent sources for learning about clothing styles in the 1950s and 60s). With the advent of feminism in the 1970s folk costume became more diversified. Shirts are cotton or other natural fibers commonly worn open at the neck to show off one's woman-identified jewelry (especially at lesbian community events). A more tailored style—not a lot of frills—is appropriate for shirts. T-shirts often display sayings. Lesbian sayings such as "I got this way from kissing girls" may be worn at lesbian events. For everyday wear good "lefty" sayings are usual choices. Most selected color choices are lavender, purple, or bright colors, not pastels. Pants can be jeans, tailored slacks, or baggy pants. Again, natural fibers and no pastel colors are the rule.

Shoes should be flat and comfortable, made of good quality material, especially leather. Tennis shoes, especially high-tops, are popular style choices. One comic note which points to the prevalence of comfortable shoe use can be gleaned from Robin Williams' movie *Good Morning, Vietnam*. At one point during one of

his A.M. radio broadcasts he says: "We can't even use the word dyke, you can't even say the word lesbian. It's women in comfortable shoes." Much lore surrounds Birkenstocks, including the belief that there is a good chance that a woman who wears Birkenstocks is a lesbian.

Favorite jewelry choices are crystals (unpolished) and woman-identified jewelry such as a labrys (double ax) or a double women's symbol. Cowrie shells woven into the hair are favored by many black lesbians. The primary lesbian community value expressed in how and what clothing and adornments are worn is comfort.

*Conclusion.* There are also other forms of lesbian folklore: legends, jokes, arts, crafts, and the like. Other regions of the United States would provide additions to and variations of the examples given. Imbedded within lesbian books are wonderful samples of lesbian folklore. The grassroots newsletter *Lesbian Connection* is another rich source of lesbian folklore. On the academic side several ethnographies give descriptions of lesbian communities. Lesbian archives located throughout the United States house primary data collections (letters, diaries, photographs, and the like) which contain folkloric information. Lesbians should be encouraged to preserve their heritage by donating documents to archives and by interviewing friends and donating tapes.

Aside from a few papers read at the American Folklore Society's annual meetings in the 1980s, folkloristic analysis of lesbian material is non-existent. By not including data about lesbians within folklore scholarship, a heterocentric bias has been allowed to permeate the scholarship. When lesbian data are part of folkloric definitions and theories, they will add to a better understanding of America, its folklore, and American lesbian culture.

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Jan Laude

## FORSTER, E[DWARD] M[ORGAN] (1879-1970)

English novelist, short story writer, and essayist. Forster's father died less than two years after his birth, and he was raised by a group of female relatives, who were connected with a stern evangelical sect. When he was ten, a great-aunt left him a legacy, which permitted him to obtain a good private education and to attempt a career as a writer. Forster detested public school, but found King's College, Cambridge, by contrast almost a paradise. Among students and faculty the atmosphere was strongly homoerotic, and Forster developed an intense Platonic relationship with another undergraduate, H. O. Meredith, whom he later was to depict as "Clive" in *Maurice*. Forster's sensibility took shape under the guidance of teachers of Hellenist bent, especially Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, and under the influence of the ethics of personal integrity that stemmed from the philosopher G. E. Moore. In 1901 Forster was elected to the elite secret society at Cambridge, The Apostles, leading to close ties with such other members as John Maynard Keynes and Lytton Strachey.

Uncertain what course to follow after graduation, he sojourned for a year in Italy with his mother. Not only did he find his vocation as a writer there, but he came to cherish to the end of his life a somewhat idealized concept of Mediterranean tolerance and "earthiness" in contradistinction to the Protestant uprightness and commercialism of his native England.