



Falling into the Lesbi World

Evelyn Blackwood

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Winner of the 2011 Ruth Benedict Prize for Best Monograph, Association for Queer Anthropology

Falling into the Lesbi World offers a compelling view of sexual and gender difference through the everyday lives of tombois and their girlfriends ("femmes") in the city of Padang, West Sumatra. While likening themselves to heterosexual couples, tombois and femmes contest and blur dominant constructions of gender and heterosexuality. Tombois are masculine females who identify as men and desire women; their girlfriends view themselves as normal women who desire men. Through rich, in-depth, and provocative stories, author Evelyn Blackwood shows how these same-sex Indonesian couples negotiate transgressive identities and desires and how their experiences speak to the struggles and desires of sexual and gender minorities everywhere.

Blackwood analyzes the complex and seemingly contradictory practices of tombois and their partners, demonstrating how they make sense of Islamic, transnational, and modern state discourses in ways that seem to align with normative gender and sexual categories while at the same time subverting them. The childhood and adolescent narratives of tombois and femmes offer bold new insights into a social process that is rarely addressed in anthropological, lesbian, gay, or transgender studies. We see how tombois and femmes come to view themselves as boys and girls, respectively, through their interactions with family and community, and how as teenagers tombois learn that masculinity needs its opposite: feminine women. By contrast femmes notice shifts in their desires as they develop long-term relationships with tombois. The book reveals the complexity of tomboi masculinity, showing how tombois enact both masculine and feminine behaviors as they move between the anonymity and vulnerability of public spaces and the familiarity of family spaces.

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