

Lesbian Liberation: The Construction of Rural Lesbian Identities, Cultures, and Activism in New Mexico, 1970s-1980s



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SUB Luminaria

Scholars have mainly conceived of the development of gay and lesbian identities

and its attendant gay liberation movement as urban led. City centers helped solidify LGBTQ culture and aided gay men and lesbians in uniting, but the dichotomy of urban/rural leaves out the spaces in-between and denies the agency of queers in rural areas and small cities who built sexual networks and found ways to embrace “non-normative” sexual identities. I explore lesbians’ participation in an urban-to-rural migration, their ideologies behind moving to rural spaces, and the construction of a land-based lesbian culture. Theoretically, I challenge the urban-based paradigm in the field. Empirically, I provide a social history of rural lesbian life in New Mexico and explain how lesbians resisted homophobia through their employment of multiple strategies. I argue that lesbians spearheaded the movement of queer identified people to rural regions. Lesbian-feminists organized rural separatist communities in northern New Mexico. Lesbians also used the flat-topped mesas and hills, steep mountains and vast desert to form safe and private spaces as individuals and couples. They experimented with activism out of city centers, and thus asserted their visibility and strength everywhere.



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