



## Inventing Lesbian Cultures

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### **Inventing Lesbian Cultures** From Beacon Press

This pioneering collection of essays explores some of the many and varied ways that women might use a particular idea of being lesbian to invent themselves, to understand how they are connected in the world, and to imagine notions of community. Focused through an anthropological lens, contributors explore a wide range of expressions that bind different lesbian communities together—from dance club culture to lesbian wedding ceremonies, from lesbian life in the 1920s to lesbian motherhood today.

As a whole, *Inventing Lesbian Cultures* in America shows how communities and identities allow for a sense of collective meaning for lesbians today. Defined in terms of culture, the activities, alliances, and identities that make up the experience of being lesbian imbue their lives with dignity and stability. *Inventing Lesbian Cultures* in America will become required reading for anyone interested in gender and sexual identity.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

This collection of eight essays gives a wonderful overview of how lesbians think, live, love, and deal with the world today. Editor Ellen Lewin has gathered pieces that range from an examination of lesbian subcultures in South Dakota in the 1930s to an analysis of the lesbian motherhood to a description of the nightlife of black lesbians in Detroit from 1940 to 1975. The essays--informed, well written and fascinating--give us a view of lesbian history and life unprecedented in scope. For the academic, or for the common reader interested in gay history, **Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America** is mandatory reading.

### From Publishers Weekly

Anthropological readings of contemporary lives can be one of two things: enlightening or extremely tedious. Lewin's compilation is an odd combination of both. According to the introduction, the essays mean to examine how lesbians' constructions of the past inform their understandings of the present. That is the basis of most of the essays, but the widely varying degrees of sophistication render the collection uneven. The best works are focused on a specific time and place: Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy writes about the life of a South Dakota teacher who moved in a discrete but acknowledged circle of lesbians in the 1920s and '30s. Rochella Thorpe's essay on house parties as an integral part of lesbian and gay African American socializing from the 1940s to the '70s is an intimate and fresh account. Kath Weston's "Requiem for a Street Fighter" is a succinct, sharp analysis of the failure of the notion of community and its tragic effect on a forgotten individual. Some of the essays are spoiled by bad or pretentious writing. Alisa Klinger takes a half-page of obtuse, academic prose ("the distinctly political cast of multiracial and multiethnic lesbian personal and fictional narratives and the revolutionary investment of lesbians in textual production...") and fails to make a cohesive point other than that lesbians are a diverse group who have written many books. Other essays, such as Lewin's on lesbian weddings and commitment ceremonies, Ellen Herman's on lesbian motherhood and Deborah Amory's on a late 1980s San Francisco lesbian dance club, while focused, fail to turn up important discoveries or insights. If there is a message here, it is that lesbian lives do not automatically make for interesting research, but a researcher's drive can make even the smallest bit of cultural history rich with meaning.

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