

**The Contested “White Lady”: Perceptions and
Social Meanings of the “White Lady”
in Auckland.**

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no previously published or written material by another person, or material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed: _____

Lindsay Neill

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Confidential Material

Within this research some participants are immediately identifiable, either because of ownership of the White Lady (Peter Washer) or because of their employment roles within Auckland City Council. These participants are within the domain of general public knowledge, and therefore their identities are not a matter of confidence. However, and in the case of Auckland City Council employees, their inputs are noted not by their name, but rather their position titles or similar.

Other participant groups, namely the staff and customers of the White Lady, have not been identified by name within this work. Descriptors that add to their characterisation within the research are commonly used for these stakeholders.

ABSTRACT

The White Lady (WL) is a mobile fast food takeaway eatery. The WL has been trading in Auckland City's central business district for almost fifty years. The WL opens in the early evening and remains open until the early morning hours. At closing, the WL is towed to a storage area where it remains until this process is repeated. This daily pattern has occurred since the WL opened in 1948. Because of its longevity, the WL, and many of its stakeholders have experienced ongoing change as Auckland City has grown, and competition within fast food has increased. Thus, for many stakeholders, the WL is representative of their lives, a mirror of their reality and life experiences. Obviously, these realities and experiences are different for different stakeholders.

In this thesis, I examine the contested "White Lady" (WL): the perceptions and the social meanings that its stakeholder groups attribute to it. This thesis illuminates differences and similarities within stakeholder viewpoints and in doing so defines that pie carts like the WL are a valid part of New Zealand's culinary and social cultures. Ultimately, this thesis provides a platform of knowledge from which stakeholders and others can come to understand and know the differing and similar views that other stakeholder groups hold. With this in mind, this research ranges in scope from the examination of city administration to the symbolism associated with the (WL) by some of its stakeholders. Therefore, this research is founded within socio-historic constructs: the history of fast food and, the similarities that this history holds to today's WL operation.

The contextualisation of hospitality within "three domains" (Lashley, 2004, p.13) aids in defining the WL as well as recognising the competitive growth of New Zealand's fast food industry. This research suggests that fast food growth and subsequent competition have had negative impacts upon many small fast food outlets including the WL.

The growth of fast food has facilitated a “slow food” (Jones, Shears, Hiller Comfort and Lowell, 2003, p. 298) movement. This movement coupled with the hierarchy of food typologies, adds a Saussurian overlay and sociological discourse to this work. This overlay clarifies for the reader Bourdieu’s (1984) position that all food is reflective of class status. Within postmodernist constructs and the rise of the individual, (and the consequent opportunity to hear ‘voices from the margins’), movement within class and individuality within New Zealand’s wider culture has occurred. Social change therefore, has facilitated some of the issues within WL contestation.

In highlighting Bourdieu’s (1984) concept, the “binary opposition” (Levi-Strauss, 1981, as cited in Adamenko, 2007, p.27) inherent within food hierarchies and, as often expressed within the media, is examined. This examination reveals that while the media inform, this information often contributes to the polarisation of opinion that facilitates the formation of contested viewpoints by WL stakeholders. It is against a backdrop of compliance need, the absence of an official street trading policy, the differing views of stakeholders, and the intensification of competition in fast food, coupled with a lacuna in the knowledge base of younger Auckland residents regarding the WL that this research finds its voice.