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Alex Bitterman
Daniel Baldwin Hess *Editors*

The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods

Renaissance and Resurgence

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Editors


The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods

Renaissance and Resurgence

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*This book is dedicated to the memory of
Michael Thurston*

*His experiences and sacrifices—together with
gay men and lesbian women of his
generation—made possible better lives for
generations of LGBTQ+ people they never
met ...*

*...and to LGBTQ+ pioneers everywhere who
fight for acceptance, dignity, and civil rights.*

Foreword

I am honored to introduce readers to *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Renaissance and Resurgence* (Springer, 2021) edited by Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Hess. This important work summarizes years of sustained research about how LGBTQ+ people inhabit and interact with urban space, forming gay neighborhoods (or “gayborhoods”) that have been a hallmark in recent decades of gay urban life. In the recent past, before gay neighborhoods such as we conceive of them today, gay bars provided one venue for LGBTQ+ people to visit and learn about themselves. These bars were often located in isolated and dangerous locations and were often raided by police. However, greater physical safety made it easier for larger numbers of LGBTQ+ individuals to begin to form communities. In Montréal, for example, this happened in the early 1980s. The gay village in Montréal had changed a great deal over the years, and throughout my own research, I interviewed many LGBTQ+ people who helped me to better understand their contributions to creating safe community spaces—fledgling gay neighborhoods—based on the various visions of what they wanted. Their energy was contagious. When these early pioneers and business owners had a creative idea, they went for it. It was a cast of different characters doing different things and their efforts built the neighborhoods we know today.

In assembling this impressive volume, the editors have brought together a collection of leading scholars who document for future generations the evolution of gay neighborhoods and especially their maturation that brings us to the present-day situation of depopulation and “de-gaying” in gayborhoods. The chapters contained herein examine the evolution, history, and importance of gay neighborhoods and how they have changed over time and persevered against adversity for the LGBTQ+ community. With its comprehensive treatment of LGBTQ+ culture as reflected in urban placemaking, this critical work will undoubtedly become a key resource in LGBTQ+ studies, provide a comprehensive resource for students and scholars across the academic landscape from architecture to sociology and from anthropology to urban planning. The editors are to be commended for including research from a diverse group of scholars representing various academic disciplines and focusing the chapters on the importance of gayborhoods not only to LGBTQ+ people, but to society more broadly.

This book introduces a broad cross-section of perspectives that successive generations of LGBTQ+ individuals share about gay life—and especially about gayborhoods. Sometimes there is harmony in these viewpoints between generational cohorts, and sometimes there is discord. But interactions with other groups can enlarge our worldview and lead to more inclusive outcomes. I have witnessed this throughout my career as an administrator in higher education and a professor of sociology and anthropology.

From my own window I can see the gay village in Montréal. Rainbow flags are proudly displayed and vibrant colored decorations hang above the street, created by an artist that joked the various colors show the “eighteen shades of gay,” representing the many differences united under the LGBTQ+ moniker. The gay neighborhood in Montréal remains thriving and vital. It too has changed over the years to become more inclusive but still serves as a magnet for LGBTQ+ people of all ages and plays an important role for the dominant group in the broader city.

As we navigate through the tumultuous year 2020—through the COVID-19 pandemic, racial and social unrest in North America and other countries, and the eternal struggle for greater equity and equality—we are reminded that the unique manifestations of the struggle for human and civil rights are evident in places like gay neighborhoods. We are reminded of the critical, cultural, and historic importance of gayborhoods as the engines of societal momentum. Like the adaptation of gay neighborhoods in the 1980s and 1990s to battle the HIV/AIDS pandemic, gay neighborhoods, though at a point of plateau, still serve a vital purpose in our cities of today and tomorrow. The fact that LGBTQ+ people have been systematically denied rights and are, at times statistically invisible—as demonstrated in several chapters in this book—suggests that we are now at a plateau not only in the development of gay neighborhoods but also in the steady march toward LGBTQ+ rights and recognition. The change will continue to come to gay neighborhoods, some quicker than others, and the neighborhoods will evolve as the people that use them change and age and new generations come of age.

Over my lifetime, many changes have occurred in the manner by which LGBTQ+ people are perceived, treated, and legally protected. In 1977, The Quebec charter of human rights and freedoms made discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal. Montréal, my home, has become a very friendly place for LGBTQ+ people to live. As these rights have been secured in cities across the world, the preferences of LGBTQ+ concerning where they live have reflected these changes, and so an in-depth study of gayborhoods helps us reflect on the desire for gay men and lesbian women to self-segregate in certain urban districts and for other LGBTQ+ individuals to live in areas outside of gay neighborhoods. It also provides us an opportunity to reflect on

LGBTQ+ people in other areas of the world that do not share these freedoms. We have come so far, but in so many ways, we still have so far to go.

September 2020

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Preface

A book about *gay* neighborhoods? It is a question that we have heard many times during the past two years of assembling this book. Through traveling and working in Asia, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Australia, South America, Africa, as well the United States and Canada, our observations have piqued our interest in the state of gay neighborhoods and quality of life for LGBTQ+ people in all corners the world. Some gayborhoods appear vital and striving, some appear to be diminishing, some are notably different in character from years past, but all—more or less—seem to be existing, in North American and Western Europe, over a backdrop of increasing civil rights and legal protections. The situation is not so positive in other parts of the world, however. In parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Republics, LGBTQ+ individuals continued to experience harassment and persecution. Some gay neighborhoods in locations where homosexuality remains illegal are probably yet to even emerge.

We begin by humbly recognizing our position of privilege as gay, cis, white males. We are fortunate to have been awarded advanced degrees and have earned tenure at universities based on our research and scholarship. Our experience likely does not fully reflect the experience of other readers, but we acknowledge the responsibility that comes from living in a country where freedom of expression and our positions as tenured university professors allow us the freedom to explore ideas and to speak publicly about LGBTQ+ concerns. However, despite an overall increase in rights for LGBTQ+ people over the past seventy years, prejudice and discrimination persist. Even in societies that ensure some degree of legal protection to LGBTQ+ individuals, a systemic anti-gay sentiment prevails. Within our own institutions, support for this volume—often referred to as “that gay” project by our colleagues—was at best, lukewarm. At an early stage of the project, a senior university administrator—in a meeting of faculty and staff members—referred to one of the editors as “a soft boy.” Another senior administrator referred to the editor in a separate meeting as “emotional and sensitive.” This euphemistic sort of coded triggering—often used to describe gay men by using terms associated with feminine qualities—implies “gayness” without resorting outright to a derogatory slur. However, some were not even this clever. Separately, the other editor encountered resistance when a senior academic administrator characterized this book as “stupid, gay, faggot bullshit that no one has time

to read” and encouraged abandoning the project because the book “wouldn’t be well received on campus” due to its LGBTQ+ focus which “makes donors and alumni uncomfortable.” Challenges such as these make our gay studies scholarship difficult to promote on campus and tarnish the celebration of publishing this important work. Notably, the last of these comments was made by an administrator at a U.S. institution in the Spring of 2020, only weeks before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County* that “sex” is a protected class that includes the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of “sexual orientation,” thereby extending legal protection against discriminatory—and only recently, illegal—comments such as these. These experiences listed above exemplify the disconnect between perceived legal protection and actual legal protection, demonstrating that while LGBTQ+ people have struggled to achieve equality, true equity for LGBTQ+ individuals remains in the distant future. But as we reflect on where we are now and from where we have come, we are fortunate to have been alive to see several landmark legal rulings and policy changes that improved the lives of LGBTQ+ people. Nonetheless, veiled discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals remains embedded even with legal protections in place, and the fight for dignity has really only just begun.

Discussions with our LGBTQ+ colleagues and contributing authors suggest that comments such as these are not unusual. One contributing author was told by a senior colleague that though the chapter *could* be included in this book that it would not “count” toward tenure or promotion due to its LGBTQ+ focus, which the administrator had deemed “outside” a desired area of scholarly expertise. Unkind treatment and comments such as these indicate to us that while the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights has made some significant advances, that systematized discrimination, hostility, and disregard for LGBTQ+ individuals to some degree endures even within more inclusive societies. This troubling persistence makes these advances tenuous, and we are reminded that true equality for LGBTQ+ remains elusive. Additionally, LGBTQ+ colleagues in other regions of the world, including the Global South, still have much longer to go before they begin to approach the level of rights and recognition that some of us enjoy today.

This unstable backdrop provides the context and fuels our scholarship in LGBTQ+ studies and specifically our interest in the study of gay neighborhoods. We are trained in design and architecture, civil engineering and urban planning, and American studies. We love cities and we love understanding how people create homes, neighborhoods, and communities. We appreciate the fact that in our professional and scholarly work, we are given opportunities to study cities and understand what makes them work, and sometimes we even contribute to shaping the future of cities. We are compelled to explore the idea of transformations in gay neighborhoods, and we seek to understand and positively influence the future of LGBTQ+ urban spaces.

Gay neighborhoods are the figurative cradle of the struggle for LGBTQ+ tolerance, acceptance, freedom, equality, and pride. True, gayborhoods are fun places to visit replete with vivacious bars, sassy LGBTQ-themed gift shops, exuberant cafés and restaurants, and salacious shops that peddle adult-themed merchandise. However, gay neighborhoods also serve a deeper and less readily apparent purpose: they are the cultural centers of LGBTQ+ life and often provide the formative physical space

for organizing in the ongoing fight in support of equality, same-sex marriage, alternative lifestyles and amorous arrangements, sexual positivity, and personal expression. Some established gay neighborhoods are home to LGBTQ+ museums, archives, and organizations that support the preservation of various shades of LGBTQ+ culture and history. This history is important for future generations and should not be lost to the dustbin of history because its value is not immediately apparent or because prejudice prevents proper funding or equitable access to support preservation efforts.

As we visited gayborhoods during our travels, we noticed—during the last 20 years—the closure of bookstores and gay-oriented businesses and less foot traffic at gay bars and restaurants. Residents and businesses owners struggled with escalating rents and property values; they were victims of the gentrification they unintentionally helped, in the quest to build vital neighborhoods and to foster community for all LGBTQ+ people. There was a certain level of sanitization of city streets, while at the same time there was increased tourism to ‘gay meccas’ from which Pride parades and carnivals emanate but that visitors frequent less. We noticed that non-LGBTQ+ people felt more comfortable visiting gayborhoods. Gay bars and gay restaurants, once a no-go zone for mainstream straight patrons, now provided a hip and cool experience or colorful night out for those who do not identify as LGBTQ+, making once gay-exclusive neighborhoods markedly “less gay.” The underground drag culture was no longer underground; drag became part of mainstream culture and was featured on cable television, and now legions of straight fans are “spilling tea” and “throwing shade” as they sashay away from their television screens. This level of awareness has provided a degree of celebrity for drag performers across mainstream culture, helping to make LGBTQ+ culture more accessible, but perhaps diluting the qualities of LGBTQ+ culture that make gay neighborhoods typologically unique.

Similarly, ‘gay-friendly’ spaces in gayborhoods became popular, bolstering revenues for gayborhood business owners, and perhaps producing truly inclusive and diverse neighborhoods under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, but inviting the curious, voyeuristic, and sometimes judgmental eye of heteronormative society into gay space. Inside homes and apartment buildings in gay neighborhoods, there was a shift in the demographics of the ‘gay family’, which now included children. This required a different set of amenities in neighborhoods, including child care, elementary schools, playgrounds and play spaces, and family healthcare. This is a stark different from gay neighborhoods of the 1970s, perceived mostly as playground for childless adult gay men. In response and in search of peace, gay friends have streamed from gay neighborhoods to mainstream neighborhoods, and by so doing, have made various once-heteronormative neighborhoods “more gay.”

Our own scholarship and our worldview has been strongly affected by seminal works in the field such as Steven Seidman’s (2004) *Beyond the Closet*, George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* (2008), Amin Ghaziani’s *There Goes the Gayborhood* (2015), and Jeremiah Moss’ *Vanishing New York* (2017). Aside from these works, gay neighborhoods—and their evolution, trajectories, and future—are sparsely documented in social sciences scholarship, even in research about gay and lesbian culture and the LGBTQ+ experience. We thus felt that gay neighborhoods is a topic worthy of academic investigation and review. To augment our own research about LGBTQ+

urban space, we invited many of the world's leading experts to contribute their scholarship. Every effort has been made to acknowledge copyright holders of images used throughout this book. We are happy to correct any oversights or acknowledgements in future editions of this book.

We also hope to acknowledge in this work the generational differences that manifest in gayborhoods and the diverse residents and visitors that inhabit LGBTQ+ urban space. Younger generations of 'out and proud' LGBTQ+ individuals who have the freedom and right to exercise and investigate, for example, fluid sexual orientation often do not fully appreciate the civil rights that were both hard-fought and hard-won by generations of gay men and lesbians women only 20 or 30 years older. The community culture related to age in the LGBTQ+ community is noticeably more stratified. For example, old queers wanting to get together to play cards and drink beer perceive younger twinks to be unaware of the struggle for rights. Those 'young' twinks perceive even younger gender-fluid, polyamorous or proudly asexual individuals as 'queerdos,' and the cycle continues. In this way, we intend to add a dimension to this book that interrogates the generational differences in attitudes and perspectives in LGBTQ+ neighborhoods and explore how these generational differences affect the current functioning and future prospects for LGBTQ+ neighborhoods.

The book would not have been possible without contributions from extraordinary author teams from Australia, Canada, Belgium, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These scholars produced top-notch research that challenges assumptions and forges new intellectual territory in LGBTQ+ studies. We were inspired to pursue this work thanks to our conversations with Christopher Brown, Jack Coffin, Amin Ghaziani, Frank Gitro, David Granville, Lindy Korn, and Sam Miles. Special thanks to our on-site photographers Anne Hanavan, William Ivancic, Elizabeth R. June, and Rob Modzelewski. We were especially inspired by Don Hinrichs and are thankful that he shared his expertise with us with patience and kindness. Susan June receives our highest appreciation for reliable proofreading. The Rt. Hon. Bob Bratina, MP has always supported our curiosity about cities and we are grateful for his kind generosity and support. We are indebted for their support of our work to Bertie Dockerill, Nikkie Herman, Molly Hess, Bruce Jackson, Calista McBride, Laura Quebral, Kristina Johnson, Alfreda Brown, Despina Stratigakos, Denise Bishop, and Brendan Seney. We are grateful for the work of the Springer team—especially Juliana Pitanguy, Preetha Kuttiappan, Sanjievkumar Mathiyazhagan—for their dedication to this book.

The memories of our departed LGBTQ+ friends and colleagues lost to HIV/AIDS—especially Michael Thurston, Thomas Cardina, Craig North, North Rebis, Danny Rounds, and Edward Stierle—who continually remind us of the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and motivate us to continue our work in LGBTQ+ studies. We also pause to remember our departed friends and students, including Randall Hill and Jessie Mazzocchi, who touched our lives and fueled our desire to complete this book. Our parents—Annette and Bill and the loving memory of Janet and Ed—started us on this journey by teaching us acceptance (and everything else). We are touched by how they shaped us into the people we have become.

We admire the efforts of New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, a champion for LGBTQ+ rights in the State of New York. We are indebted to his team current and former—Ron Zacchi, Matthew McMorrow, David Turley, Jason Starr, Alphonso David, and Priya Nair—who help to make the Governor’s vision a reality as New York State leads the nation in setting the agenda of equality for all LGBTQ+ Americans.

We are deeply indebted to our family, friends, and colleagues who supported our effort to make this book Open Access and therefore available free of charge to teachers, scholars, students, policymakers and readers throughout the world. To these colleagues, we salute and support you, and to generous our donors, we thank you: Seth Amman, Karla Back, Francis Benoit, William Bitterman and Annette Bitterman, Mark Bloxson, Carolyn Bost, Caleb Boyce-Wright, Bob Bratina, Tammy B. Conrad, Cody Clement-Sanders, Vanessa Dingley, Kelly Dixon, Phil Dougharty, Thomas Dunigan and Johanna Dunigan, Emily Ebert and Joe Ebert, Shannon Fay, Jim Gannon and Mary Gannon, Frank Gitro, David Granville, Nikkie Herman, Richard Hess, Shana House, Diane Ivancic, James Jacobik, Zhiqiu Jiang, Susan June, Noel Kiernan, Thomas Korn, Linda Leising, Natalie Leitch, Beverly McLean, Keith Merritt, Barbara Mierzwa, Nayda Pares-Kane, Betsy Penrose, Christopher Platt, Eric Poniatowski, Mark Niewiemiński, Matt Shufelt, Mark Sieminski and Sandra Sieminski, Sean Stapleton, Debi Street, Jayne Swanson, Brianna Swartz, Camille Thomas, Alan Vlakancic, Kristine Zimmerman, and Henry Zomerfeld. We also thank Laura Quebral, Kate Masiello, and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo for encouraging Larry Van Heusen and Robert Scharf to support the Open Access fee for the book.

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Buffalo, NY, USA
September 2020

Daniel B. Hess
Alex Bitterman

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Who Are the People in Your Gayborhood? Understanding Population Change and Cultural Shifts in LGBTQ+ Neighborhoods



Daniel Baldwin Hess and Alex Bitterman

Abstract Gay neighborhoods, like all neighborhoods, are in a state of continual change. The relevance of gay neighborhoods—originally formed to promote segregation of individuals who identify as sexual minorities—is lately challenged by advances in technology, experiences with pandemics, shifts in generational opinion and social values, increasing acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, and (in certain places) increased rights and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. This confluence of change has created for many people anxiety related to the belief that gay neighborhoods may be dissolving or even disappearing altogether. Seeking to address these concerns, this opening chapter of the book *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Renaissance and Resurgence* presents eight important takeaway messages distilled from the chapters in this volume that, taken together, provide an in-depth overview of the formation, maturation, current challenges, and future prospects of LGBTQ+ spaces in urban environments. Findings suggest that shifts in patterns of residence, socialization, and entertainment for LGBTQ+ residents and visitors across metropolitan space have resulted in certain gay neighborhoods becoming less gay while other neighborhoods become more gay. In this time of social change, economic inequities, public health crises, and technological evolution, gay neighborhoods provide a culturally and historically significant template for communities in confronting adversity, fear, and discrimination. At this point in their maturity, gay neighborhoods have reached a plateau in their evolution; from here we pause to consider the current state of gay neighborhoods—and trajectories that might describe their future form—as we contemplate the importance of gay neighborhoods in the ongoing advancement of LGBTQ+ people everywhere. We conclude by observing that while gayborhoods have experienced a certain level of de-gaying, the trend toward viewing gayborhoods as inclusive and gay-friendly places de-emphasizes the self-segregation aspects of gayborhoods that were important to their initial formation;

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consequently, while gay neighborhoods may become less gay, other neighborhoods may also become more gay.

Keywords Gayborhoods · Gay neighborhoods · LGBTQ+ · Queer · Segregation · Sexual minorities · Urban change

1.1 Introduction: Beneath the Crowded LGBTQ+ Umbrella

The rainbow-colored LGBTQ+ umbrella is broad and encompasses many people underneath it. Shades of the rainbow umbrella denote various identities of individuals: gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans+, queer, questioning, intersex, allies, and others. Though all of these groups live outside the heteronormative mainstream, little else in common is shared among some members of these groups. Apart from identifying as LGBTQ+, a high-income Black female cis-gendered lesbian, for example, in her journey to understand and express her own sexual orientation, may have little in common with a middle-income gay gender-queer Asian male who both may have little in common with a middle-age White gender-nonconforming trans individual quietly exploring bisexuality at mid-life. All, however, may potentially share in the experience of feeling “othered,” or living *outside* of predominant heteronormative society.

CNN anchor Anderson Cooper (who identifies as gay) while speaking with presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg (who also identifies as gay) during the U.S. Democratic Presidential Candidates Town Hall in April 2019, reflected that though the LGBTQ+ acronym contains many divisions of identity, the groups contained within reflect people who share vastly different experiences. Cooper questioned the value of such a broadly inclusive umbrella and suggested that those who identify as LGBTQ+ are nonetheless united in that they live *outside* what is considered to be the mainstream norm (CNN 2019). Examined in this way, the term “out” may refer metaphorically to exiting the proverbial closet, but may also refer to stepping *outside* of the heteronormative mainstream. Cooper’s observation calls attention to a heteronormative propensity to generically lump all sexual minorities under a broad LGBTQ+ umbrella, but further raises the question of what homonormative might look like. Perceived differences between heteronormative and LGBTQ+-normative creates an overgeneralized binary that become especially problematic when researching “gay” neighborhoods.

Over the past five decades or so, LGBTQ+ individuals, couples, and families have made their homes in gay enclaves in cities around the globe. Nonconformity is one commonality among the various identities allied under the LGBTQ+ umbrella and while life challenges may be different among certain subgroups, members of the LGBTQ+ community maintain respect for the relations between the subgroups as a means of self-preservation. For LGBTQ+ people, “gayborhoods” provide spaces for group members to come together and forge collective experiences (Ghaziani

2015b) and to confront shared challenges that LGBTQ+ people have faced for many decades (Chauncey 2008; Seidman 2004). Gay neighborhoods embody this struggle and have been closely linked to the nascent days in the fight for LGBTQ+ recognition, equality, and civil rights. LGBTQ+ people are not unique in this regard. Many minorities and subgroups form communities, and neighborhoods are the physical manifestation of these communities. Gay neighborhoods cater to and provide safe harbor for LGBTQ+ residents, citizens, and visitors in settings intended to be separated from a judgmental or unaccepting heteronormative public. For people outside of the LGBTQ+ community, gay neighborhoods are often perceived as “gay ghettos” (Levine 1979) that may be curious or fun to visit, although populated by “different” or “weird” people—affectionately “queerdos” (Kane 2020). It is these differences that fuel a grassroots mobilization among LGBTQ+ people to persevere through adversity; gay neighborhoods thus serve as incubators for empowerment and social change and serve as home base for social movements and the fight for equality that ultimately benefits every corner of society.

Challenges are not unknown to residents of gay neighborhoods. We find ourselves in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, forty-odd years following the start of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and it has re-ignited faintly familiar fears in gay neighborhoods (and beyond) relating to an emerging, mysterious, and deadly contagious disease (see Fig. 1.1). Gay neighborhoods were among the first to experience the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and the disease proved to be both formative and formidable. The unseen gay population was further marginalized and stigmatized during the AIDS pandemic, but residents of gay neighborhoods—along with the broader LGBTQ+ community and its allies—rose to the challenge of fighting the deadly pandemic. Gay neighborhoods fostered brave pioneers and some of the very first efforts to assist people with AIDS, to unselfishly raise awareness among the general public about safe sex (when governments were unwilling to do so), and to nurture the value of human life amid profoundly changing circumstances. As a result, gay neighborhoods provide a template of successful place- and community-based adaptation and evolution in maintaining regularity during a pandemic when nothing seems normal. Gay neighborhoods, despite being perceived by some as “other” or “different” can in this way provide much-needed anchors of normalcy and perseverance for broader society.



Fig. 1.1 In Chicago and other cities, residents of gay neighborhoods adapt to COVID-19 guidelines including mask wearing and spatial distancing (*Source* Image courtesy of William Ivancic)

1.2 Nomenclature: Everyone Belongs

The semantics of “gay” have changed over time and these changes reflect shifts in attitude and shifts in the evolution of mainstream perception. Gay “liberation” during the 1960s evolved into gay “freedom” in the 1970s which evolved into gay “pride” in the 1990s, and this progression was interrupted in the 1980s by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the call to power for all LGBTQ+ individuals to “Act Up” for the right to live free from social stigma. We begin by defining the LGBTQ+ population as consisting of individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and other sexual minorities. Individuals self-identify and choose to become members of the LGBTQ+ community. The group is inclusive because the community includes members of these sexual minority groups (and their allies), and everyone is welcome to be part. Throughout this chapter and this book we use the acronym LGBTQ+ to signify a broad cultural group (other chapter authors may employ different terminology or acronyms). In editing this volume, we have treated the terms “gay,” “homosexual,” “queer” as synonymous and as synonyms for the LGBTQ+ acronym as a means to broadly examine the group and its importance along with specific, identifiable urban spaces for sexual minorities. However, we fully acknowledge that the meanings of these words to those in the community differ significantly, and we further recognize the important scholarship about the unique experiences of various sexual minorities (Black et al. 2002; Doan 2007; Gieseck 2020; Hemmings 2002; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015b; Podmore 2001). It is not our intention to simplify or generalize this complex and diverse group. We understand and acknowledge the imprecision of the LGBTQ+ acronym in that it may make generic the individuals and individualism among its constituent groups and, as noted above, the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in and among these groups may greatly vary. In this vein, although many gay neighborhoods were historically anchored by a population of gay cis men (Chauncey 2008; Podmore 2021), we consider a “gay” neighborhood to be urban space with some degree of tolerance inclusive of gay men, lesbian women, trans+ individuals, intersex individuals, questioning individuals, and various other sexual minorities.

Living among like-minded people, LGBTQ+ residents sought collective security to address their feelings of disenfranchisement and safeguard against oppression manifested in hostility and violence (Lauria and Knopp 1985). In this way, gayborhoods served as refuges from persecution and provided affirming space for marginalized groups. Throughout this chapter and this book, we consider a neighborhood to be a basic building block of a city (Forsyth 2001), and for convenience we interchangeably use the terms “gayborhood,” “gay neighborhood,” “gay enclave,” “gay district,” “gay village” and “LGBTQ+ neighborhood”; we acknowledge the limitations of these labels. We recognize that our decision to use the term “gay” to describe neighborhoods is imprecise because sometimes the term relates to gay men but other times it relates to everyone under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (such as when used to denote “gay” pride, which would more accurately be labeled LGBTQ+ pride). Nonetheless, we seek to probe the emergence, evolution, and potential future

trajectory of LGBTQ+ spaces in urban environments. It is our sincere hope that over time and with greater study, that these terms can be calibrated and standardized among various disciplines and used in a manner that more accurately captures the individuality of those represented.

1.3 The Other: Refuge and Refusal to Change

For the greater part of the twentieth century, people identifying or classified as LGBTQ+ were considered by doctors, police officers, teachers, and other authority figures to be sexually deviant and were often publicly referred to in this way (including labels such as “the degenerates of Greenwich Village” [Duberman 1991]). Perceived sexual deviance was closely associated with dangerous and communicable criminality. The stigma associated with homosexuality remained throughout the twentieth century as authorities openly harassed LGBTQ+ individuals and turned a purposeful or delinquent eye to their rightful protection. Indeed, in many jurisdictions, homosexuality until relatively recently was illegal, and in some places across the globe remains illegal. The anxiety and fear experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals as a consequence of this environment of stigma and persecution resulted in a social stigma that kept many LGBTQ+ individuals closeted. Gay neighborhoods emerged over this period as a safe haven for free expression and a respite for all manner of people ostracized or shunned by mainstream society from prosecution, judgement, and violence.

Many gay neighborhoods were seeded in the settlement and movement pattern of sexual minorities beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, and the history of gay neighborhoods is well documented in literature (Chauncey 2008; Ghaziani 2015a; Higgs 1999; Niedt 2021; Orne 2017). The neighborhoods began coalescing in the 1930s, becoming first identifiable in large cities following World War II, but rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s partially in response to civil rights struggles and sexual liberation in the 1960s and 1970s and later by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. During the second half of the twentieth century, recognizable gay neighborhoods emerged in various cities around the world at different times and different rates of settlement. Large urban centers were generally the destination of the “great gay migration” of the post-World War II decades. Original and iconic LGBTQ+ neighborhoods—in large cities such as Berlin (Schöneberg), Istanbul (Taksim Square), London (Little Compton Street), Los Angeles (West Hollywood, which became America’s first gay city), Mexico City (Zona Rosa), Miami (South Beach), New York (Greenwich Village and Chelsea), Paris (LeMarais), Sydney (Oxford Street), San Francisco (the Castro), São Paulo (Rua Frei Caneca), Tokyo (Ni-chōme), Toronto (Church Street), and Washington, DC (DuPont Circle)—catered mainly to gay men (lesbians often did not have a notable presence). Each gay neighborhood has its own unique reasons for being and circumstances for development (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021) and consequently the development and evolution of individual gayborhoods differs.

Within large urban centers—perceived as the “natural space” for gays and lesbians (Higgs 1999)—opportunities in gay neighborhoods for leisure and socialization brought together the formative elements for the development of community. Gay neighborhoods have provided individuals with opportunities to develop social networks, to date, and to form relationships (Aldrich 2004; Weinke et al. 2021) and gayborhoods became the center point of social events including gay-themed parties, dances, parades, and street fairs (Bruce 2016; Stone 2021). All of these events helped LGBTQ+ community members to locate their status outside the mainstream. In this way, LGBTQ+ neighborhoods provided a supportive community structure which helped LGBTQ+ individuals to succeed. The social and “party” dimension has always been part of the perception of gay villages, where gay men were assumed to engage in frivolity and promiscuity far from the castigating eye of heteronormative society (see Fig. 1.2). As LGBTQ+ neighborhoods began to mature in the 1980s and 1990s, gay villages served a central role in delivering health-supportive services—including HIV prevention and clinics, doctor’s offices, counseling services—related to the AIDS pandemic (Ghaziani 2021) as well as mental health resources (Weinke et al. 2021) and social services for displaced and homeless LGBTQ+ youth shunned or ostracized by families. Later, in the 2000s, these same communities became the organizing centers for supporting same-sex marriage and equality.

Many people identifying as LGBTQ+ seek freedom of personal expression, while others seek anonymity in gay neighborhoods, where they can live their lives free of judgement or persecution. Centripetal forces serve as the attractions that draw LGBTQ+ people (and others) toward a gayborhood due to the shared benefits derived from a sense of tolerance and belonging (Doan and Atalay 2021). Surrounded by like-minded others, gay men and lesbian women feel more comfortable on city streets in gayborhoods due to attitudes of acceptance and a sense of comfort and belonging, and LGBTQ+ residents and visitors felt more free here compared to other places in cities. Gay neighborhoods and their residents have been widely accepted as significant forces in leading and advocating for positive urban change and have reduced the effects of LGBTQ+ minority status by helping to enhance people’s understanding about sexual minorities (Doan and Higgins 2011; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021), and LGBTQ+ community members—and indeed all of society—can experience an improved quality of life when there is an increased level of tolerance.

Gay neighborhoods also provided a means of entry for mainstream society to better understand LGBTQ+ individuals and LGBTQ+ culture. However, as much as heteronormative society identified gay neighborhoods as different or “other,” gay neighborhoods also became places that inclusively celebrated “the other.” In addition to sexual minorities who lived apart from the mainstream, other alternative groups—hippies, punk rockers, prostitutes—could find a home in gayborhoods (Ross and Sullivan 2012). The influence of gay neighborhoods on popular culture—music, theatre, writing, visual arts—especially in the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is especially notable.



Fig. 1.2 The gay village in Manchester, England, surrounds Canal Street and is one of the largest gay neighborhoods anywhere (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

1.4 Marginal to Memorable: The Evolution of Gay Neighborhoods

Gay neighborhoods have often been located in disused fringe locations or undesirable areas of cities where space was available and real estate and rents were cheap. In these off-the-beaten-path neighborhoods, gay men and lesbian women could establish homes and businesses with less fear of being bothered by others or by the authorities, and LGBTQ+ customers could enjoy service without fear of rejection, persecution, or harassment. Property owners in LGBTQ+ neighborhoods renovated buildings and performed various acts of inner-city preservation bringing value to the properties through sweat equity. Gay neighborhood leaders worked to landmark and preserve places significant to LGBTQ+ history (Miller and Bitterman 2021). As a result, these gay neighborhoods were usually passed over for large publicly-funded urban renewal projects (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021), thereby protecting the integrity of the built environment and often sparing these neighborhoods from the urban planning missteps common in the mid- to late-twentieth century (Jacobs 1961). This grassroots-level of active preservation and advocacy spared the architectural integrity of neighborhoods—like the meatpacking district in New York City, the South End in Boston, and countless others—and helped to successfully reintegrate these neighborhoods into the urban fabric of today.

As understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people continued to grow, LGBTQ+ neighborhoods often became home to the popular culture vanguard that welcomed, in addition to LGBTQ+ individuals, straight mainstream visitors, bohemian artists, and the cultural *avant garde*. Gay villages cultivated a reputation for restaurants, music scenes, boutiques, and hipster culture (Podmore 2021), thanks to LGBTQ+ pioneers who moved in and settled these places and attracted the pink economy to form around them (Ghaziani 2021). Bars, nightlife, parties, and pride parades became further attractors to gay neighborhoods (see Fig. 1.3). Gay districts in large world cities became tourist destinations, and LGBTQ+ neighborhoods flourished “by commodifying the diversity, cosmopolitanism and lifestyle of the inner city” (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015a, 98). As cultural and economic engines, gay neighborhoods also help to support the vitality of adjacent neighborhoods. In some cities, a “city of neighborhoods” scheme emphasizes gay neighborhoods as cultural anchors that draw tourists, visitors, and residents away from well-known areas like city centers (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021).

While gay neighborhoods first emerged as marginal outposts, many have transformed (and gentrified) in the last few decades to become universally sought-after districts. Nearly two decades ago, Richard Florida (2004) published a study of “creative places”—locales having the power to attract economic development and foster urban vibrancy—suggesting that concentrations of LGBTQ+ residents form the center of an educated and creative community, contributing to the development of local amenities and increases in property values.



Fig. 1.3 Gay bars are anchor institutions in the Stanley Street Gay Quarter in Liverpool, England (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

1.4.1 The First Great Plateau

Over the last two decades many historically gay neighborhoods—such as the Castro in San Francisco and West Hollywood in Los Angeles—have experienced significant demographic change (Bitterman 2020; Hess 2019; Spring 2021; Weinke et al. 2021). Soaring property taxes, rents, and property values—ingredients for hypergentrification—have driven many sexual minorities away from these areas, while many affluent straight professionals and their families have moved into replace them (Christafore and Leguizamón 2018; Ghaziani 2014). With a rise in property values, more affluent people relocate to gay districts and low- and middle-income people have been pushed away (Moss 2017; Zukin 1998). Increases in the number of condominium dwellers are notable, as non-LGBTQ+ residents are attracted by neighborhood amenities and the carefree cachet of hip urban living, triggering centrifugal forces that push people away from gayborhoods (Doan and Atalay 2021). Since 2000, a process of “de-gayng,” during which non-LGBTQ+ people were attracted to gayborhoods (either for entertainment or as residential space), many gayborhoods lost “anchor” institutions, epitomized by the large-scale closure of gay bookstores and gay bars (Eeckhout et al. 2021; Mattson 2019). Neighborhood commercial strips in gayborhoods have been replaced by nightlife venues intended to attract mixed or straight crowds (see Fig. 1.4). As a result, the pink economy has changed significantly (Ghaziani 2021)



Fig. 1.4 The Zona Rosa (“Pink Zone” in English) is located near the historic center of Mexico City and features retail outlets and nightlife venues amid a gay community (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

suggesting a slow erasure of LGBTQ+ culture in gay neighborhoods. The closure of iconic gay meeting places, given their importance in sexual minty communities, was often a “turning point” in the decline of gay villages (Doan and Atalay 2021).

Established gay neighborhoods now embody a virtual dimension for LGBTQ+ connection (Miles 2021), perhaps redefining the importance of physical place. Compared to mainstream heteronormative communities, LGBTQ+ communities fostered early adoption of technology as a means to augment/enhance physical communities. This newfound reliance on digital technology in gay neighborhoods (largely as a means to take advantage of propinquity) has become increasingly common. Compared to other types of neighborhoods, these digital connections may provide one potential avenue for future sustenance of gay neighborhoods. However, with this shift, some anxiety has arisen among the denizens of LGBTQ+ neighborhoods about the perceived demise the incidental physical importance of these spaces which may have interrupted the continuity among LGBTQ+ generational cohorts and accentuated disconnects between various groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (Bitterman and Hess 2021). The closure of gay bars, emerging virtual gay spaces, generational disconnect, and changes in the character of gay neighborhoods are reminders that as these places transition from being home to generations rooted in

struggle to playgrounds of generations benefitting from that struggle, now may be a germane time to examine the present plateau in the trajectory of gay neighborhoods.

1.5 Empirical Plan for This Book

Drawing on a tradition of scholarship about the spatial basis of LGBTQ+ identity (Binnie and Valentine 1999), this book explores perspectives about the past, current, and future conditions of gay districts in cities as a means to better understand the ongoing evolution of gay neighborhoods. We begin by clarifying the role of gayborhoods—home to constituent members of the LGBTQ+ rainbow—as places that celebrated “the other” and became the site of sexual liberation from the 1970s to the 1990s (Castells 1983). We are motivated to explore the current plateau in the evolution of gay neighborhoods. We also wish to explore whether gay neighborhoods are declining or are simply evolving, and—in an age of digital connectivity that replaces person connection—the comfort LGBTQ+ individuals experience living as part the heteronormative mainstream. As the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ groups decreases, there are changes in people’s needs and desires for living in gay districts (places that initially promoted isolation over integration).

Like all neighborhoods, gay neighborhoods and the dynamics that shape them are unique. This book addresses questions related to the necessity and demand for gay neighborhoods in the future as LGBTQ+ people become more accepted as part of mainstream communities. We expect to see new types of gay communities emerge in the future, especially as the baby boom generation and Generation X (and subsequent generations) age into retirement (Hess 2019; Bitterman and Hess 2021), however, these neighborhoods may be different than those we know today. The local, national, and global upheaval related to the COVID-19 pandemic will likely change how people live in and perceive urban neighborhoods, perhaps instigating further—and at present unknowable—transformation to gayborhoods.

While recent books have provided various perspectives on the development, growth, and change of gay neighborhoods (Notaro 2020; Ryan 2020; Crawford-Lackey and Springate 2020; Martel et al. 2018; Doan 2015; Ghaziani 2014) and the changing sexual space of cities (Khubchandani 2020; Nagourney 2019; Contreras 2019; Elledge 2018; Evansky et al. 2018; Orne 2017; Potts 2016; Shaw 2015; Giraud 2014; Murray 2014), this book provides an in-depth exploration of social and cultural phenomena related to the past, present, and future of gay districts. Just as the LGBTQ+ community continues to grow and evolve, so too have gay neighborhoods and gay places continued to grow and evolve. Consequently, chapters within the book give special attention to two phenomena in particular: (1) the forces of gentrification that have changed the character of gay districts during the last two decades (Hess 2019; Bitterman 2020), pushing out long-time gay and lesbian residents as the number of non-LGBTQ+ residents and visitors increases; and (2) the changing views toward gayborhoods of successive generations of LGBTQ+ residents, with generational-attitudinal perspectives as a significant factor in changing



Fig. 1.5 An advertisement for a property leasing opportunity on Christopher Street in New York City's Greenwich Village (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

demand among LGBTQ+ groups for gayborhoods (see Fig. 1.5). We believe that the interrelation of these factors both shapes and reshapes the lived experience for LGBTQ+ people in neighborhoods and cities. As the stigma associated with membership in groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella decreases universally, the need/desire for living in places underscored by segregation and self-isolation may change in parallel. As gay neighborhoods continue to evolve, one significant and important risk to note is that the importance of gayborhoods in the struggle for LGBTQ+ recognition and rights may be forgotten or erased.

1.5.1 A Note Regarding Limitations

The geographical reach of the chapters herein is broad, since phenomena relating to the development, maturation, and life cycle of gay neighborhoods is not uniform from country to country or even from city to city (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021; Doan and Atalay 2021; Bitterman and Hess 2021). This is due to (among other reasons) incomplete and inconsistent collection of data about LGBTQ+ individuals and couples (Spring 2021; Frisch 2021) and differing laws and legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals from place to place. Accuracy of broadly applicable

assessments regarding “the emergence of” or “the death of” gay neighborhoods is challenging given these legal, social, and economic landscapes and what may be happening in one gay neighborhood may not parallel what is happening in another.

We acknowledge the various limitations that this edited volume presents. Chief among these is an under-representation of scholarship from countries and cities in the Global South (Brown et al. 2010). LGBTQ+ civil rights in many countries across the Global South, parts of Asia, and former Soviet republics are less secure than in countries in the Global North and the West. For this reason, some researchers and scholars from countries in the Global South are unable to conduct research or publish works about LGBTQ+ issues and communities without significant risk to their professional careers or their personal safety. It is our sincere hope that by making this book broadly available, we can create and support future opportunities for researchers, policymakers, and advocates committed to understanding and evaluating civil rights movements for LGBTQ+ individuals across the Global South. While humbly acknowledging the geographic limits presented in this volume, we hope that our contributions in this volume to LGBTQ+ scholarship can help further the geographic reach of this research and support future research as voices in commonly underrepresented areas bravely emerge. Support of this volume from colleagues across the Global South is an important formative step toward increasing global awareness, recognition, and societal equality for all LGBTQ+ individuals. Similarly, space consideration in this volume prevented us from giving full attention to LGBTQ+ communities in non-metropolitan spaces (Binnie 2014; Tongson 2011) but our hope is that the research presented here can provide a springboard for others engaging in future research in locales not fully represented in this book.

1.6 Takeaway Messages

The chapters in this volume are constructed in an effort to provide a snapshot of the state of gay neighborhoods in 2021 and beyond. We next offer the following eight synthetic takeaway messages, distilled from the seventeen chapters in this book.

Takeaway message 1. Gay neighborhoods are inclusive and are not only for gay men.

The term “gay” as a shorthand descriptor in the label for “gay neighborhoods” effectively ignores the multipolar diversity among the LGBTQ+ population (as noted in the “nomenclature” section above). The array of groups represented under the LGBTQ+ banner may share similar journeys but collectively each subgroup has unique challenges not commonly shared among other sectors of the broader LGBTQ+ community. Therefore, the term “gay neighborhood” may unintentionally suggest exclusive focus on one specific group—gay men—and not fully reflect the entire inclusive LGBTQ+ rainbow.

Established largely by gay men, the first gay neighborhoods over time became increasingly defined by inclusivity especially through tolerance of—and kinship

with—other sexual minorities, the artistic and creative avant garde, and affluent straight urban professionals. However, these spaces were often viewed by other members of the LGBTQ+ community predominantly as gay male space, and as a result of their gay male origins many lesbian women, bisexual individuals, and trans+ individuals are consequently less likely to feel a resonant connection with gay neighborhoods. “Gay” male influence in the establishment of gay neighborhoods is still prevalent, but not exclusive.

The attraction between gay neighborhoods and cultural trendsetters continues today. The distinction between gay neighborhoods and hipster neighborhoods becomes increasingly less clear in neighborhoods recognized for their high shares of sexual minorities (Podmore 2021) and sexual fluidity among younger generations shifts the generational perspective of gay neighborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021). As these emerging generational trends become increasingly normalized, the notion of gay neighborhoods demarcated by geographic boundaries may become more challenging for scholars to effectively measure and less relevant to those interested in living there. As Podmore observes (2021, 303): “because the sexual identity of hipster men was ambiguous, their presence could evacuate the area of the hegemonic norms of masculinity that might exist elsewhere.”

Takeaway message 2. Gay neighborhoods matter.

Gay neighborhoods matter to everyone and are important—both historically and currently—to the functioning of contemporary urban culture; gay neighborhoods support the health and well-being of both LGBTQ+ individuals as well as mainstream society.

Gay neighborhoods emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in large cities as a respite from the critical and shunning eye of mainstream society and overt harassment by authorities. The natural tendency to surround oneself with similar people who share common experiences—known as homophily—underscores the fundamental attraction toward gay neighborhoods (McPherson et al. 2001). Often located in disused urban space, early gay neighborhoods emerged from bohemian enclaves which served as nexuses for a fledgling gay culture that was equated in mainstream society with criminality and deviance. Initially, gay neighborhoods provided a degree of protection from police harassment (safety in numbers) in peripheral urban spaces outside of the public eye. LGBTQ+ neighborhoods also give people who identify as sexual minorities a feeling of safety—due to the a perceived feeling of acceptance—compared to other places throughout a city where tolerance for LGBTQ+ individuals may be lesser. Gay neighborhoods provide positive benefits. Living among other LGBTQ+ people, gay neighborhoods help fulfill the human desire to build community and capacity for self-actualization, since those who live in areas with higher densities of sexual minorities have lower rates of depression symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem (Weinke et al. 2021).

Gayborhoods help raise the visibility and advance the cause of sexual minorities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (though at differing rates for each of the various groups). Clustering in certain neighborhoods, LGBTQ+ people have

raised their visibility and have formed (largely liberal or progressive) voting blocs that help achieve political and social gains. In addition to political functions of voting and elections, Ghaziani (2021) identifies other reasons that gay neighborhoods matter, including providing space to build community and nurture relationships, promoting the pink economy, and supporting political action and activism (Bitterman and Hess 2016b). Most LGBTQ+ neighborhoods develop formal and informal support services to improve life quality for all. Without gayborhoods, LGBTQ+ people risk becoming marginalized and under threat of possibly losing rights and liberties they have fought to win (Ghaziani 2021). Over time, the importance of gay neighborhoods solidified as they became the nexus of—at first—the struggle for LGBTQ+ civil rights. However, as the HIV/AIDS pandemic emerged in the 1980s, gay neighborhoods became important centers in the fight against the disease, against ignorance, and against stigma due to illness. Gay neighborhoods later served as the organizational center for pride events which helped to introduce gay life to mainstream culture and established the conditions that eventually made way for legalizing same-sex marriage.

Gay neighborhoods remain the physical monument to decades of struggle, oppression, and violence. In more recent years, challenges and milestones have been celebrated through LGBTQ+ archives, museums, and exhibits in gayborhoods that educate younger generations about past efforts to secure equality and rights and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals (Miller and Bitterman 2021). Gay neighborhoods, throughout each of these eras, have largely provided a welcome and accepting urban space for sexual minorities, LGBTQ+ singles, couples, and families who choose to live there or visit.

Takeaway message 3. Gay neighborhoods are becoming less gay.

The trend toward inclusivity may be “de-gaying” gay neighborhoods. As formerly exclusive gay neighborhoods (and gay places within them) have broadened to include “gay friendly,” many gay neighborhoods have attracted straight people as residents and visitors, a phenomenon that dilutes the exclusivity and collective safety offered by gay neighborhoods. Along with broader societal forces and greater mainstream acceptance, heteronormatizing gayborhoods has diminished the need for LGBTQ+ individuals to retreat to or self-segregate into gay spaces.

As they matured, gay neighborhoods transitioned from destinations primarily for socialization (in bars, restaurants, cafes, and bookstores) to places for residence, where LGBTQ+ people established their homes and built community (Niedt 2021). More recently, as gayborhoods gentrify, heterosexual people have moved in and gay neighborhoods have become attractive mixed-use residential neighborhoods containing amenities with broad appeal and progressive cachet. The conventional concept of a gay neighborhood (a “village” with a mix of everyday services, modeled on Greenwich Village in New York City) is being replaced through demographic shifts by “emerging” LGBTQ+ places in urban-metropolitan space (Bitterman 2020; Hess 2019). The emergence of gay neighborhoods in other settings reflects a redefinition of what is important in residential environments

and surrounding communities for LGBTQ+ individuals and same-sex couples, resulting in “a new normal” for gay neighborhoods. These “emerging” places likely contain neighborhood services and amenities that have not in the past been strongly associated with gayborhoods.

Examples of the “de-gayng” and the evolution of LGBTQ+ neighborhoods are plentiful. Across Atlanta, this phenomenon produces an outward centrifugal force that redistributes LGBTQ+ residents from gayborhoods to other places (Doan and Atalay 2021). This dispersal is evident by the decentralized display of symbols associated with gay pride and gay neighborhoods (some of which are shown in Fig. 1.6)—pink triangles, rainbow flags, and equality symbols—that are dispersing across metropolitan space and becoming more ubiquitous. This “rainbow diaspora” has produced a measurable increase in the visual display of the rainbow flag in neighborhoods in Toronto—diffused from the historically gay Church-Wellesley neighborhood—into the Parkdale and Roncesvalles neighborhoods and across the city (Bitterman 2021). These integrative examples suggests both greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals and greater dispersion of LGBTQ+ individuals from specific gayborhoods.

Following legislative and social advances—including human rights protections, civil rights, and same-sex marriage—LGBTQ+ people have over recent years become increasingly more visible across a variety of locations and are less likely to be confined to or concentrated in gay neighborhoods (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021). However, just as compelling as the places LGBTQ+ people choose to *live* is where LGBTQ+ individuals *do not* live. For example, few gay couples live in the suburbs: “quintessentially suburban neighborhoods have remained closed-off to male same-sex partners, even within a larger MSA context of declining segregation” (Spring 2021, 51). The most inaccessible places for some male same-sex couples, for example, include economically vibrant, “child-friendly,” mostly suburban neighborhoods where they may feel unwelcome or not accepted (Spring 2021), which demonstrates difference in essential requirements for different groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella to create gay neighborhoods.

Moreover, recent demographic research suggests that many individuals residing today in neighborhoods with high concentrations of sexual minorities do not themselves identify as sexual minority (Spring 2021; Weinke et al. 2021) and non-minority heterosexuals constitute the majority (Carpiano et al. 2011). Repositioning gay villages as the nexus of LGBTQ+ or queer urban space addresses the criticism that gayborhoods are welcoming mostly to gay men and to a lesser extent, lesbians, and even less to queer people who are not out, questioning, or do not identify as either gay or lesbian (Wolf 1979). As the inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ umbrella encompasses more difference, the term “gay” becomes increasingly generalized and its meaning diluted. In this way, the term “gay” is used as a generic shorthand for all LGBTQ+ people, which potentially leads to “diversification of the term to the point of meaningless homogenization” (Bitterman 2020, 100). That is, as the LGBTQ+ umbrella has expanded to encompass more diverse groups, the



Fig. 1.6 Banners depicting the rainbow flag adorn streetlamp in the Castro in San Francisco (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

relative life experience of members of LGBTQ+ subgroups may be less comparable and less interconnected especially when overlaid by other understandings and complexities related to diversity. The effects of this hyper-inclusivity may result in an unintended dilution of gay neighborhoods by “de-gaying” the very neighborhoods meant to protect and empower LGBTQ+ people.

During the 1990s and 2000s, a dramatic decline occurred in the number of gay bars in gayborhoods (Eeckhout et al. 2021; Mattson 2019). See Fig. 1.7. An increased demand for larger venues for staging expansive organized parties reduced the demand for smaller neighborhood bars, and gay-friendly mega clubs offered opportunities for more entertainment spectacle in mixed parties. This loss of regular neighborhood bars has reduced opportunities for social mixing among LGBTQ+ people from various generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Eeckhout et al. 2021). While previous generations of gay men preferred to socialize in bars visited strictly by gay men, those attending parties in gay neighborhoods today seek inclusive “gay friendly” dances and events (Eeckhout et al. 2021): “the relatively exclusive, niche-specific, semi-public spaces of lesbian and gay bars that promised a safe haven in a largely hostile environment lost their *raison d’être* faster than anyone would have expected a few decades ago” (Eeckhout et al. 2021, 238). These changes in how LGBTQ+ individuals socialize in gay



Fig. 1.7 Bars and nightclubs are prominent in the Zona Rosa (“Pink Zone” in English) in Mexico City (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

neighborhoods underscores broader societal shifts among younger generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

Among those traditionally not found beneath the LGBTQ+ umbrella, gender fluidity and diversity of gender expression—long conflated with homosexuality and “being gay”—has become more clearly articulated and is becoming more socially accepted. Shifting perceptions of gender, gender identity and fluidity, and gender expression—paralleling the rise of “gay friendly” culture—have given a broader mainstream voice to queer culture (Seidman 1994). Amalgamations of words that reference homosexuality as a cultural touchpoint are becoming increasingly common. For example, “metrosexual”—a straight male with grooming habits or fashion-conscious proclivities typically associated with gay men—is one example of this cross-over. Similarly, a “lumbersexual”, is a homosexual with certain “butch” characteristics (manner or dress) reminiscent of a lumberjack. “Cuomosexuals” are those individuals who appreciate the efforts of New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, especially in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic (Miles et al. 2021). In contrast to the “de-gaying” of gay neighborhoods, this shift could be considered the “gaying” of heteronormative society. Observing the more recent blurring of differentiation between queer culture and hipster culture in the gay village of Montréal, Podmore (2021, 303) argues that “the boundaries between hipsters and queers were blurred rendering all young people in Mile-End as queer.”

Many LGBTQ+ individuals today—especially younger groups—embrace a broadly inclusive definition of sexual orientation and find little value in labels such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “transgender,” and other sexual minority groups (Podmore 2021). These younger individuals may view gayborhoods as relics of the past, or may find gay neighborhoods not to be welcoming in ways that match contemporary sensitivities toward inclusivity (Bitterman and Hess 2021). In the same way, the older cohort in gayborhoods is often less comfortable with the sexual diversity that younger people easily accept nor the sexual fluidity they may practice. It can be difficult to distinguish between queer and hipster, and the hipster aesthetic marks gayborhoods as distinctly non-heteronormative space. For non-LGBTQ+ individuals, “the idea that sharing space with hipsters serves to disrupt heterosexual norms and to recode the spaces as progressive, creative and open” (Podmore 2021, 304). This is a reminder that we now live in a post-binary multipolar world (Hess 2019) and this change is reflected in neighborhoods and places. These social shifts represent significant changes in thinking and perspective underpinning generational change. A tendency for younger groups to embrace less prescriptive and defined gender and sexual orientation will likely impact gay neighborhoods and indeed all neighborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

The “de-gaying” of gay neighborhoods has elevated their visibility but also their vulnerability. Gay neighborhoods, as places favored by LGBTQ+ people to visit for entertainment and socialization and to reside in, also provide space for those who do not identify as sexual minorities. Research by Nash and Gorman-Murray

(2014) suggests that rather than understanding changing gendered and sexual landscapes as manifestations of decline, it is more suitable to understand gayborhoods as part of relational geographies between neighborhoods supporting visible queer populations and marking greater social cohesion. Groups of people may now visit gayborhoods who would not have done so when gayborhoods were seen strictly as playgrounds for gay men.

Many researchers have investigated the impact of gentrification on gay villages including the displacement of LGBTQ+ commerce and households and the “de-gaying” or the loss of LGBTQ+ consumers and the integration of the broader public into local markets (Doan and Higgins 2011; Ghaziani 2014; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2016; Ruting 2008). We conclude this section by observing that while gayborhoods have experienced a certain level of de-gaying, the trend toward viewing gayborhoods as inclusive and gay-friendly places de-emphasizes the self-segregation aspects of gayborhoods that were important to their initial formation (Moss 2017); while gay neighborhoods become less gay, other neighborhoods become more gay.

Takeaway message 4. Virtual connections enhance gay neighborhoods.

Contrary to the perception that technological change—online presence and virtual connection through social media (dating and hook-up apps)—has hastened the decline of gayborhoods by reducing the need for physical presence, we argue that technology enhances rather than replaces the social aspects of gay neighborhoods.

During the last decade a broad proliferation of location-based smartphone dating and hook-up apps including Grindr, FindHrr, Scruff, and others have replaced Internet dating websites from the 1990s and 2000s, such as Adam to Adam and Planet Romeo. Unlike online dating sites and newspaper personal ads before them, these apps offer geocoding that serves to “decenter placemaking efforts” (Ghaziani 2021, 89). Consequently, remarkable changes may be looming:

... LGBTQ life has been transformed by the virtualization of sexual networks in urban space as a result of new technologies. Digital, mobile, and social media allow for instantaneous contact across the globe, allowing LGBTQs to connect across geographical boundaries beyond their immediate (urban) dwelling. At the same time, location-based services, in particular dating apps such as Grindr, allow LGBTQs to identify and connect with other LGBTQs within their urban or even rural contexts. (Eeckhout et al. 2021, 239)

Technology, as a consequence, may transform certain functional aspects of gay neighborhoods and render physical proximity less relevant because physical aspects of gay neighborhoods now have virtual dimensions for LGBTQ+ connection. The centrifugal pull away from gay neighborhoods may shift as a result (Doan and Atalay 2021), because location within in a gay neighborhood or even in the same city or country is unnecessary to use hook-up apps to find others. Today, most everyone can be connected digitally, since gay dating and hook-up apps transform “any street, park, bar or home into a queer space by brokering a meeting between mutually attracted individuals” (Miles 2021, 207). In this

way, any physical locale can acquire a queer overtone when it is employed as a meeting place relating to LGBTQ+ online/virtual connection (Miles 2021), and technology is used creatively by LGBTQ+ people as they inhabit gay spaces other than gayborhoods (Wu and Ward 2018). In this way, gay neighborhoods could emerge as neutral and safe “meeting grounds” for hookups and dating. For Miles (2021), this creates in gayborhoods a “hybrid reality” formed from layered physical place and digital space. Consequently, a gay neighborhood can be created anyplace, enabled by “pre-screening” of people and places in social apps.

Online environments and apps may perhaps facilitate the decline of gay neighborhoods, permitting LGBTQ+ people to scatter from gay villages to new residential settings across metropolitan space: “queer dating and hook-up apps are variously blamed for destroying gay neighborhoods and celebrated for reinvigorating them; dismissed as impediments to queer community by some and hypothesized by others as virtual sites for new and often liberatory communities of their own” (Miles 2021, 210). Smartphone apps, in this way, could be credited as a leading factor in LGBTQ+ deconcentration from gayborhoods. Certainly, the ability to connect with others for sex and dating lessens the centrality of the former go-to gay neighborhoods and venues—shops, bars, restaurants, bookstores, community centers—within them.

We argue, however, that while online apps *enhance* physical space in gayborhoods, they provide an *overlay* upon lived physical space but do not *replace* the lived city. In other words, technology overlaps but does not replace propinquity and physical presence. Although LGBTQ+ life “has been transformed by the virtualization of sexual networks in urban space as a result of new technologies” (Eeckhout et al. 2021, 238), the importance of place in gayborhoods is not threatened with erasure solely because of changes in the way LGBTQ+ people use or engage technology.

During the early days of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, gay neighborhoods served as ground zero for LGBTQ+ activists to organize and demand change. We emphasize the importance of neighborhoods, yet virtual connections for LGBTQ+ community members can transcend neighborhoods and go anywhere—both physically/spatially (global) and temporally. If gayborhoods are indeed in decline as physical spaces, they now—in the Internet age and beyond—have an “electronic afterglow” that is embodied in smartphone apps and reflected in people’s individual and collective digital presence (and the legacy of this presence) (Coffin 2021).

Digital connectivity has accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Miles et al. 2021). We conclude this section by noting that various generations of LGBTQ+ individuals engage technological change differently, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further influenced the way nearly everyone engages technology (Miles 2021). Consequently, we expect that people’s response due to coronavirus-related lockdowns will further shift how LGBTQ+ people cope with and embrace technology vis-a-vis the places in which they reside (Miles et al. 2021) and

frequent. In this way, gay neighborhoods will likely—stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic—again become engines of change for LGBTQ+ communities and beyond.

Takeaway message 5. The disappearance of gay neighborhoods could diminish safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The perceived decline of gay neighborhoods has produced concern and anxiety among the LGBTQ+ population about possible disregard for the original accomplishment of establishing gayborhoods as safe and inclusive urban space for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Gentrification and hypergentrification may slowly edge gay residents and businesses away from gay neighborhoods (Bitterman 2020; Hess 2019; Moss 2017). With closure or displacement of LGBTQ+ residences, bars, businesses, and services, the “gayness” of gay neighborhoods can be vulnerable to decline, eventually resulting in destruction or obsolescence that leads to erasure (Eeckhout et al. 2021; Mattson 2019). Anxiety and fear related to this potential erasure exposes the vulnerability that LGBTQ+ people experience (Weinke et al. 2021) regarding their comfort with their place in society. Iconic institutions and venues within popular gay neighborhoods—bookstores, bars, nightclubs—are closing, and these place are important to the identity of people in the LGBTQ+ community and may even have been part of “coming out” stories. As the LGBTQ+ population share in gay neighborhoods appears to decline—or as the gayborhoods become more “mainstream” and populated by non-LGBTQ+ people—a foreboding sense of potential and monumental loss of LGBTQ+ spaces and culture emerges. Gorman-Murray and Nash (2021, 250) explain that “anxiety about (gayborhoods”) possible decline has grown, particularly with the loss of several iconic businesses, rising rents and an influx of heterosexuals into the condominium market and entertainment venues.”

Older generations of LGBTQ+ pioneers helped to build gay neighborhoods as safe spaces unthreatened from the harassment and persecution of a hostile world (Bitterman and Hess 2021). These respites provided fertile ground for an early generation of pioneers to organize, mobilize, and activate a wave of advocacy for LGBTQ+ recognition and rights. These trailblazing generations shifted the public perception of “being gay” away from illegality and dereliction toward tolerance and normalcy. The societal stigma attached to being gay was magnified during the HIV/AIDS pandemic—and the adversity experienced by gay men during (and after) that pandemic—reshaped and fueled a generation of LGBTQ+ activists, pioneers, and allies (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Challenging those in power and the institutions of power was no small effort for these trailblazers. Gay neighborhoods served as the geographic centers of a cross-generational movement, and gay neighborhoods remain important to the shared cultural memory of the struggle for dignity, rights, and civil protections—aspects that undergrad LGBTQ+ pride celebrations today—for gay men and lesbian women.

However, younger generations that did not directly participate in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights may not fully grasp the importance of gay neighborhoods for LGBTQ+ culture and lesbian and gay life (Bitterman and Hess 2021). This may signal a disconnect between older and younger LGBTQ+ generations, especially as fluidity in gender expression and sexual orientation shifts LGBTQ+ identity among the younger generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). As a result, a lack of continuity and awareness may threaten the existence (Podmore 2021) and lasting value of gay neighborhoods (Miller and Bitterman 2021). In the United States, a national effort was started during the Obama administration to identify, memorialize, and landmark sites that provide significance to the history of LGBTQ+ community (Miller and Bitterman 2021). This important endeavor was intended to affirm the critical importance and relevance of these sites for generations to come (Bitterman and Hess 2021). The survival of smaller gay districts (and gay districts located in small- and mid-sized cities (Forstie 2008)) is more threatened than established gay districts in larger metropolitan areas with critical mass in LGBTQ+ communities (Ghaziani 2021) and some locations have informally commemorated LGBTQ+ significant places within or near gay neighborhoods, as shown in Fig. 1.8.

The apparent slow erosion of gay neighborhoods, loss of collective identity, and struggle to preserve historical achievements creates a cultural stress. LGBTQ+ people experience stressors over and above the routine stressors that all people encounter, increasing the likelihood that minority group members experience mental health problems (Weinke et al. 2021). LGBTQ+ people have a number of resources available to them—typically in or near gay neighborhoods—to help with “minority coping” related to the “minority stressors” they experience. In this way, gay neighborhoods provide various supports to LGBTQ+ individuals and have a positive impact on the mental health of sexual minority young adults, above and beyond the influence of their individual characteristics (Weinke et al. 2021). Although multiple factors appear to contribute to sexual minorities’ poorer mental health (Weinke et al. 2021), most researchers believe that the stress caused by sexual stigma and prejudice is the most significant factor, and gay neighborhoods can help mitigate this stress across the lifespan, though younger generations not directly participating in the struggle for LGBTQ+ civil rights may be unaware of the importance of community that gay neighborhoods provide and support (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

Takeaway message 6. Same-sex couples have shifted their residences away from gay neighborhoods.

Members of the LGBTQ+ population are shifting their residences or settling in new patterns. Gayborhoods have consequently experienced noticeable diffusion since 2000, with many LGBTQ+ couples relocating to other neighborhoods.

In 2011 the media began reporting the residential and commercial dispersion from Montréal’s gay village to other parts of the metropolitan area (Podmore 2021). Generally, gay neighborhoods with a declining population of male couples tend



Fig. 1.8 Signage welcomes visitors to the Stanley Street Gay Quarter in Liverpool, England (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

to be situated in central cities, where housing values are rising, where median incomes are rising, and with lower home ownership rates than other neighborhoods (Podmore 2021). Chapters throughout this volume explain how gay men and gay male couples historically self-segregated into gay villages, however the trend since 2000 suggests declining self-segregation in gayborhoods with more same-sex couples spread across *all* urban neighborhoods (Spring 2021). As gay people leave gay neighborhoods, the resulting demographic profile of those who remain (combined with newcomers who replace departing gays and lesbians) is *less gay* than it was before (i.e., an overall smaller share of sexual minority identifying people in the population and an overall higher share of non-LGBTQ+ individuals). In the United States, census data suggests that certain new gay neighborhoods—mostly in central cities (and not in suburbs)—sprouted between 2000 and 2010, but they were different in character (i.e., more demographically “average”) from established gay neighborhoods (Spring 2021). Mobility data from the U.S. census suggests that the key trend driving declining segregation in gayborhoods is an increase in male same-sex households across other neighborhoods throughout metropolitan space (Spring 2021).

As members of the LGBTQ+ community shift housing locations, evidence of other types of LGBTQ-friendly or inclusive neighborhoods is emerging (Bitterman 2020; Spring 2021). As established gay neighborhoods deconcentrate, clusters of male same-sex couples [and other LGBTQ+ couples and individuals] emerge elsewhere, so that the original gayborhoods become less isolated and LGBTQ+ individuals become more integrated. Again, the phenomenon of gay neighborhoods becoming slightly less gay, while other neighborhoods become slightly more gay, becomes evident as LGBTQ+ people reconcentrate in other spaces away from gay villages, producing a greater number of gay enclaves while the original gay neighborhoods become less self-segregated.

Visual assessment evidence in neighborhoods around Toronto indicate the emergence of enclaves of LGBTQ+ people living away from the established gay village (Bitterman 2021), supporting similar observations in Atlanta where greater integration has shifted LGBTQ+ life to peripheral parts of the metropolitan region (Doan and Atalay 2021). Importantly, we note, a spatial diffusion of LGBTQ+ culture away from gayborhoods does not suggest a complete or pending demise of gay neighborhoods; instead, we argue that gay neighborhoods have arrived at a plateau from which continuous and dynamic re-spatializations across metropolitan space (Coffin 2021) and the memorialization of gay neighborhoods and places within them (Miller and Bitterman 2021) may occur.

We draw attention in this takeaway message to our important observation that—although the preceding discussion has relied on, among other scholarship, a recent study of LGBTQ+ residence patterns using U.S. census data (Spring 2021) drawing on previous comparable studies (Gates and Ost 2004)—data collection related to LGBTQ+ individuals, including their presence and activities in gay neighborhoods, is incomplete or is not collected at all. This poses challenges

for elected leaders, advocates, and scholars in tracking LGBTQ+ individuals, couples, and families. Only certain entities collect data about same-sex partnerships and LGBTQ+ individuals. Sometimes the data collected depends on the political predilections of the administration in power. Frisch (2021) reports that the historic record of LGBTQ+ individuals through U.S. census data is troubled and incomplete and has resulted in erasure and marginalization. This discontinuity of information provides challenges for researchers, especially in the Global South and Middle East and in countries where homosexuality remains illegal or stigmatized and where little or no data is collected.

Certain methodological challenges are also present. For example, the U.S. census relies on census tracts to represent neighborhoods, even though the boundaries of census tracts are arbitrary and do not reflect administrative district or other elements of urban geography (Spring 2021). Consequently, varying physical definitions of neighborhoods could lead to estimates of demographic and geographic phenomenon—including segregation patterns—that are lower or higher than the realities of characteristics in neighborhoods. These inconsistencies amount to de facto discrimination by omission, ignorance, or willful disregard and creates among LGBTQ+ individuals an invisible and indiscernible minority hiding in the shadows of heteronormative life (and reflected in administrative data and datasets). We register concern with regard to these inequities, which may compound as integration of LGBTQ+ people continues across urban neighborhoods.

Takeaway message 7. Gay neighborhoods, at this point in their stage of maturation, have reached a plateau.

By 2020, gay neighborhoods may have reached a plateau in their evolution; from this point in time and space, there are various trajectories into which gay neighborhoods may proceed in the coming years. A plateau, we caution, is an expected part of an evolutionary process and not necessarily a signal that gay neighborhoods are extinguishing.

As people seek to better understand the post-gay, post-binary world in which we find ourselves, there is a recognition that gayborhoods have possibly reached a “pause point” in their evolution. From this position—a plateau or a natural evolutionary stage—there are various trajectories which the future meaning and form of gayborhoods may follow (2020). While a simple linear model can be used to conceptualize the dissolution of gayborhoods when society has eventually reached full acceptance of LGBTQ+ and segregation is unneeded and unwanted, we can more realistically imagine much nuance—provided by the addition of complex centrifugal and centripetal forces that entice LGBTQ+ people and other population subgroups toward or away from gayborhoods—to the model (Doan and Atalay 2021; Duberman 2018).

As LGBTQ+ neighborhoods change and evolve, some current or original gayborhoods will be succeeded by or replaced with new LGBTQ+ urban space. For example, “micro-communities of LGBT residents will likely arise, constituted perhaps from ten nearby apartments or ten nearby apartment buildings, rather than

the size of ten city blocks, as in the past” (Hess 2019, 234). Demographic subpopulations under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, such as older LGBTQ+ adults (Bitterman and Hess 2016a), may settle in gay-friendly apartment complexes or resort-like LGBTQ+ retirement centers (Hess 2019). Nuanced re-spatialization—perhaps taking forms that we cannot yet imagine—may describe future gayborhoods (Coffin 2021).

From a position on this plateau, we pause to contemplate the potential future trajectory of LGBTQ+ urban space, and we suggest that it is unwise to fixate on the decline or death of gay neighborhoods but to instead better understand and explore emerging concentrations of LGBTQ+ residents in new formations across metropolitan space, especially other central city neighborhoods that have not long been associated with a LGBTQ+ presence but may acquire one. Gay neighborhoods in cities continue to evolve and may reach “stagnation” points on a plateau: “Oxford Street has continued to decline materially and imaginatively as *the* gay village within Sydney, [Australia] while Newtown and the inner west have continued to solidify as queer neighborhoods” (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021, 256). Similarly, the gay village in Montréal has matured from an enclave for gay men to an inclusive space dominated by a queer presence (Podmore 2021). Similar observations have been made with regard to other cities by other authors in this volume.

Takeaway message 8. The evolution and history of gay neighborhoods is empowering to the LGBTQ+ community.

While the future meaning and shape of gay neighborhoods is unclear, it is important to reflect on the profound and formative effect gayborhoods had on gay life and LGBTQ+ culture during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Stemming from this remarkable period of cohesion and maturation, the historic importance of gay neighborhoods will continue to influence the afterlife of LGBTQ+ urban space. In this way, gay neighborhoods will continue to reflect the struggle for recognition, equality, and civil rights for sexual minorities for future generations.

Prior to the twentieth century, a great deal of repression of gay and lesbian life and little acknowledgement occurred of bisexual or trans+ life. Various social and cultural forces converged in the second half of the twentieth century, and LGBTQ+ neighborhoods were established and grew and became places from which pride for sexual minorities emanated and through which the fight for equal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals was waged and has been (fragmentally) won over time (see Fig. 1.9).

Now, the physical building blocks of gay neighborhoods—commercial establishments (bars, restaurants, bookstores), services (community centers, health clinics), and residences—may be removed or displaced due to various urban forces including neighborhood change, revitalization, and gentrification and socio-cultural influences (tastes, preferences, and attitudes) and even equal rights legislation (Bitterman 2020; Eeckhout et al. 2021; Hess 2019). However, if gayborhoods (or elements of gayborhoods) are at risk or indeed disappearing, then the



Fig. 1.9 A mural at The Molly House in the Canal District in Manchester, England depicts gay and feminist icons (Source Image courtesy of Daniel Baldwin Hess)

need to preserve these memory spaces becomes urgent to preserve the places and document the memories of residents in the neighborhoods and social action that occurred there (Miller and Bitterman 2021) especially for future generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). See Fig. 1.10.



Fig. 1.10 The LGBT+ Archives Project of Louisiana is located just outside the French Quarter in New Orleans (Source Image courtesy of Alex Bitterman)

As we mention in takeaway message 5, gay neighborhoods can be vulnerable to erasure due to urban revitalization and gentrification (Eeckhout et al. 2021). If gay neighborhoods are becoming less gay, declining, or potentially disappearing, it seems that they are being reinforced and even replaced by a diaspora of LGBTQ+ cultures across time and space as other neighborhoods become more gay and LGBTQ+ inclusive. Gay neighborhoods possess a legacy and history that has meaning beyond their current physical life; Coffin (2021) explains that “non-climactic gayborhoods leave “afterglows,” affects that continue to exert geographic effects in the present and near future” (Coffin 2021, 373) and “a gayborhood can have an afterlife even if its physical presence is lost” (Coffin 2021, 381). LGBTQ+ neighborhoods can consequently be expected to continue to “exert an influence, albeit an altered one, on the sociospatial dynamics of urban conurbations (and beyond” (Coffin 2021, 375). The physical presence of LGBTQ+ urban space can thus be replaced by a “subconscious image” of gay neighborhoods (Coffin 2021). In this way, aspects of gayborhoods live on even after aspects of the physical place have been removed:

This is because gayborhoods, like most meaningful places, produce intense affective experiences that leave their marks in the minds and bodies of humans, as well as in the heterogeneous bodies that constitute the nonhuman environment. ... If a plateau, such a physical place that can be experienced first-hand, becomes sufficiently intense, such as a highly concentrated gayborhood that forms the heart of local LGBTQ+ cultures, then it can leave an afterglow that continues to exert an effect through the bodies of those that experienced this intensity. Put differently, the plateau describes a place as a physical-sensual environment within a particular territory, while the afterglow denotes a post-place as an imaginary-symbolic effect that percolates through deterritorialized networks. (Coffin 2021, 381)

1.7 Conclusion: Resurgence and Renaissance

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, established gay neighborhoods became increasingly “less gay,” and more mainstream, while many LGBTQ+ residents moved to other neighborhoods and communities (arguably making these neighborhoods “more gay”), while the perception of gay neighborhoods as relevant and meaningful began to fracture. As gay neighborhoods appear to “decline” through LGBTQ+ population loss (Spring 2021) and in other ways (Bitterman 2020, Hess 2019), new gay districts arise in processes of household migration and demographic shifts—spread across metropolitan space—in a pattern of succession and replacement (Doan and Atalay 2021; Bitterman 2021; Podmore 2021). Displaced LGBTQ+ residents often re-group in other nearby locations—a sort of LGBTQ+ diaspora masked by mainstream integration—planting the seeds for the potential genesis of future gay neighborhoods (Bitterman 2021). Gentrification, shifting generational attitudes and social values, increasing use of technology and pandemic are among the many factors that influence the relevance and desirability of gay neighborhoods. Perhaps gentrification (and in some cases, hypergentrification) has run its course. In the early days of the

COVID-19 pandemic, affluent people fled cities and urban neighborhoods in favor of greater space and isolation from others. As the gentrifiers move out, “queerdos” have begun to return to cities to reclaim their place (Kane 2020), resulting in new types of neighborhood forms and dynamics. This phenomenon calls into question whether the plateau at which we currently find gay neighborhoods portends the beginning of the end of gay neighborhoods, or the beginning of a new cycle for gay neighborhoods or simply part of the evolutionary process. Moreover, this plateau largely relates to gay neighborhoods in the Global North. Perhaps gay neighborhoods of a different or alternative sort may emerge as civil rights, recognition, and tolerance shifts across the Global South, evident in countries like India and the Philippines.

LGBTQ+ people migrate to new districts when they find safe, inclusive, and convenient access to everyday services and amenities—especially LGBTQ-friendly businesses and services—and now, perhaps more so than before 1990, the presence of services that support LGBTQ+ families including schools, libraries, child-care centers, and family healthcare facilities. Gay neighborhoods appear to be at the vanguard edge of continual evolution—embodying a type of urban diaspora or metamorphosis—further evolving and adapting as LGBTQ+ individual and families re-sort themselves into new spaces (Andersson 2009). These “seed communities”—formative pockets that are too small yet to be considered proper neighborhoods—are the likely genesis points for future gay settlements that will emerge over time. These LGBTQ+ micro-districts surface in expected places and unexpected places; the Hayes Valley in San Francisco, built partly on reclaimed urban land where a freeway was removed, is not exactly a gay neighborhood, but a gay-inclusive place populated by and visited by people connected with the famed Castro. A similar phenomenon is occurring in the Roncesvalles and Parkdale neighborhoods of Toronto, with LGBTQ+ people migrating from Toronto’s legendary Church Street gayborhoods find places that proudly and outwardly welcome LGBTQ+ individuals (Bitterman 2021). The potential reconfiguration of LGBTQ+ communities (physical communities, virtual communities, and other communities) is in opposition to an assumption in 2020 of urban decline following the COVID-19 pandemic and the stresses—economic decline, joblessness, a feared urban exodus, feelings of despair—it has caused (Batty 2020; Florida et al. 2020).

Perhaps “second generation” gay neighborhoods will serve future generations of LGBTQ+ residents, citizens, families, and visitors by providing similar (and perhaps new, unimagined) functions just as established gay neighborhoods have served past generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). While not all “seed” communities will flourish and some may even be extinguished by external forces, it is likely that as the needs of LGBTQ+ citizens and families change, so too will the types of neighborhoods these citizens and families require as gay neighborhoods potentially reconfigure for the future. In this way, gay neighborhoods could reconstitute around the archetype reflecting their existence for the previous five decades or in a form that does not yet exist or we cannot yet imagine. Moreover, we anticipate that established gay neighborhoods will propagate via an “afterglow” (Coffin 2021) as historically relevant sites become landmarked or memorialized (Miller and Bitterman 2021).

Gay neighborhoods have proven themselves resilient to the AIDS/HIV pandemic, economic change, population loss, demographic change, gentrification, and other forces. Given the evidence offered by chapters in this book and the thematic takeaway messages enumerated in this chapter, we argue that we are not witness to the “death” or even the uncontrolled decline of gay neighborhoods; instead, we suggest that gay neighborhoods by 2020 have reached a state of maturity and have ascended to a plateau in which a decentralized LGBTQ+ populace may provide the catalyst for new forms of community engagement, activism, and relevance. The chapters in this volume emphasize the pressing need for supporting safe, inclusive, productive neighborhoods for LGBTQ+ people.

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Part II
Context and Composition

Chapter 2

Breaking Down Segregation: Shifting Geographies of Male Same-Sex Households Within Desegregating Cities



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The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Resurgence and Renaissance.

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Abstract From 2000 to 2010, the segregation of male same-sex couples from different-sex couples declined in almost all of the nation's largest cities. This trend toward a more even distribution of male same-sex couples across city neighborhoods calls into question the demographic future of gay neighborhoods. However, it is unclear how exactly male same-sex couples are spatially reorganizing within desegregating cities. Multiple processes could be driving declining segregation, including declining shares of same-sex households within gay neighborhoods, the emergence of gay neighborhoods in new parts of the city, and/or a general dispersal of same-sex couples to almost all neighborhoods. Moreover, it is unclear what characteristics—like urbanicity, housing values, or racial/ethnic composition—define neighborhoods that have gained (or lost) same-sex partners. This chapter uses data from the 2000 and 2010 Decennial Censuses to investigate neighborhood-level changes within desegregating cities. The small number of increasingly segregated cities are also explored. Results indicate that increasing representation of male same-sex households across most neighborhoods and an expanding number of gay neighborhoods are important contributors to the trend of declining segregation. In contrast, the loss of gay neighborhoods from a city was fairly uncommon—most neighborhoods that obtained large concentrations of same-sex partners tended to keep those concentrations over time. Finally, the same residential expansion of same-sex households that occurred within desegregating cities did not occur in cities that experienced increasing segregation. These results have important implications for the spatial organization of same-sex households into the future. The chapter concludes with a discussion and critique of

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census data for the continued study of the geography and segregation of same-sex partners.

Keywords U.S. Census · Same-sex households · Gay neighborhoods · Spatial reorganization

2.1 Introduction

Since 2000, Census data have allowed researchers to track the segregation of same-sex couple households from other households. Spring (2013) demonstrated that the segregation of both male and female same-sex couples from different-sex couples declined within the 100 largest cities in the United States between 2000 and 2010. Some scholars have taken this as evidence that same-sex couples are dispersing out of established “gayborhoods.” However, multiple demographic processes could be driving declines in segregation. For several reasons, same-sex couples might be making up lower shares of all households in gay neighborhoods, while retaining relatively static representations in other parts of the city. Or, same-sex couples might be increasingly represented in new parts of the city, as they grow in numbers and/or move from other areas. Thus, the fact alone that segregation has declined in many cities leaves open many unanswered questions about how exactly this pattern emerged.

Also important are the characteristics of changing neighborhoods. What features define neighborhoods that are losing shares of same-sex partners? Urbanicity? High housing costs? And what features define neighborhoods that are gaining shares of same-sex partners? Suburban locations? Affordable housing? Racial and ethnic diversity?

To answer these questions, this chapter takes a closer look at metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with declining segregation of male same-sex households and describes the sociodemographic characteristics of neighborhoods within these MSAs. Using data from the 2000 and 2010 US Censuses, this chapter identifies neighborhoods that had increasing, decreasing, or static shares of male same-sex households. Demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic characteristics of these neighborhoods are then compared. This chapter also investigates changes in gay neighborhoods, including changes in their prevalence and spatial distribution within MSAs. Demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods that transitioned to or from a gay neighborhood, or remained unchanged, are also compared. Lastly, this chapter investigates the small number of MSAs that experienced *increasing* segregation of male same-sex households and explores neighborhood changes within these areas as well.

Through such descriptions, a better picture of within-MSA changes in the spatial demography of male same-sex households can emerge, providing clues into the future geographies of same-sex partners. At the same time, such descriptions call for us to be critical consumers of census data, as these data are not very inclusive and

notoriously error-prone for same-sex partners (DiBennardo and Gates 2014). The chapter concludes with a look ahead to the 2020 Census, and what it will mean for future research on the geography and segregation of same-sex partners.

2.2 Data and Methods

2.2.1 Decennial Census Data

Data come from the 2000 and 2010 US Decennial Census Summary File 1, the 100% census count of the US population (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). Census tracts boundaries are used to approximate neighborhoods. Data are standardized to geographic boundaries from the year 2000 (Geolytics Inc. 2010) to account for any shifts in census tract boundaries over the study time period. Male same-sex partners are identified in the census data by combining individual responses to two questions: the sex of each individual living in the household and their relationship to the household head. Two males who report an “unmarried partner” relationship are defined as male same-sex partners. “Unmarried partner” is defined by the census as a person who was not related to the householder but who had a “close personal relationship” with them. The Census Bureau recoded responses of “same-sex spouse” to “unmarried partner” over the study time period.

There are several limitations to this census-based definition of same-sex partners. First, the Census did not ask sexual orientation directly, so it can only be inferred for individuals living with unmarried partners of the same sex. This means the census data do not represent the entire LGBTQ population. Second, some same-sex partners may have been unwilling to identify themselves on the Census. Census follow-up studies have assessed the undercount of same-sex partners and have estimated that 16–19% of same-sex partners did not identify themselves in Census 2000 (Badgett and Rogers 2003), and 10% of same-sex partners did not identify themselves in 2010 (Gates 2010). Third, there were substantial errors in the 2010 Census that resulted in a significant number of different-sex partners being counted as same-sex partners (O’Connell and Feliz 2011). The Census Bureau re-estimated the number of same-sex partners using micro-data level files of respondents’ first names and an index of the sex commonly associated with their first names (see O’Connell and Feliz 2011 for a detailed description of the methodology). Revised counts for 2000 and 2010 were released by the Census Bureau at the state level. Using the procedure outlined by Gates and Cooke (2012), I then apply the state error rates to individual census tracts to calculate revised tract estimates. The revised census tract estimates are used throughout this analysis including in the calculation of segregation scores. Fourth, the present analysis relies on census tracts to represent neighborhoods, even though the boundaries of census tracts are somewhat arbitrary. Different definitions of neighborhoods could lead to segregation estimates that are higher or lower, especially if these definitions differ dramatically from census tract boundaries.

2.2.2 Segregation Scores

This study categorizes MSAs as those that experienced declining or increasing segregation of male same-sex partners from different-sex partners (including married and unmarried partners) between 2000 and 2010. I measure segregation with the index of dissimilarity. The index of dissimilarity compares two groups at a time, and values represent the percentage (ranging from 0 to 100) of one group needing to change residences (in this case, move into a census tract where they are underrepresented) in order to achieve an even distribution (Duncan and Duncan 1955).

The index of dissimilarity is statistically independent of the relative size of the two groups used in its computation, which is particularly important in this study because different-sex partners greatly outnumber same-sex partners in all MSAs. However, the index can be sensitive if the population of one group is small compared to the number of census tracts used in its calculation (Johnson and Farley 1985). To ensure there is a substantial number of male same-sex partners for analysis, this study is limited to the 100 most populous MSAs.¹ Segregation indices cannot be reliably calculated for smaller MSAs.

2.2.3 Gay Neighborhoods

This study relies on a demographic definition of gay neighborhoods. To determine whether a census tract is a gay neighborhood, the tract percent of male same-sex households out of all households is compared to a threshold for the metropolitan area. The threshold adopted for this analysis is at or above the 90th percentile for percent male same-sex households in the MSA in the year 2000.² Tracts are compared to the 2000 threshold in 2000 and 2010, to determine whether tracts were a gay neighborhood in 2000 and whether tracts transitioned into or out of gay neighborhood status by 2010. This threshold is somewhat arbitrary and could just as easily be set at a lower or higher percentile. The 90th percentile is used because it generates a large enough number of gay neighborhoods to calculate summary statistics, without being overly inclusive. This purely demographic definition does not encompass the full identity and broader symbolic meaning of gay neighborhoods; for that I direct readers to other excellent chapters in this volume.

¹I conducted sub-analyses comparing the 50 most populous MSAs to the next 50 most populous MSAs, and found similar distributions of segregation scores across these groups of MSAs.

²If a slightly lower (or higher) percentile is chosen, then slightly more (or less) neighborhoods are classified as gay neighborhoods. Despite shifts in the number of gay neighborhoods, the contextual changes within gay neighborhoods observed in Table 2.5 and the differences in shares of gay neighborhoods across desegregating and increasingly-segregated cities observed in Table 2.6 remain substantively similar at slightly lower or higher thresholds for gay neighborhoods.

2.2.4 *Other Neighborhood Characteristics*

Data on other census tract characteristics are drawn from the 2000 and 2010 US Decennial Census (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010) and the 2005–2009 American Community Survey (US Census Bureau 2009) and are also standardized to year 2000 geographies. Of particular interest to this study is the urbanicity of neighborhoods. I define “urban” neighborhoods as those that are inside the principal city(ies) of their metropolitan area.³ Neighborhoods outside of a principal city are defined as “suburban.” Other tract variables include median home values, share of housing units that are owner-occupied, total population, share of households with own children under 18, share of the population age 25+ with a college degree, median income, and racial-ethnic distributions. All monetary variables are specified in year 2010 dollars, and any comparisons made to the year 2000 are adjusted for inflation.

2.2.5 *Analysis*

I first summarize segregation scores in 2000 and 2010, dividing the sample of MSAs into those that experienced declining segregation of male same-sex households and those that experienced increasing segregation. I then take a descriptive look at the neighborhoods within each of those MSA contexts. I describe the share of tracts within each group of MSAs that experienced declining, increasing, or static shares of male same-sex partners out of all tract households, and the share of neighborhoods that transitioned to or from a gay neighborhood. Then, within each of those neighborhood categories, I summarize the sociodemographic characteristics of those neighborhoods.

2.3 *Results*

2.3.1 *Trends in Segregation and Neighborhood Change*

The dominant pattern in US metropolitan areas is declining segregation of male same-sex households. Among the 100 largest MSAs in the United States, 96 experienced declining levels of segregation between 2000 and 2010 and only 4 experienced increasing levels of segregation. Table 2.1 shows the average index of dissimilarity across these MSAs. In desegregating MSAs, the index of dissimilarity was 61.73 in 2000 and 52.10 in 2010, a decline of 9.63 points. In increasingly segregated MSAs,

³The largest city in each MSA is designated a “principal city.” Additional cities qualify as principal cities if they meet specific requirements for population size and employment (US Census Bureau 2019a). The list of principal cities of metropolitan areas according to Census 2000 definitions was obtained from the US Census Bureau (1999).

Table 2.1 Segregation of male–male households from male–female households, 2000–2010

	Desegregating MSAs	Increasingly segregated MSAs	All MSAs
Number of MSAs	96	4	100
Mean index of dissimilarity, 2000	61.73	51.00	61.30
Mean index of dissimilarity, 2010	52.10	54.09	52.18
Mean change in index of dissimilarity, 2000–2010	−9.63	+3.09	−9.12

the index of dissimilarity was 51.00 in 2000 and 54.09 in 2010, an increase of 3.09 points. What is notable about these numbers is that desegregating MSAs started out at higher levels of segregation than did MSAs where segregation increased. In fact, both groups of MSAs end up at similar levels of segregation, with segregation scores that are in the low 50s. According to guidelines from Massey and Denton (1993), the overall average index of 52.18 is considered in the “moderate” range for segregation.

The levels of segregation reported in Table 2.1 are higher than segregation scores reported in Spring (2013), primarily because Spring (2013) based that assessment on individual cities (i.e., census-designated places), while the data here are for MSAs. This suggests that the inclusion of the surrounding suburban areas of MSAs contributes to higher segregation scores for male–male households. The differing geographies of male same-sex households in urban versus suburban areas is an important point I return to throughout the chapter.

Because declining segregation is far and away the dominant trend and only four MSAs actually experienced increasing segregation, I now turn to more in-depth assessment of desegregating MSAs. Within the context of a desegregating MSA, how have individual neighborhoods changed?

Table 2.2 reports changes in neighborhood shares of male same-sex households out of all households. Within the context of desegregation, tracts on average increased their shares of male–male households, going from an average of 0.18% male–male households in 2000 to 0.26% male–male households in 2010. Although these percentages are still quite small (they are both less than one percent), the trend that is driving declining segregation appears to be increasing representation of male same-sex households across most neighborhoods. Indeed, Table 2.2 also shows that more than half of all tracts (57.79%) within the 96 desegregating MSAs had increasing shares of male–male households. By comparison, 27.93% of tracts experienced declining shares of male–male households, and 14.27% experienced no change.

Another way to assess neighborhood-level change in desegregating MSAs is to compare demographic changes in gay neighborhoods. Table 2.3 shows how many neighborhoods met the demographic threshold for a gay neighborhood in 2000 and 2010. By definition, about 10% (9.89%) of neighborhoods were defined as gay neighborhoods in 2000 (since the definition is based on meeting the 90th percentile for tract

Table 2.2 Change in tract shares of male–male households within desegregating MSAs

	Desegregating MSAs
Tract share of male–male households, 2000	0.18%
Tract share of male–male households, 2010	0.26%
Share of tracts with declining shares of male–male households	27.93%
Share of tracts with increasing shares of male–male households	57.79%
Share of tracts with static shares of male–male households	14.27%
N tracts	39,185
N MSAs	96

Table 2.3 Transitions of gay neighborhoods within desegregating MSAs*

	Desegregating MSAs
Share of gay neighborhoods, 2000	9.89%
Share of gay neighborhoods, 2010	16.51%
Share of tracts by whether gay neighborhood in 2000, 2010	
Not gay nh (2000), not gay nh (2010)	80.30%
Not gay nh (2000), gay nh (2010)	9.80%
Gay nh (2000), not gay nh (2010)	3.19%
Gay nh (2000), gay nh (2010)	6.71%
N tracts	39,185
N MSAs	96

*Gay neighborhoods are defined in each year as tracts that are at or above the 90th percentile for tract share of male–male partners in the MSA in the year 2000

share of male same-sex households in the MSA in 2000). By 2010, 16.51% of neighborhoods were defined as gay neighborhoods, suggesting that an expanding number of gay neighborhoods is another important contributor to declining segregation.

Despite this expansion, most neighborhoods (80.30%) were not gay neighborhoods in 2000 or 2010. However, a fairly substantial number of neighborhoods (9.8%) transitioned to gay neighborhood status by 2010. Of the remaining neighborhoods, 3.19% transitioned out of being a gay neighborhood, while 6.71% were gay neighborhoods in both time periods. Overall the data in Table 2.3 somewhat challenge the idea that gay neighborhoods are declining or withering away. A small minority of gay neighborhoods did transition away from having substantial shares of male

same-sex households. But more common was that gay neighborhoods remained gay neighborhoods, and that new gay neighborhoods emerged.

2.3.2 Characteristics of Neighborhoods Within Desegregating Cities

The previous section demonstrated the divergent pathways of neighborhoods within desegregating cities. While many neighborhoods have expanded their shares of male same-sex households, a few have gone in the other direction, and many others have remained unchanged. What are the sociodemographic characteristics of neighborhoods following each of these trends?

Table 2.4 focuses on urbanicity, housing, and other demographic characteristics of tracts within desegregating MSAs, depending on whether the tracts experienced declining, increasing, or static shares of male same-sex households. Data are reported for 2010. The level and direction of change from 2000 is also reported.

Among tracts with declining shares of male same-sex households, the average share of male–male households out of all households was 0.16% in 2010, representing a 0.16 percentage point decline from the year 2000. This means that in neighborhoods that lost shares of male same-sex partners, shares of male–male partners were on average cut in half. About half (50.55%) of these neighborhoods were located in urban areas and another half were located in suburban areas (49.45%). Since about 45% of tracts in the sample of MSAs were in urban areas, neighborhoods that lost shares of male–male households were somewhat overrepresented in urban areas. These neighborhoods also represent areas where housing values have grown (+\$40,842), median incomes have grown (+\$931), and homeownership rates were lower than in other neighborhoods (54.30%).

Neighborhoods with increasing shares of male same-sex households seem to have absorbed about the same percentage of male–male households that were lost from declining neighborhoods. These neighborhoods nearly doubled their shares of male same-sex households from 2000 to 2010, and by 2010 had the greatest shares of male same-sex households compared to other neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were about equally distributed between urban and suburban areas. They too had increasing home values (+\$40,121) and were otherwise fairly similar to neighborhoods with declining shares of male same-sex partners. These neighborhoods may have offered a few more opportunities for homeownership and had slightly higher rates of college degrees and higher median incomes. These neighborhoods also appeared to be less diverse than neighborhoods with declining shares of male same-sex partners. The former were 61.32% white, while the latter were 53.30% white.

Finally, Table 2.4 reveals that neighborhoods with static shares of male same-sex partners were static because they had no male–male households in either time period. These tracts were overwhelmingly suburban (77.35%). These tracts also had greater increases in home values (+\$65,004) than other neighborhoods, and much higher

Table 2.4 Characteristics of tracts within desegregating MSAs, by direction of change in the share of male–male households

	Tracts with declining shares of male–male households		Tracts with increasing shares of male–male households		Tracts with static shares of male–male households	
	Mean	Δ from 2000	Mean	Δ from 2000	Mean	Δ from 2000
<i>Tract Characteristics, 2010</i>						
Share of male–male households						
% Male–male households	0.16	–0.16	0.38	+0.16	0.00	0.00
Urbanicity						
% Urban	50.55	–	47.97	–	22.65	–
% Suburban	49.45	–	52.03	–	77.35	–
Housing						
Median home value (\$)	267,783	+40,842	268,588	+40,121	266,531	+65,004
% Owner-occupied homes	54.30	–0.50	56.71	–0.75	72.37	–1.35
Demographics						
Total population	4614.06	+1055.23	4880.49	+1255.83	5088.11	+605.91
% Households with children	21.54	–1.41	20.72	–2.04	26.64	–11.08
% College degrees	27.21	+1.30	30.42	+0.99	31.37	+3.07
Median income (\$)	55,123	+931	57,914	+276	71,156	–2,627
% White, non-Latinx	53.30	–0.13	61.32	+0.24	74.94	–4.64
% Black, non-Latinx	21.21	+0.29	16.35	+0.04	9.05	+0.62
% Asian, non-Latinx	5.29	+1.44	4.77	+0.88	4.19	+0.93
% Latinx, any race	16.92	+2.19	13.70	+1.56	7.87	+1.81
% Other race	6.87	+5.77	6.99	+5.49	6.91	+4.09
N tracts	10,946		22,646		5,593	

rates of homeownership (72.37%), more households with children (26.64%), higher median incomes (\$71,156), and were more white (74.94%). These data suggest that what appear to be quintessentially suburban neighborhoods have remained closed-off to male same-sex partners, even within a larger MSA context of declining segregation.

The second way this chapter categorizes neighborhoods is by the transition of gay neighborhood status. Table 2.5 shows summary statistics for neighborhoods depending on whether, across the two time points, the neighborhoods were never

Table 2.5 Characteristics of tracts within desegregating MSAs, by transitions of gay neighborhoods*

	Gay nh (2000) Gay nh (2010)		Gay nh (2000) Not gay nh (2010)		Not gay nh (2000) Gay nh (2010)		Not gay nh (2000) Not gay nh (2010)	
	Mean	Δ from 2000	Mean	Δ from 2000	Mean	Δ from 2000	Mean	Δ from 2000
<i>Tract Characteristics, 2010</i>								
Share of male–male households								
% Male–male households	1.35	+0.24	0.20	−0.45	0.65	+0.46	0.13	+0.04
Urbanicity								
% Urban	88.32	–	70.54	–	67.98	–	37.66	–
% Suburban	11.68	–	29.46	–	32.02	–	62.34	–
Housing								
Median home value (\$)	345,420	+101,483	244,482	+76,588	253,971	+79,412	264,199	+69,964
% Owner-occupied homes	42.12	+1.45	44.50	−0.74	48.54	−0.79	61.34	−1.81
Demographics								
Total population	3503.27	+46.47	3313.45	+255.46	3721.62	+143.35	5143.39	+562.57
% Households with children	13.44	−7.93	18.79	−12.99	17.10	−10.88	23.19	−11.41
% College degrees	44.85	+6.54	25.13	+3.62	30.97	+4.24	28.41	+2.80
Median income (\$)	57,860	+2,368	46,028	−2,331	50,863	−1,198	60,600	−3,341
% White, non-Latinx	61.01	+1.98	43.46	−2.63	57.60	−2.51	62.15	−5.45
% Black, non-Latinx	17.46	−1.60	27.09	−0.06	19.65	+0.33	15.82	+0.93
% Asian, non-Latinx	5.15	+0.48	4.58	+0.61	4.42	+0.47	4.86	+0.85
% Latinx, any race	14.42	+0.69	21.13	+2.00	15.01	+2.10	13.27	+2.60
% Other race	7.15	+3.33	8.62	+4.60	7.69	+3.75	6.77	+3.81
N tracts	2,628		1,249		3,841		31,467	

*Gay neighborhoods are defined in each year as tracts that are at or above the 90th percentile for tract share of male–male partners in the MSA in the year 2000. It is also possible to select a slightly higher or lower percentile. In that case, while the number of neighborhoods within each category of gay neighborhood transitions shifts, the relative changes in tract characteristics over time within these categories remains similar

a gay neighborhood, remained a gay neighborhood, or transitioned one way or the other. Those that were gay neighborhoods in 2000 and remained gay neighborhoods in 2010 had the highest shares of male same-sex households (1.35%) compared to all other neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were very likely to be urban neighborhoods (88.32% urban) and were substantially underrepresented in the suburbs (11.68% suburban). These neighborhoods also had the highest and most rapidly increasing home values (\$345,420; up \$101,483 since 2000), along with the lowest rates of homeownership (42.12%), compared to all other neighborhoods. It is important to note that despite high housing costs, these neighborhoods remained gay neighborhoods and even increased their shares of male same-sex households. These neighborhoods also had low rates of households with children (13.44%), high rates of college degrees (44.85%), some of the highest incomes (\$57,860), and were not especially diverse (61.01% white, non-Latinx).

The least common neighborhood was one that transitioned from a gay neighborhood in 2000 to a non-gay neighborhood in 2010. In these neighborhoods, the average tract share of male same-sex households was 0.20% in 2010, down 0.45 percentage points from 2000. These were mostly urban neighborhoods (70.54%), but also some suburban (29.46%). These neighborhoods, on average, had lower housing values than other neighborhoods (\$244,482), the lowest rates of college degrees (25.13%), and the lowest median incomes (\$46,028), suggesting that these neighborhoods were perhaps struggling socioeconomically. These neighborhoods were also the most racially diverse neighborhoods, with higher than average shares of Black and Latinx residents (27.09 and 21.13%, respectively).

Some neighborhoods became gay neighborhoods over the time period. These neighborhoods saw the highest increases in shares of male same-sex households (+0.46 percentage points), compared to other neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were 67.98% urban and 32.02% suburban. When it comes to housing values and other demographic characteristics, these neighborhoods tended to be neither the highest nor lowest compared to the other neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were moderate in terms of home values, rates of homeownership, incomes, and other sociodemographic characteristics. This seems to suggest that new gay neighborhoods did represent a departure from those that were already gay neighborhoods in 2000, in that new gay neighborhoods were more “average” types of neighborhoods (average, that is, demographically).

Not surprisingly, those that were never gay neighborhoods had the lowest shares of male same-sex households (0.13%), compared to all other neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were more often in the suburbs (62.34%), but a substantial share were also urban (37.66%). These neighborhoods had the highest rates of homeownership (61.34%), the highest rates of households with children (23.19%), the highest median incomes (\$60,600), and the lowest levels of racial diversity (62.15% white), compared to all other neighborhoods. Much like the tracts with zero shares of male same-sex partners described in Table 2.4, these typically well-off, mostly suburban neighborhoods have remained relatively closed-off to male same-sex households.

2.3.3 *Increasingly Segregated Cities*

As previously shown, the dominant trend among MSAs is declining segregation of male same-sex partners. However, among the 100 most populous MSAs, 4 MSAs experienced increasing segregation. These were Los-Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA; Stockton, CA; Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL; and Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC. This section takes a brief look at neighborhood changes within these increasingly segregated metropolitan areas.

Although only 4 MSAs experienced increasing segregation, these MSAs included over 4,000 census tracts. Table 2.6 assesses whether the distribution of male same-sex households across these 4,000+ tracts differed from the average distribution in desegregating MSAs. The data indicate that tracts in increasingly segregated MSAs had, on average, greater shares of male–male households than in desegregating MSAs in both 2000 and 2010. More of the neighborhoods in increasingly segregated MSAs had declining shares of male–male households than in desegregating MSAs (5.65% more), while fewer neighborhoods had increasing shares (1.51% fewer). These differences are fairly modest, but may indicate that in increasingly segregated MSAs there was a trend of male same-sex households leaving a large number of neighborhoods to settle (or resettle) in a smaller number of neighborhoods. In other words, while the trend in desegregating MSAs was toward neighborhood “deconcentration” of male same-sex partners, the trend in increasingly segregated MSAs seems to be more toward (re)concentration.

The change in gay neighborhoods in increasingly segregated MSAs follows along the same lines. In 2000, desegregating and increasingly segregated MSAs had similar numbers of gay neighborhoods. But by 2010, increasingly segregated MSAs had fewer gay neighborhoods than desegregating MSAs. This is primarily because more neighborhoods in increasingly segregated cities (2.64% more) remained ‘not gay’ in 2000 and 2010.

Because this is a summary of only four metropolitan areas, and the MSAs themselves are very different in terms of geography and socioeconomic conditions, readers are cautioned against reading too much into the data in Table 2.6. Further statistical summary of these four MSAs likely would not carry much meaning (which is why I do not present that here), but further research on increasingly segregated cities could follow several important directions. First, it might be interesting to assess what these cities have in common with cities that only slightly declined in segregation. The line that separates these types of cities might be very small, and perhaps these cities as a group are quite distinct from cities that are more rapidly desegregating. Such comparisons could be useful for identifying the metropolitan-level conditions that support more rapid, as opposed to more minimal, changes in segregation, since the dominant trend is toward decline anyway. Second, this statistical work should be complemented by qualitative descriptions of cities with varying contexts of segregation. The four MSAs identified as increasingly segregated might provide interesting and important counterpoints to qualitative research in desegregating cities.

Table 2.6 Neighborhood change within increasingly segregated MSAs*

	Increasingly segregated MSAs	Difference from desegregating MSAs
Tract share of male–male households, 2000	0.24%	+0.06
Tract share of male–male households, 2010	0.35%	+0.09
Share of tracts with declining shares of male–male households	33.57%	+5.64
Share of tracts with increasing shares of male–male households	56.28%	–1.51
Share of tracts with static shares of male–male households;	10.15%	–4.12
Share of gay neighborhoods, 2000*	9.96%	+0.07
Share of gay neighborhoods, 2010*	14.51%	–2.00
Share of tracts by whether gay neighborhood in 2000, 2010*		
Not gay nh (2000), not gay nh (2010)	82.94%	+2.64
Not gay nh (2000), gay nh (2010)	7.10%	–2.70
Gay nh (2000), not gay nh (2010)	2.55%	–0.64
Gay nh (2000), gay nh (2010)	7.41%	+0.70
N tracts	4,197	
N MSAs	4	

*Gay neighborhoods are defined in each year as tracts that are at or above the 90th percentile for tract share of male–male partners in the MSA in the year 2000. It is also possible to select a slightly higher or lower percentile. In that case, while the share of gay neighborhoods changes within MSAs, the relative difference in the share of gay neighborhoods between desegregating and increasingly segregating MSAs remains similar

2.4 The Demographic Future of Gay Neighborhoods

What do the aforementioned results mean for the demographic future of gay neighborhoods? Contrary to some popular assumptions, gay neighborhoods are not ceasing to exist. However, gay neighborhoods are demographically changing and spatially reorganizing, even within the broader context of declining segregation. Underlying declining rates of segregation seems to be the increasing suburbanization of male same-sex households *and* gay neighborhoods.

At the same time, some suburban areas (and some urban areas, to a lesser extent) have remained closed-off to male same-sex households. These tend to be economically vibrant, “child-friendly,” mostly suburban neighborhoods. It will be interesting to see if these neighborhoods remain unchanged in the 2020 census. It is probably unlikely that these neighborhoods will remain isolated from the dominant trend of increasing male same-sex populations at the neighborhood-level. However, quantitative and qualitative researchers may find it interesting to track how these neighborhoods change, and how same-sex households fare when they enter these neighborhoods.

2.5 Future Research: Census 2020 and Beyond

Future research on the segregation of same-sex partners depends on the availability of high-quality data. The census is a federal product mandated by the constitution, and is arguably the most important and consequential source of data on the US population. One could argue that the accuracy with which the census counts LGBTQ populations says a lot about society. If the United States wants to strive for equality based on gender identity and sexual orientation, it must also strive for accuracy in national data collection efforts. Accurate estimates matter for both practical reasons (e.g., the allocation of funding for community resources) and symbolic reasons (e.g., the visibility of marginalized communities), which is why there is so much at stake for getting the estimates right.

Due to inaccuracies with Census 2010, Census 2020 moved to a new way to count same-sex partners. In 2000 and 2010, same-sex partnerships were inferred by cross-referencing the sex of each person and their relationship to the household head. This method was prone to error, because as it was later revealed, a significant number of individuals mis-marked their sex and were erroneously counted as same-sex partners (O’Connell and Feliz 2011). The new method asked directly within the relationship question whether each person was an “Opposite-sex husband/wife/spouse,” an “Opposite-sex unmarried partner,” a “Same-sex husband/wife/spouse,” or a “Same-sex unmarried partner” (US Census Bureau 2019b). This reframing of the question should considerably improve the accuracy of same-sex partner population counts and is a huge step in the right direction.

What Census 2020 still lacked was a separate LGBTQ category. Detailed questions that ask directly about sexual orientation and gender identity would finally allow single LGBTQ people to be counted. The US Census Bureau reportedly proposed such questions in the lead-up to the 2020 Census (Wang 2018). However, those questions were quickly removed from consideration by the federal administration shortly after Trump took office in 2017. In 2018, the “Census Equality Act” was introduced in the US Senate, which, if it becomes law, would require sexual orientation and gender identity questions to be added to the census by 2030 and the American Community Survey by 2020 (Govtrack 2019). According to the bill’s sponsor Senator Kamala

Harris, “the spirit of the census is that no one should go uncounted and no one should be invisible” (Govtrack 2019).

To obtain accurate data, the Census Bureau not only needs to ask the right questions, it also need to overcome peoples’ concerns about participation. Misinformation about the census, concerns over confidentiality of responses, and general distrust in the government all serve as barriers to participation. A number of advocacy organizations are seeking to break through those barriers, encouraging LGBTQ populations to “get out the count” and “queer the census” (National LGBTQ Task Force 2019). Yet even with 100% participation, the census can still only provide a simplistic, point-in-time snapshot of LGBTQ populations. LGBTQ identities can be complex, in flux, and individualized (Browne 2010); and as such, there will always be some misrepresentation when the only option is to check a box.

Despite its limitations, the US Census remains a critical source of data on same-sex households. Other useful sources of data include large scale social surveys like the General Social Survey⁴ and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health⁵—which have continued to fold more LGBTQ people into their samples, and smaller targeted studies like the Williams Institute’s mixed-methods Pathways to Justice study⁶—which focus specifically on LGBTQ people. Such expansion of qualitative and quantitative data on LGBTQ people will be instrumental in furthering our understanding of LGBTQ lives. But the Census remains the only data source large enough in scale to track the geographic segregation of same-sex households over time. For scholars interested in how the spatial reorganization of LGBTQ populations impacts LGBTQ communities, such demographic estimates of segregation and change are important for setting the broader context. The need for such research further underscores the need for a non-political, accurate, and inclusive national census.

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Chapter 3

A Queer Reading of the United States Census



Michael Frisch

Abstract LGBTQ neighborhoods face change. Planning for these neighborhoods requires data about LGBTQ residential concentration. Some analysts have used US Census same-sex partner data to make judgments about LGBTQ neighborhoods. Two agency actions make this reliance problematic. The US Census was required to enforce the Defense of Marriage Act and reassigned some LGBTQ responses in a heteronormal way. The Census also assigned sex based upon patterns of names. These US Census actions of gay removal and sex assignment to datasets raise questions about the usefulness of the partner dataset. A queer reading of the census may give a better representation of neighborhood development and decline. Data are developed for four queer neighborhoods: the West Village in New York City, Center City Philadelphia, Midtown Atlanta, and Midtown Kansas City. The results show that queer attributes of these areas grew to about 1990. Some queer attributes may have declined some from their peak. The results raise questions about social surveys, the closet, and the direction of LGBTQ neighborhoods in the twenty-first century. LGBTQ displacement has occurred.

Keywords LGBTQ neighborhoods · US Census · Planning · Queer past · Marriage · Sex ratios · Gentrification · Displacement

3.1 Introduction

The mainstreaming of lesbian and gay culture through the adoption of same-gender marriage may be changing the nature of lesbian and gay enclaves (Ghaziani 2014). Stories in the press (James 2017) note this changing nature of gay neighborhoods as bars, clubs and bookstores that cater primarily to a gay and lesbian clientele close. These closings are evidence of neighborhood change and displacement. Urban planners usually use Census data to measure neighborhood change. Yet the Census,

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even in 2020, does not explicitly ask about sexual orientation or gender identity. This Chapter develops an alternative way of looking at LGBTQ neighborhood change using Census data. This allows for the development of a baseline to allow further assessment of LGBTQ neighborhood changes. The resulting analysis gives some context to the generational rise and relative decline of the gayborhood.

Measuring US neighborhood change relies heavily on Census data in the United States. Since the 1940 Census, urban areas of the United States have been divided into census tracts (Snow 2011). For the last 80 years, urban scholars analyzed changes in population and housing within neighborhoods to the degree that census questions and definitions defined variables of interest. These variables include age, sex, race, marital status, housing characteristics, household composition, and work status. With each Census, definitions of variables would be modified to reflect necessary changes in proposed outcomes and to reflect changes in social conceptions of subgrouping in work and residential life (Alonso and Starr 1987). The lack of Census questions on LGBTQ variables such as gender and sexual orientation has meant that analyses of LGBTQ neighborhoods and places rely on a combination of other information sources to determine their location and degree of concentration (Forsyth 2011). Early analyses of gay neighborhoods relied on ethnographic stories of LGBTQ community members building neighborhood institutions (Castells 1983). Other methods for analysis included identifying concentrations of LGBTQ institutions and organizations such as bars, businesses and non-profits who were willing to list themselves in LGBTQ guides (Harry 1974; Levine 1979; Wolfe 1992). Historical work has had to rely on a combination of oral history and archival material (Chauncey 1995). Without a national gay rights law, LGBTQ people risk their own livelihoods by being out and counted as part of a community. Such readings of history have had to rely on the ability to read code—implicit expressions of queerness identifiable between the lines (Sedgwick 1990). Throughout most of the twentieth century, the ethics of compulsory heterosexuality and the closet meant that much evidence of variance may have been destroyed to protect reputations (Rich 1993). Thus, it was an exciting advance in urban studies in the late 1990s when the Census began to put together a series of tables on same-sex partnered households (Black et al. 2000). These data might allow a more accurate accounting of residential LGBTQ neighborhoods.

Researchers used this dataset. Most famously, Richard Florida's Creative Class (2002) theory relied on the Census Bureau's concentration of same-sex partnered households as a measure of regional tolerance (Florida and Gates 2003). At the same time that the Creative Class theory was gaining respectability, the Census Bureau was involved in a process of reassigning lesbian and gay partnered responses as heterosexual responses when constructing these data sets (Simmons and O'Connell 2003). The reassigning of responses is gay removal. Evidence about changes in gay neighborhoods based solely on this dataset must account for changes in how the Census Bureau constructs the dataset (MRFHS 2014). While 25 years of Census data on same-sex partnered households exists, the 2020 Census does not ask the questions about sexual orientation and gender necessary to develop a fuller understanding of LGBTQ communities and neighborhoods (Doan 2016; FIWG 2016b; Edgar et al. 2018; Wang 2018).

The answer to this lack of data is to do a queer reading of the census. This requires reading the structured silences within Census data (see Frisch 2002). Census data and government survey data has been structured around questions of citizenship, representation, and distribution (Alonso and Starr 1987). These structures reflect heteronormative ideals of marriage, households and the nuclear family. Therefore, a queer reading of the Census asks—how would a queer person answer the Census questions? How and where does my household and the households of LGBTQ friends and acquaintances show up in the data categories collected? Asking these questions raises issues about intersectionality, the closet, gender expression, passing, and what it means to live in and around LGBTQ communities. Such a reading allows for identifying clusters of LGBTQ individuals and positions LGBTQ neighborhoods in contrast to the question of non-heteronormative neighborhoods.

This analysis starts with a quick review of heteronormality and its social enforcement by urban development processes and planning. Census questions and the resulting data, must be considered within this context. The next section presents the problems of Census data on LGBTQ communities. The most accurate way of assessing LGBTQ neighborhoods would be to add questions about sexual orientation and gender identity. The earliest we might get an accurate census count of LGBTQ communities is 2030. Without these data, the queer reading of the Census proceeds by asking, “how might a person with a non-heteronormative life answer the Census?” Indicators such as sex ratio, and marital status may then identify neighborhoods outside heteronormative expectations. The analysis proceeds by illustrating how a queer reading of the Census might work with examples of four probable “queer” neighborhoods—Midtown in Kansas City; Midtown in Atlanta; the West Village in New York City and Center City Philadelphia. Such a reading provides evidence of a decline in queerness—indicating areas of possible displacement by the end of the study period. This chapter concludes that full recognition in the public realm requires counting.

3.2 Heteronormativity and Urban Development

While different sexual orientations and gender identities have been around forever, the meanings attached to the categories are products of the modern era (D’Emilio and Freedman 2012). Homosexuality and heterosexuality are terms coined by sexologists of the late nineteenth century and only really attained their modern meanings around the turn of the century. Heterosexuality as a term arose to encompass often unspoken assumptions about normal society. Katz (1995) identifies three basic components of heteronormality: that marriage can only be between one man and one woman, that a nuclear family of heterosexual parents is the expected and best site for raising children, and that it is the only site where expression of romantic and sexual pleasure should be allowed. These assumptions about heteronormality still surround us every day—who comprises an average family? What gets shown on TV, and what is suitable for kids to see?

Frisch (2002) argues that modern methods of urban planning arose at the same time as these categories of sexual orientation identity. Urban planning acts to build and promote heterosexual spaces and places on purpose. The rise of suburbs made of single-family houses is a part of this heterosexist project as apartment buildings are seen to threaten sexual and gender norms. The development of LGBTQ neighborhoods post-Stonewall must be viewed within the context of systematic power expressed through societal pressure and physical environments favoring heteronormality as well as the direct powerful legal forms of discrimination. These threats lessened as more people came-out and joined social movements demanding their rights. Some see the LGBTQ rights movement as one of the most successful twentieth-century movements for social change (Sullivan 2005; Lakey 2018).

Coming out, a successful organizing tactic of LGBTQ politics, is an act of performance (Butler 1993). When LGBTQ folks choose to be out and publicly express gender and sexual identity, they act against these cultural norms. LGBTQ rights have been achieved because of the millions of people choosing to contradict the assumptions of heteronormality. Yet, the “closet” functions as a “double bind” (Halperin 1995). It is a strategy to protect yourself from the physical violence of hate crimes, and from discrimination at your job. In this sense it gives you agency. It is also the strategy of received and perceived oppression that restricts what you do (Sedgwick 1990). The closeted safe choice is to stay silent. As Foucault (1978) notes, these silences have patterns. Finding these structures of individual responses to political, social, and cultural oppression then requires both an understanding of possible inconsistencies in response, as well as a view of how heterosexuality is empowered through legal and extralegal means. Even same-sex marriage may be seen through this lens. A same-sex marriage of course overturns the hierarchy of sex roles within marriage. Two lesbians together raising kids disorients the assumptions of heterosexuality in that masculine and feminine roles in parenting may be performed by someone of the same gender. The arguments for religious freedom in regard to LGBTQ folk are all about defending the primacy and natural existence of different sex roles (Alliance Defending Freedom 2019). These cases however hover around the discovery that a possible client, customer or patient is LGBTQ. Information management still matters.

The normalization of LGBTQ status then requires tolerance, recognition, and eventually acceptance of LGBTQ status. Tolerance might be seen through the early stages of LGBTQ enclave formation (see Forsyth 2011). Recognition requires some acceptance of standing as a citizen as evidenced by the Supreme Court rulings in the *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), *US v. Windsor* (2013) and the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) decisions. Increasing acceptance may then lead to a more dispersed residential pattern (Ghaziani 2014). Without LGBTQ places then do we still need LGBTQ spaces (Nusser and Anacker 2013, 2015)? If gay neighborhoods are in decline, do we then need to take action to protect and plan for LGBTQ space? Planning for LGBTQ neighborhoods and communities requires information about individuals and households comprising the community. In the United States, the Census provides initial local data that informs planning analysis.

3.3 The Census, Heteronormativity, and LGBTQ Populations

US Census questions change every decade to reflect changing notions of American citizenship (Anderson 2015). Furthermore, the Bureau of the Census runs and coordinates other social surveys such as the Current Population Survey in order to collect information necessary for further implementation of government policies and programs (Alonso and Starr 1987). The 1990 Census added questions about unmarried partners in households (Simmons and O’Connell 2003), however, as the data was being collected, the assumption was being made that unmarried couples had to be of a different sex. Responses that were from people in same-sex partnerships had their responses changed by the Bureau to being a response of a different sex. This was during a health crisis when accurate data about gay men would have saved lives—yet the Census Bureau was actively removing lesbians and gays responses from the Census. With the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, these acts of gay removal became the policy of the Bureau. A technical note from 2003 stated:

Same-sex spouse responses were flagged as invalid to comply with the 1996 Federal Defense of Marriage Act (H.R. 3396) passed by the 104th Congress. This act instructs all federal agencies only to recognize opposite-sex marriages for the purposes of enacting any agency programs. In order for Census Bureau data to be consistent with this act and the data requirements of other federal agencies, same-sex spouse responses were invalidated. The legislation defines marriage and spouse as follows:

... interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, ... the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or wife.— Simmons and O’Connell (2003)

This policy interfered with how same-sex partner datasets could be developed. If the partner answering the Census question used the word “spouse” it must be invalid. The Census Bureau was acting as an enforcer of heteronormality. This decision of course had an impact on the datasets used by Florida and Gates in developing their tolerance index (2003). In the 2000 census, if someone listed their partner as partner they were counted as being in a same-sex unmarried couple. If they said they had a spouse—their response was reclassified as “straight.” The tolerance index then measured the degree that LGBTQ folks in same-sex partnerships used the term “partner” in answering the census.

How much did this process of gay removal impact the same-sex partner database? Later work on the 2010 Census data revealed the degree of gay removal and sex classification errors in the Census data. Using “uncorrected data” from the full-count, same-sex partnered households who used the term “partner” accounted for 0.32% of all households in the year 2000 and 0.47% of households in the 2010 census (O’Connell and Feliz 2011: 5). Same-sex households that used the word “spouse” to describe their partnership accounted for 0.24% of all households in 2000 and 0.30 in 2010. According to counts produced by Census procedures “spouse” households accounted for 43% of these households in 2000 and 41% of households in 2010.

Yet, Gates and Steinberger's (2009) work found that only 16% of unmarried partners would answer the census describing their partner as spouse. It turns out that the over count of "spousal" responses in the Census was due to a Census procedure accounting for non-respondents to the Census. The Census uses the probability that a particular name aligns with a particular sex to assign a sex classification to people in non-respondent households (O'Connell and Feliz 2011). Errors due to this sex-assigning name processing led to a 28% over count of same-sex partners in 2010 (O'Connell and Feliz 2011: 23). This sex assignment procedure may also produce a "misgendering."

The 2010 Census occurred at a moment when the Defense of Marriage Act was still the Federal law, and only Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire and DC had legalized same-sex marriage. More than half the states had some sort of state law or constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. The 2010 Census definition of the family maintained that a family required one or more people living in the same housing unit who are related to the householder by "blood, marriage, and/or adoption." These criteria have been consistent for 80 years (Pemberton 2015). In the 2010 Census many same-sex partnered couples with kids were only considered to be a family due to their having kids whereas an opposite-sex couple who was married without kids would be considered a family. Once again, heteronormality is the underlying deciding factor in how the datasets are put together between families and households.

Federal agencies reacted to the problems with organizing data around same-sex partners and unmarried couples and the challenges that increasing recognition of same-sex partnered relationships made to heteronormal assumptions about marriage and families. In 2010, during the Obama administration, the Office of Management and Budget organized the Interagency Working Group on Measuring Relationships in Federal Household Surveys to examine issues related to collecting information about household formation. After reviewing 55 surveys done by various Federal agencies, this task force found a series of measurement issues that could lead to inconsistent results:

1. variation in response categories (for example, more categories and/or different category wording);
2. inconsistent measurement of relationship to child;
3. infrequent measurement of interrelationship of all household members;
4. inconsistent measurement of cohabitation;
5. infrequent measurement of sex for all household members; and
6. inconsistent inclusion of State of current residence and State where married—(MRFHS 2014: ii).

The task group also suggest various ways to improve data gathering:

First, question wording should incorporate sex-neutral language wherever possible;

Second, Federal surveys should continue working to collect information on intimate relationships other than opposite-sex marriage:

Third, Federal agencies should review their current use of editing and processing procedures with respect to sex, relationship, and marital status;

Finally, results from tests and discussions should be widely shared, not only among Federal agencies but also with other interested parties such as academic and policy research organizations.—MRFHS (2014: iii)

The task group also remarked that the *United States v. Windsor* (2013) case overturning the Defense of Marriage Act would have an impact on how survey data are processed (MRFHS 2014: 3). The work of this task group then set the stage for potentially asking about sexual orientation and gender identity in the 2020 Census. While reporting on questions for the Census and the Current Population Survey one of these research groups found no “significant issues that would make collecting SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) information in the CPS infeasible” (Edgar et al. 2018: 4). Draft lists of questions for the 2020 Census including sexual orientation were initially proposed in 2018 only to be censored by Trump administration officials (Wang 2018). Only recently have Federal agencies begun the work of understanding the implications of asking questions about gender identity (FIWG 2016a; Holzberg et al. 2018).

Table 3.1 sorts out the various national estimates of the number of same-sex partnered households in the United States within the context of all partnered households whether married or not. Over the last two decades the number of same-sex partnered households has more than doubled going from 0.6% of households in 2000 to 1.33% in 2019. Perhaps this is evidence of a rise in homonormativity (Bell and Binnie 2004). At the same time, we still do not have population-based numbers for sexual orientation and gender identity. We do not know how many un-partnered people consider themselves LGBTQ. We do not know how transgender and/or genderqueer folks would answer the “sex”-based questions on the survey; and we do not know how many opposite-sex partnered households are made up of LGBTQ folks living in what looks like a heteronormative household in census terms. Sadly, we must now wait until 2030 to get population-wide results.

3.4 A Queer Reading of the Census

The previous discussion showed why the distribution of the partnered data may or may not estimate the relative degree of concentration of LGBTQ folks in a particular neighborhood. Looking back over time can we find variables where residents answer Census questions in patterns that show that they are not living in a typical heteronormal fashion? While Census questions were written with the presumption of heteronormativity, what if we look for queer patterns instead? When faced with a Census questionnaire, how might have a queer person have answered it? For example, gay partners in New York City often kept their separate apartments. Space was always running short in New York and if you had access to a rent-stabilized apartment you

Table 3.1 Same and opposite sex coupled households in the United States by unmarried status

	Population estimate in millions	Percent of total
2000 Total number of partnered households	59.732	100.0
2000 Opposite-sex married partners	54.493	91.2
2000 Opposite-sex Unmarried partners	4.881	8.2
2000 Same-sex spousal partners	0.044	0.07
2000 Same-sex unmarried partners	0.314	0.53
2010 Total number of partnered households	63.999	100.0
2010 Opposite-sex married partners	56.510	88.3
2010 Opposite-sex unmarried partners	6.842	10.7
2010 Same-sex spousal partners	0.132	0.20
2010 Same-sex unmarried partners	0.515	0.80
2019 Total number of partnered households	70.412	100.0
2019 Opposite-sex married partners	61.4	87.2
2019 Opposite-sex unmarried partners	8.0	11.4
2019 Same-sex married partners	0.543	0.77
2019 Same-sex unmarried partners	0.469	0.66

Sources O’Connell and Feliz (2011), Social Explorer (2019b), and Gurrentz and Valerio (2019)

Note 2019 estimates are based on the Current Population Survey. 2000 and 2010 estimates are based on the Census, using the “corrected” same-sex partner data

had to be sure about the relationship before giving it up. While some housing protections for LGBTQ New Yorkers have existed since the early 1990s, same-sex marriage makes it easier to guarantee security. In Kansas City, with more LGBTQ repression, queer men and women may have been in opposite-gender marriages in the past. Single LGBTQ folks may have lived in a relatively closeted situation within their kinship networks in one space and lived out their LGBTQ lives by going out and dating in other spaces and places. How will these situations show up in neighborhood census data? A queer reading of the census chooses multiple variables that might reflect these situations.

A concentration of LGBTQ folks would then show up as a concentration of people without the characteristics of heteronormality. From 1960 to 2000 this would mean people of child-rearing age who are not involved in what was counted as marriage at the time—only opposite sex people with a marriage license from the state. Generally, people between the ages of 25 and 54 who are single and/or divorced are not conforming to the societal norm of marriage and procreation during their child-rearing years. The Census has been reporting marital status of people age 15 and older

and this variable includes counts of single and divorced people by sex. LGBTQ neighborhoods will therefore have concentrations of these people. With heteronormality, there would be a relative evenness in the sex ratio—the ratio of men to women within the same age cohort. As lesbian and gay social connections develop between members of the same-sex, a lesbian neighborhood may show a higher number of women than men while a gay male neighborhood will have the opposite ratio showing higher numbers of men than women. It is important to note that other socio-spatial forces and institutions may create sex ratio imbalances. For example, mass incarceration leads to minority neighborhoods with a higher proportion of women. Local military bases may lead to neighborhoods with higher proportions of men. Furthermore, the census definition of family also reinforces heteronormality by requiring ties by blood and/or marriage. LGBTQ neighborhoods then will have higher proportions of non-family households.

3.5 Testing the Variables in Four Neighborhoods

The three variables: the proportion of non-family households, marital status, and sex ratio by age cohort were analyzed for four neighborhoods in four different cities: the West Village in New York City, Center City in Philadelphia, Midtown Atlanta, and Midtown Kansas City. Maps detailing the Census Tracts (US Census Bureau 2020) encompassing the study areas are shown in Fig. 3.1 for New York, Fig. 3.2 for Philadelphia, Fig. 3.3 for Atlanta, and Fig. 3.4 for Kansas City. All of these neighborhoods were chosen because they housed LGBTQ bars in the early 1990s as listed in the Damron guide (Damron Co. 1993, see Knopp and Brown 2020 for an analysis of the impact of these guides). The West Village is the site of the Stonewall Riots in 1969. Center City Philadelphia includes both Washington Square that Jane Jacobs (1961) called a “pervert park” as well as Rittenhouse Square and Camac Street that were notorious as gay meeting places. Midtown Atlanta was chosen to give an idea of how these variables might work within the South. Midtown in Kansas City was chosen in order to capture places where there was a concentration of bars in the past as well as an effort to develop a lesbian community in the 1970s and early 1980s. All of these areas have also faced development and gentrification pressures since at least 1980. With these geographies selected, the question becomes, will the selected variables show the expected concentrations over time? This would be the period from 1960 to 2000 which captures the emergence of the LGBTQ social movements. The second question then becomes, if the variables work as a measure, might changes in these variables reveal increasing and decreasing levels of concentration? This second question gets at the issue of gentrification and displacement. LGBTQ displacement would lead to lower levels of these variables appearing sometime in the years 1990–2015.

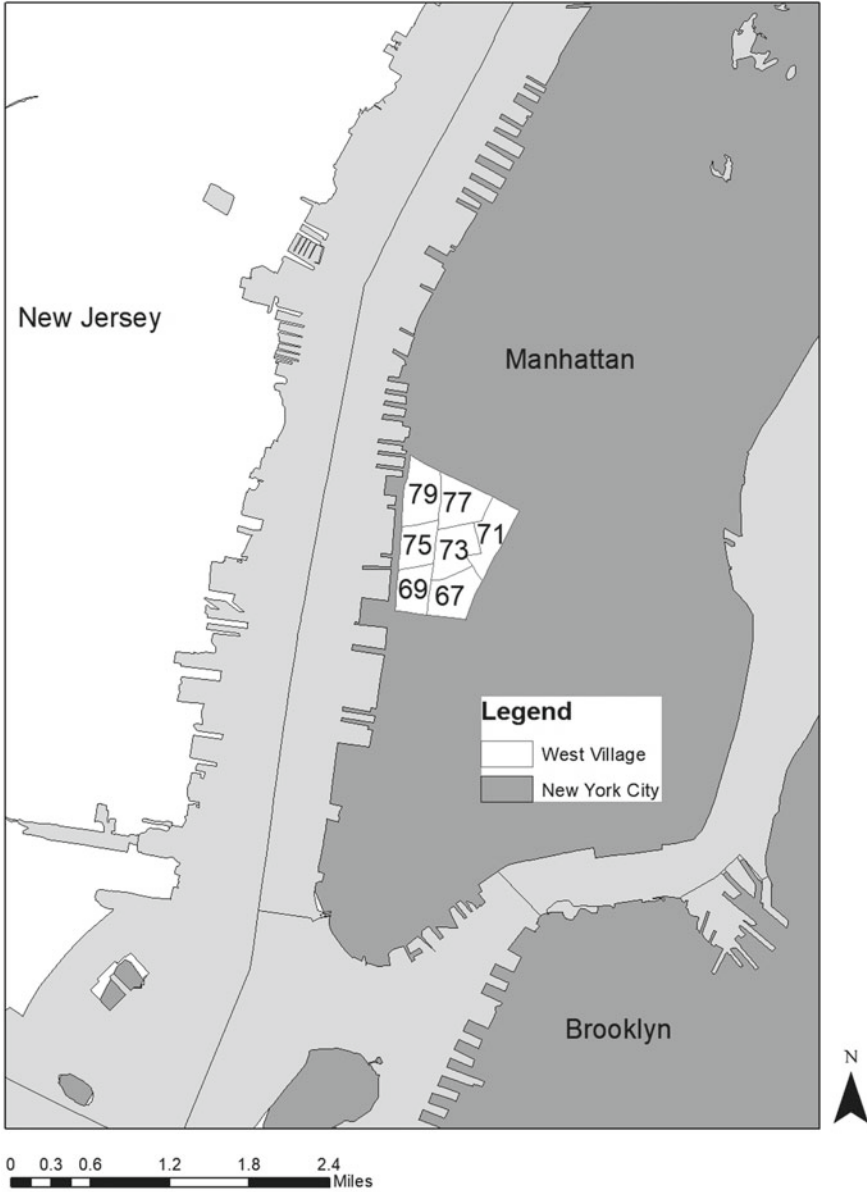


Fig. 3.1 The West Village in New York (Source Map by author)

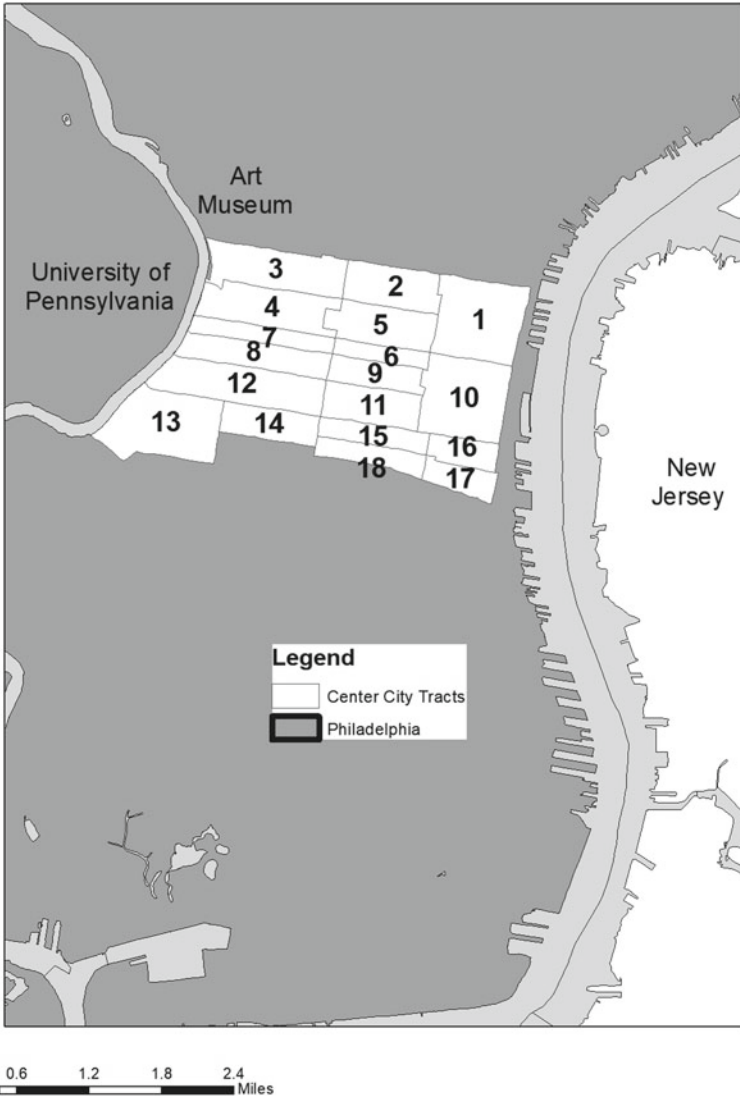


Fig. 3.2 Center City Philadelphia (Source Map by author)

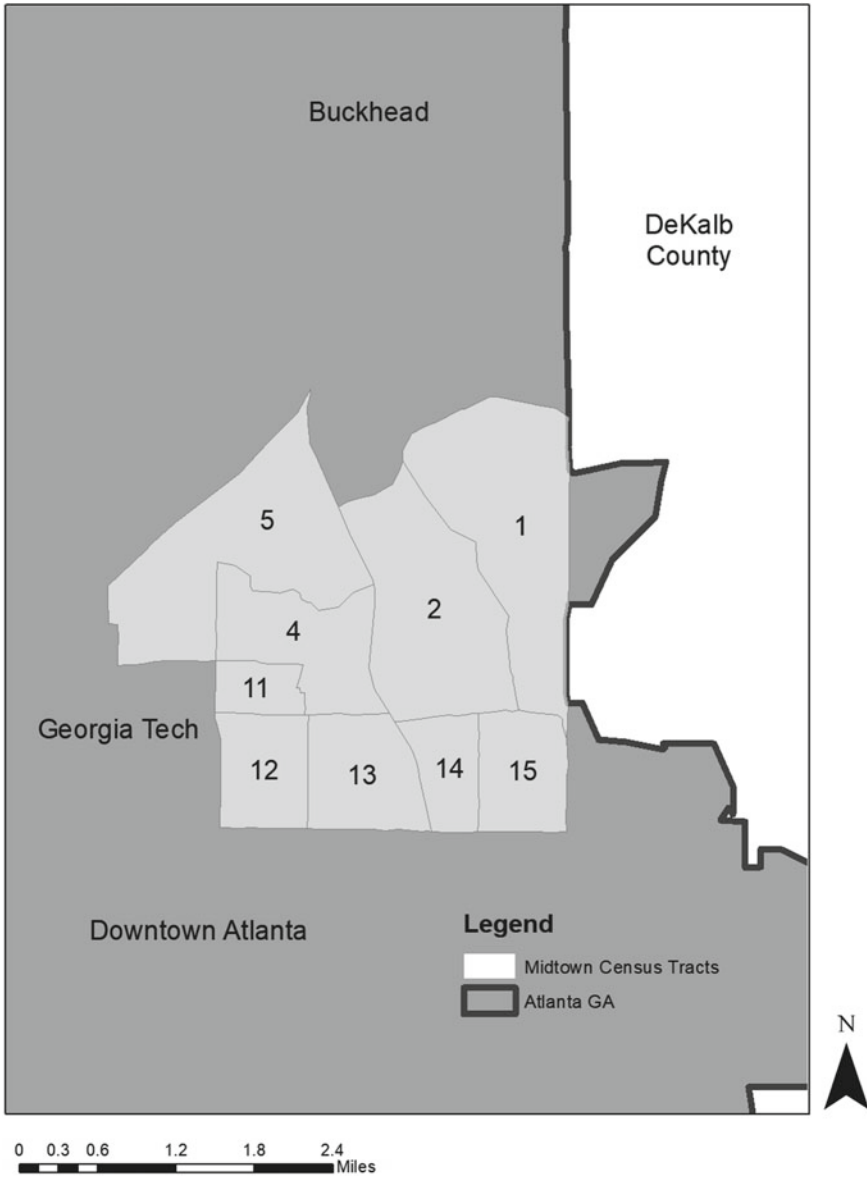


Fig. 3.3 Midtown Atlanta (Source Map by author)

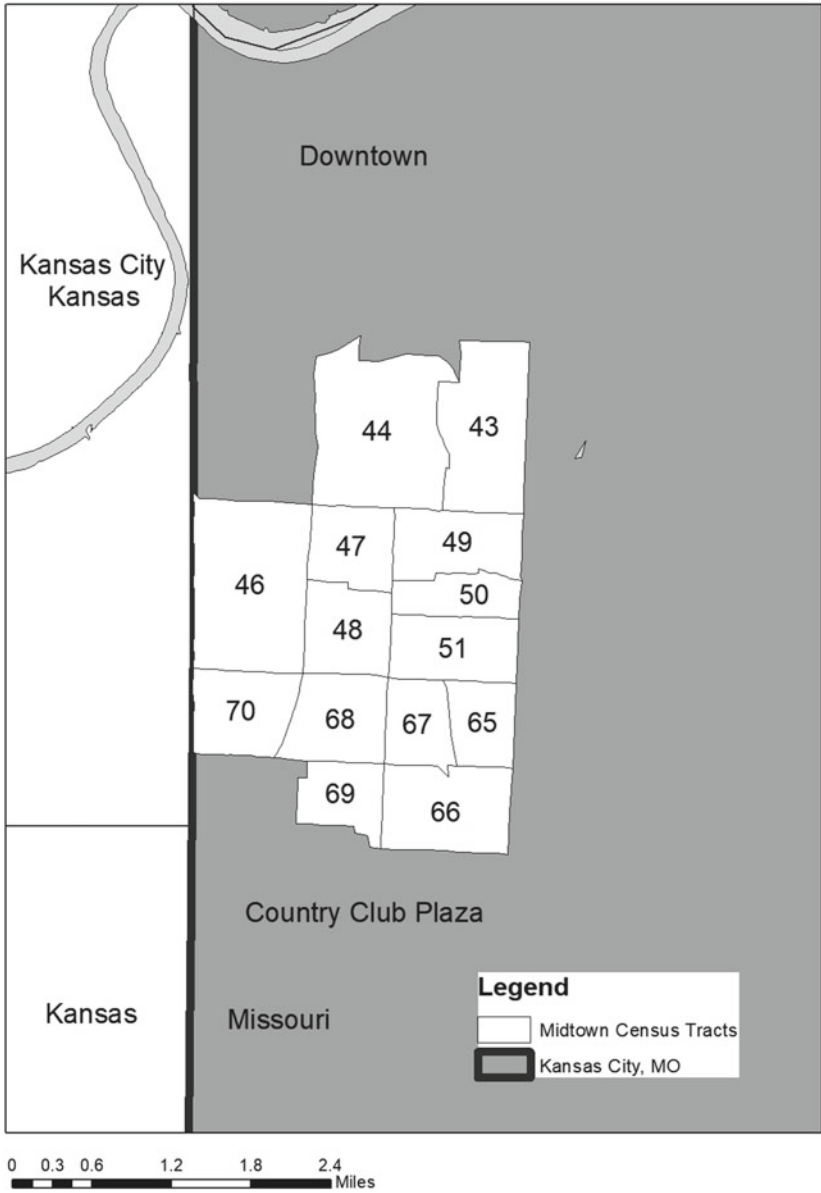


Fig. 3.4 Midtown Kansas City (Source Map by author)

Table 3.2 Non-family households as a share of total households

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960	14.95	40.30	45.82	55.92	55.79
1970	18.84	51.65	58.36	61.13	67.93
1980	26.14	69.89	69.02	69.36	78.10
1990	29.33	73.11	69.99	72.65	76.64
2000	31.21	75.69	71.15	74.55	77.68
2010	33.57	73.99	72.61	73.61	76.81
2015 ACS	34.11	68.08	71.89	68.83	75.11
60–70 change	3.89	11.35	12.54	5.21	12.14
70–80 change	7.30	18.24	8.66	8.24	10.17
80–90 change	3.19	3.22	0.97	3.29	−1.46
90–00 change	1.88	2.58	1.16	1.90	1.04
00–10 change	1.36	−1.70	1.46	0.94	−0.87
10–15 change	0.54	−5.91	0.72	4.78	−1.70

Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

3.6 Non-family Household Results

The proportion of all households comprised of non-family households for each of the selected neighborhoods compared to the result for the United States as a whole is shown in Table 3.2. At the national level, the percent of non-family households has increased in every period. Kansas City, Philadelphia and New York all had three times the number of non-family households in 1960, while Atlanta had more than twice the level of non-family households. By 1970 all four neighborhoods were made up of a majority of non-family households and by the year 2000, seven out of ten households were non-family households in these four areas. Yet, note that the percent of non-family households in the West Village declines in the 1980s and the percent increase in Midtown Kansas City and the West Village lag behind the national change from 1980 to the year 2000. Midtown Atlanta had the highest overall growth in this variable, while Center City, Philadelphia had the least growth of the four neighborhoods, yet Center City and the West Village started at a significantly higher level.

3.7 Never Married by Sex Results

The percent of men and women who have never married (single people) is shown in Tables 3.3a, b. These results show that there is a difference by sex. Interestingly, there is a relatively consistent higher percent (5–7%) of men who have never married than

Table 3.3a Share of men, age 15 and over never married by neighborhood 1960–2000

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960*	27.18	33.28	26.25	39.24	41.38
1970	28.11	37.26	34.41	43.96	47.93
1980	29.58	53.69	47.67	51.15	61.39
1990	29.91	60.36	54.19	57.68	60.54
2000	31.28	61.65	54.85	58.18	62.33
2010 ACS	35.08	58.71	57.64	57.72	58.39
2015 ACS	36.29	55.72	60.73	54.27	63.76
60–70 change	0.93	3.98	8.16	4.72	6.53
70–80 change	1.47	16.43	13.26	7.19	13.46
80–90 change	0.33	6.67	6.52	6.53	−0.85
90–00 change	1.37	1.29	0.66	0.50	1.79
00–10 change	3.80	−2.94	2.79	−0.46	−3.94
10–15 change	1.19	−2.99	3.09	−3.45	5.32

*Note 1960 percentages calculated with men age 14 and over
 Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

Table 3.3b Share of women age 15 and over never married by neighborhood 1960–2000

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960*	21.61	30.31	26.82	32.35	39.79
1970	22.08	26.96	30.28	39.23	44.36
1980	22.49	35.99	37.47	44.70	50.31
1990	22.75	41.97	42.09	49.22	51.30
2000	25.09	49.00	46.28	48.22	54.29
2010 ACS	28.74	46.48	50.77	53.46	57.49
2015 ACS	30.09	47.58	52.07	52.42	56.14
60–70 change	0.47	−3.34	3.46	6.88	4.57
70–80 change	0.41	9.03	7.19	5.47	5.95
80–90 change	0.26	5.98	4.62	4.52	0.99
90–00 change	2.34	7.03	4.19	−1.00	2.99
00–10 change	3.65	−2.52	3.49	5.24	3.20
10–15 change	1.35	1.10	1.30	−1.04	−1.35

*Note 1960 percentages calculated with women age 14 and over
 Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

women over the almost sixty-year period for the United States. Midtown Kansas City had a lower percentage of men never married than the US average in 1960, but had the highest total growth in net percentage over the time period (See Table 3.3a). By 1990 all four neighborhoods had 25% more male singles than the national average. Midtown Atlanta and Midtown Kansas City had much more growth in this factor than Center City and the West Village; but all four neighborhoods had much higher growth than the US overall (Table 3.3a). All four neighborhoods had higher levels of single women than the US at the start of the study period. The West Village started much higher than the other neighborhoods in 1960 and Midtown Kansas City had slightly more single women than single men (Table 3.3b). The net percent growth for single men surpasses the percentage for women for the US and all four neighborhoods for the period, with the neighborhoods having a much higher net difference. Center City Philadelphia single women total percentage growth comes closest to the male percentage growth. By the year 2000, single women make up around 50% of all women in the four neighborhoods. Finally, there was a decline in the percent of men who were single in the West Village in the 1980s and a decline in the percent of women who were single in Center City, Philadelphia in the 1990s. Apart from Kansas City, the other neighborhoods decline in numbers of single men from 2000 to 2010. More recently this decline continues in Midtown Atlanta and Center City Philadelphia up to 2015.

3.8 Divorced by Sex Results

The percent of women and men over the age of 15 who listed their marital status as divorced are shown below in Tables 3.3c, d. In this question, the Census privileges being married; no matter if it is the second, third, or fourth marriage. All four neighborhoods have higher levels of divorced men in 1960 than the United States as a whole and the levels increase in all four neighborhoods to 1980. After 1980, the percent of divorced men drops in all four neighborhoods even though the percent is rising in the United States. By the year 2000, the level in Center City is less than the US average as shown in Table 3.3c. The percent of divorced men and women in these neighborhoods is higher in Midtown Atlanta and Midtown Kansas City than it is in Center City Philadelphia or the West Village. If you add the percent of men in the four neighborhoods who are either divorced or single, it accounts for 66% of all men in the four neighborhoods by the years 1990 and 2000. The totals for women are generally less, running between 55 and 63%. The net percent growth in divorced men and women lagged behind the growth in the nation for three of the four neighborhoods with Kansas City being the exception. Note that men have a higher rate of never marrying, but women have a higher rate of being divorced as shown in Tables 3.3a–d. By 2010 all four neighborhoods lag in the net growth of divorced men and women compared to the nation.

Table 3.3c Share of men age 15 and older, divorced, by neighborhood, 1960–2000

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960*	1.83	4.78	6.43	4.28	3.38
1970	2.22	8.28	10.22	5.66	6.13
1980	4.80	12.54	15.61	8.01	9.44
1990	6.83	10.78	15.40	7.47	8.88
2000	8.31	9.95	13.47	6.85	7.52
2010 ACS	9.46	8.79	12.65	5.63	7.29
2015 ACS	9.52	7.90	11.14	6.33	5.09
60–70 change	0.39	3.50	3.21	1.38	2.75
70–80 change	2.60	4.26	5.39	2.35	3.31
80–90 change	2.03	−1.76	−0.20	−0.54	−0.56
90–00 change	1.48	−0.83	−1.93	−0.62	−1.36
00–10 change	1.15	−1.16	−0.82	−1.22	−0.23
10–15 change	0.06	−0.89	−1.52	0.70	−2.20

*Note 1960 percentages calculated with men age 14 and over
 Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

Table 3.3d Share of women age 15 and older, divorced, by neighborhood, 1960–2000

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960*	2.64	7.88	8.47	3.70	6.03
1970	3.49	10.44	11.94	5.46	7.69
1980	6.64	13.88	15.53	8.81	11.88
1990	8.86	14.19	16.11	9.28	11.91
2000	10.22	12.90	15.50	9.72	9.65
2010 ACS	11.99	11.11	14.79	8.72	9.77
2015 ACS	12.12	12.19	12.54	8.98	8.39
60–70 change	0.85	2.56	3.47	1.76	1.66
70–80 change	3.15	3.44	3.59	3.35	3.19
80–90 change	2.22	0.31	0.58	0.47	0.03
90–00 change	1.36	−1.29	−0.61	0.44	−2.26
00–10 change	1.77	−1.79	−0.71	−1.00	0.08
10–15 change	0.13	1.08	−2.25	0.28	−1.36

*Note 1960 percentages calculated with women age 14 and over
 Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

3.9 Sex Ratio of Age 25–54 Cohort Results

The sex ratio measures the number of men in the age cohort relative to the number of women. Within a heteronormative model this ratio should be close to one as children are always assumed to have a married mother and father living together. A sex ratio of greater than one indicates more men than women in that geography and a sex ratio less than one indicates more women than men. The results for the neighborhoods are shown in Table 3.4a. First, note that the US ratio has gone from 0.96 to 1.01 from 1960 to 2000. In 1960, Midtown Atlanta and Midtown Kansas City had more women than men while Center City and the West Village were about average. The ratio rises to hit the peak in 1980 in Midtown Atlanta, Center City and the West Village and 1990 in Midtown Kansas City. The ratio increases are quite sharp for Midtown Atlanta and Midtown Kansas City and much more balanced in Center City and the West Village. Both Center City and the West Village had significant lesbian and gay male communities in 1960; did these communities concentrate in particular census tracts within these neighborhoods? Variation of sex ratios within each neighborhood's individual tracts is shown in Table 3.4b. This analysis shows a much, much higher concentration in specific census tracts in the West Village and Center City in 1960. The highest ratios were in Center City and the West Village in 1960. The patterns of highs and lows were different in each place. Midtown Atlanta started as a woman dominated area in 1960, and only with 1970 did a tract have significantly more men. By the peak of sex ratio difference in 1980, all Midtown Atlanta tracts had more men than women, a pattern that continues to a lesser extent

Table 3.4a Sex ratio of age 25–54 cohort by neighborhood compared to US 1960–2000

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960	0.96	0.80	0.84	0.98	0.94
1970	0.96	1.10	0.97	1.07	1.06
1980	0.98	1.47	1.26	1.08	1.26
1990	0.99	1.46	1.34	1.09	1.17
2000	1.01	1.27	1.17	1.07	1.01
2010	0.99	1.40	1.32	1.09	1.02
2015 ACS	1.00	1.19	1.22	0.94	1.18
60–70 change	0.00	0.30	0.13	0.09	0.12
70–80 change	0.02	0.37	0.29	0.01	0.10
80–90 change	0.01	−0.01	0.08	0.01	−0.09
90–00 change	0.02	−0.19	−0.17	−0.02	−0.16
00–10 change	−0.02	0.23	0.15	0.02	0.01
10–15 change	0.01	−0.21	−0.10	−0.15	0.16

Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

Table 3.4b Sex ratio of age 25–54 cohort variation extremes across neighborhood census tracts

	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
1960 high	0.92	0.96	5.67	3.17
1960 low	0.71	0.67	0.78	0.69
1970 high	1.41	1.28	3.80	1.85
1970 low	0.86	0.78	0.74	0.75
1980 high	2.57	1.53	1.82	2.02
1980 low	1.12	0.95	0.75	1.00
1990 high	2.03	1.65	2.04	1.56
1990 low	1.08	1.06	0.74	1.02
2000 high	1.62	1.42	1.53	1.17
2000 low	1.06	1.00	0.94	0.97
2010 high	1.92	1.68	2.52	1.12
2010 low	1.04	0.98	0.89	0.96
2015 ACS high	1.93	2.09	1.43	1.25
2015 ACS low	0.80	0.94	0.66	1.07

Source Social Explorer (2019a, b)

to this day (Table 3.4b). In Midtown Kansas City, a tract had the highest number of women per men in 1960 of all four neighborhoods. The peak in the tract-based sex ratio difference was in 1990 in Kansas City, In Center City Philadelphia, there have been both male-dominated tracts and female dominated tracts consistently over the study period. While the Center City sex ratio difference dropped from 1960 to 1980, it rose again by 1990, dropped by 2000 and rose by 2010. Finally, the West Village had one of the greatest differences in sex ratio in 1960 only to drop to the least difference after the year 2000.

3.10 Discussion

These measures capture related ways of examining the concentration of folks possibly leading LGBTQ lives in neighborhoods thought to be LGBTQ friendly in the last 55 years. Each of the tables shows how queer lives in the neighborhoods substantially differed from the United States. The direction of the indicators toward concentration in these factors creates evidence of the rise of LGBTQ community formation with the baby-boomer generation forming what we now know as gayborhoods. The neighborhoods trend together up until 1990 or 2000 and then the trends on the studied factors become more variable across the four neighborhoods. The nuances in the data trends are also interesting. Midtown Kansas City and Midtown Atlanta both had higher proportions of divorced men than Center City Philadelphia and the West

Village in New York. This possibly reflects stronger enforcement of “compulsory heterosexuality” in the urban South and the urban Midwest than on the East Coast especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

The reduction in concentration post 1980 may reflect a reduction in the value of proximity. However, the specificity also smacks of displacement. The 1980s and 1990s were the HIV plague years for gay men with hundreds of deaths in these neighborhoods. Sarah Schulman (2013) calls the losses of this time “the gentrification of the mind.” AIDS deaths significantly altered the gender make up of these neighborhoods. Each of the neighborhoods had significant new developments that displaced LGBTQ institutions. Starting in the mid-1980s, Midtown Atlanta along Peachtree was transformed from a low-rise district to a mid-rise and high-rise district (Doan and Higgins 2011). After 1990, Midtown Kansas City replaced a neighborhood with gay bars and clubs with Midtown Marketplace housing a Home Depot and a Costco. Center City Philadelphia created the University of the Arts south of City Hall replacing LGBTQ bars. Finally, the West Village underwent multiple transformations as the West Side Highway was transformed into a boulevard and the piers became parks. New residential developments and luxury lofts replaced artist studios and LGBTQ clubs. LGBTQ folks get displaced by these gentrification processes. The peaks in non-family households in these neighborhoods around 1990 may also reflect the lesbian and gay baby boom beginning with lesbian couples in the 1990s and gay male couples after the year 2000 (Gates 2013; Gurrentz and Valerio 2019). These households would reduce the number of non-family households, while having a lesser impact on the sex ratio.

3.11 Comparison to Same-Sex Unmarried Partner Data

The changes in the non-family household variable raises the question about how same-sex partnered households are currently counted in the American Community Survey (ACS). Table 3.1 shows that by 2019 a majority of same-sex partnered households were married in the latest Current Population Survey data. How does the flawed same-sex unmarried partner data in 2000, corrected ACS data for 2010 (2008–2012 5 Year data) and corrected ACS data for 2015 (2013–2017 5 Year data) compare to the results of these measures? The same-sex partner data confirm that there are relatively high concentrations of same-sex partners in these four neighborhoods as shown in Table 3.5. The concentration is three to ten times more in these neighborhoods than the overall rate for the nation as a whole. These households still make up a small fraction of the households in these neighborhoods. Yet, the queer reading of the census analysis showed that these neighborhoods have a majority of households that reject heteronormality in one form or another.

Table 3.5 Unmarried same-sex partners as a share of all households in the four neighborhoods

	US	Atlanta Midtown	Kansas City Midtown	Philadelphia Center City	New York City West Village
2000	0.56	4.54	2.17	1.84	4.03
2010 ACS	0.25	3.32	2.00	1.72	2.77
2015 ACS	0.36	2.36	1.96	1.42	3.41

Source 2000 Census, 2008–2012 ACS, 2013–2017 ACS as downloaded from Social Explorer (2019a, b)

3.12 Conclusion

This analysis took the first step toward a queer reading of the census. Exploratory factor analysis might be used to deepen the analysis by uncovering other variables that capture the rise of LGBTQ communities. Such an analysis may be able to distinguish underlying factors that also lead to changes in levels of the selected variables such as the sex ratio. For example, during the period analyzed in this study, mass incarceration removed a significant generation of minority men from their neighborhoods. This removal would show up in terms of low sex ratios for these neighborhoods. Other variables could be used. The rate of detached single-family homes may be a marker for heteronormality as fixed by the *Euclid V. Ambler* decision (Frisch 2002). Smart and Klein’s (2013) findings suggest mass transit use might also be an indicator.

Even at their peak, LGBTQ neighborhoods were really just enclaves (see Marcuse 1997). There were always other folk in these neighborhoods. This analysis shows an increase in concentration and then a flattening out and/or decline in the measures. The declines in concentrations show evidence of queer displacement.

With increased social acceptance, along with increased legal rights due to three positive Supreme Court cases: *Lawrence V. Texas* (2003), *US v. Windsor* (2013), and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), LGBTQ folk might not need their own neighborhoods and enclaves to the same degree as in the past (Kelly et al. 2014). Intersectional LGBTQ communities may not use space and place in the same ways as stereotypical white gay men (Irazábal and Huerta 2016). Worry about social acceptance for sexual orientation and gender identity may now play less of a role in choosing a place to live (Ghaziani 2014). Queer Millennials may not seek the same qualities in neighborhoods as LGBTQ Boomers. After the 2016 election, there is evidence of backlash (Miller 2019). This backlash has been accompanied by the rise of anti-LGBTQ spaces—health providers, pharmacists, wedding cake bakers, and florists who claim that their religious beliefs are being violated by equally serving LGBTQ folks (Melling 2018; Green 2019a, b). The “violation” arises in opposition to someone who is truthful, public, and out about their LGBTQ identity which results in further LGBTQ displacement.

While these methods will be necessary to assess LGBTQ neighborhoods in the past, it is unsettling that sexual orientation and gender identity questions will not be on the 2020 Census. This omission reveals that the Census will still treat gender as

“sex.” This failure means the “queer reading of the Census” will still be necessary into the next decade. Good answers to these questions will be hard to get as long as people can be fired for their answers. Getting the data is a significant part of recognition. It also would provide key data that can be used to develop services and inclusive urban plans (Forsyth 2011). The lack of asking the questions, reinforces the notion that speaking about sexual orientation and gender identity is somehow offensive. It indirectly provides support to business establishments and service providers whose discriminatory actions toward LGBTQ people are being increasingly protected (Green 2019b). Full recognition in government services and social surveys would be an important step toward establishing and protecting LGBTQ rights.

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Chapter 4

Why Gayborhoods Matter: The Street Empirics of Urban Sexualities



Amin Ghaziani

Abstract Urbanists have developed an extensive set of propositions about why gay neighborhoods form, how they change, shifts in their significance, and their spatial expressions. Existing research in this emerging field of “gayborhood studies” emphasizes macro-structural explanatory variables, including the economy (e.g., land values, urban governance, growth machine politics, affordability, and gentrification), culture (e.g., public opinions, societal acceptance, and assimilation), and technology (e.g., geo-coded mobile apps, online dating services). In this chapter, I use the residential logics of queer people—why they in their own words say that they live in a gay district—to show how gayborhoods acquire their significance on the streets. By shifting the analytic gaze from abstract concepts to interactions and embodied perceptions on the ground—a “street empirics” as I call it—I challenge the claim that gayborhoods as an urban form are outmoded or obsolete. More generally, my findings caution against adopting an exclusively supra-individual approach in urban studies. The reasons that residents provide for why their neighborhoods appeal to them showcase the analytic power of the streets for understanding what places mean and why they matter.

Keywords Urban sexualities · Technology · Gay neighborhoods · LGBTQ+ safe spaces

4.1 Introduction: Gayborhood Studies

The association between sexuality and the city is as established experientially as it is affirmed in the academy—from sexological counts of sexual practices to thick ethnographic descriptions of the moral regions of urban sexual worlds (Kinsey et al. 1948; Park 1915; Park and Burgess 1925; Thomas 1907). Although the spatial expressions of queerness are a relatively recent object of inquiry, I see foundational works in anthropology (Newton 1993; Rubin 1998; Weston 1995), Black queer studies (Nero

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2005), economics (Black et al. 2002), feminist studies (Rupp 2009; Wolfe 1979), geography (Brown 2014; Hubbard 2012; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014), history (Aldrich 2004; Chauncey 1994; Heap 2003; Kennedy and Davis 1993), sociology (Castells 1983; Laumann et al. 2004), and urban studies (Delany 1999; Fischer 1975) as part of a distinct field of “gayborhood studies” (Ghaziani 2014b, 2015b, 2019c). Research in this area focuses on the properties of urban gay districts, including their spatial, historical, prototypical, institutional, and comparative features.¹ Today, new works are published at too rapid a rate for me to capture in just one citation (e.g., Baldor 2018; Bitterman 2020; Callander et al. 2020; Forstie 2019; Stone 2018).

The field of gayborhood studies consists of four major streams. One area of research focuses on the origins and ontology of these districts (Compton and Baumle 2012). Scholars ask why gayborhoods first formed (Castells and Murphy 1982; Knopp 1997; Lewis 2013), how they have changed over time (Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015; Rushbrook 2002; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996), their cultural significance for queer people (Doan and Higgins 2011; Greene 2014; Orne 2017), why they appeal to heterosexuals (Brodyn and Ghaziani 2018; Ghaziani 2019d), and their diverse spatial expressions (Brown-Saracino 2018; Ghaziani 2019a; Whittemore and Smart 2016). Regardless of whether they ask about origins, change, resonance, intergroup dynamics, or spatial variability, scholars who work in this area generally propose macro-structural arguments. For example, standard scholarly accounts point to economic forces, especially gentrification, to explain why gayborhoods form and change (Christafore and Leguizamon 2018; Collins 2004; Ruting 2008). Culturalists respond by arguing that gayborhoods are “a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” (Lauria and Knopp 1985: 152). When the nature of oppression changes, so too should the spatial response (Andersson 2019; Ghaziani 2014b). A small but vibrant area in this first group asks how a post-gay turn (Ghaziani 2011) affects these districts (Forbes and Ueno 2019; Forstie 2018; Ghaziani 2015a; Hartless 2018).

A second research stream investigates the organizational profile of gayborhoods. In earlier studies, scholars argued that the institutional elaboration of queer communities made them quasi-ethnic in character and composition (Epstein 1987; Murray 1979). This prompted follow-up questions about whether gay districts resemble ethnic ghettos (Levine 1979; Wirth 1928) and if gay bars are better conceptualized as private (Weightman 1980) or closet-like spaces (Brown 2000). From here, researchers documented the growth of public LGBTQ organizations (Armstrong 2002), pride parades (Bruce 2016), and the globalization of queer spaces (Martel 2018). Similar to the first stream, those who work in the second also favor analytic approaches that are abstracted from the streets, including debates about shifting political logics, theories of field formation, and the interplay between global templates and local variations of urban sexualities.

¹There is a separate body of work on rural and suburban sexualities (e.g., Bell and Valentine 1995; Brekhus 2003; Fellows 1996; Forsyth 1997; Gray 2009; Kazyak 2012). We can debate whether to subsume these ideas under gayborhood studies. Although they sometimes have unique theoretical debates, many scholars also offer an anti-urban challenge to queer metronormativity (Halberstam 2005; Herring 2010). Gayborhood studies would be incomplete without these critiques.

A third stream focuses on the effects of technology. Geo-coded mobile apps enable same-sex sexual partner selection to occur with greater ease outside the context of any one neighborhood. Location-based digital apps facilitate sexual transactions, and users can construct networks of intimacy across the city (Race 2015) according to their tastes (Clay 2018) and personal preferences—but researchers find that these so-called “preferences” are also coded forms of sexual racism (Callander et al. 2016; Han and Choi 2018; Robinson 2015). A common argument is that geo-aware applications like Grindr decenter placemaking efforts (Collins and Drinkwater 2017; Roth 2016). One study of seventeen cities found that in every single one, “the virtual gay community was larger than the offline physical community” (Rosser et al. 2008: 588). Other researchers use the spatial concentration of men who have sex with other men, and their online activities, to track the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (Card et al. 2018; Salway et al. 2019). These findings have triggered debates about the uneven effects of technology (Blackwell et al. 2015). Some researchers show that people use technology creatively to imagine new spaces away from the gayborhood (Wu and Ward 2017), while others argue that apps reproduce inequalities (Conner 2018).

Rather than origins, organizations, and technology, researchers who work in a fourth stream of gayborhood studies document demographic changes (Morales 2018; Spring 2013) and consider their effects on community-building and placemaking efforts (Brown-Saracino 2011; Casey 2004; Ghaziani and Stillwagon 2018; Renninger 2019). A topic of particular concern is the fate of gay bars. In San Francisco, Mattson (2015) shows that the popularity of gay bars among straight people has nearly wiped them out; their numbers dropped from thirteen to three in just eleven years. The decline in San Francisco is part of an international pattern. From 2006 to 2016, the number of LGBTQ bars, pubs, and nightclubs in London, UK plummeted by 58%, falling from 125 venues to fifty-three (Campkin and Marshall 2017). This prompted the mayor to appoint a “night czar” to oversee the capital’s £26.3 billion nighttime economy (Ghaziani 2019b). In the United States, the number of gay bar listings in the *Damron Guide* fell by 36.6% (Mattson 2019). Researchers have documented similar “structural declines” in France, Denmark, Sweden, Amsterdam, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia (Rosser et al. 2008: 590). Most recently, scholars have identified the emergence of temporary spaces, called “pop-ups,” as a creative response to bar closures. Pop-ups are ephemeral, yet they provide enduring experiences of community and self-exploration (Bailey 2013; Moore 2016; Stillwagon and Ghaziani 2019).

Table 4.1 reviews the four streams of research in gayborhood studies, focusing on representative questions, major debates, and observational units. All adopt a macro, structural, or otherwise supra-individual lens of analysis and explanation.

Although scholars have produced considerable knowledge about gayborhoods, a key oversight remains: *what does the gayborhood mean for the people who actually live in it?* Neighborhoods are a “basic building block” of cities (Forsyth 2001: 343), but people relate to them and form attachments to them based on what they

Table 4.1 Research streams in gayborhood studies

Research stream	Questions	Debates	Observational units
Origins and ontology	Why do gayborhoods form? How do they change? Why do gayborhoods appeal to queer people? Why do they appeal to straight people?	Do queer people transform urban areas? Are economic or cultural forces more compelling explanations for the emergence and change of gayborhoods? Do places reflect forms of oppression?	Census tracts, community symbols, collective memories, real estate ads, business and non-profit listings, voting patterns
Organizational forms	What is the institutional profile of a gayborhood? What do they look like in different countries?	Do queer people comprise a “community” in a sociological sense? Do gayborhoods resemble ethnic enclaves? Do they have a global template?	Business, non-profit, and other organizational listings; overall institutional composition; pride parades, festivals, and other cultural events; cross-national comparisons
Technology	How do geo-coded mobile apps affect gayborhoods?	Do apps undermine queer spaces or creatively reconstitute them?	Mobile apps, online dating services, social media, HIV and STI infection rates
Change	Can a city have more than one gayborhood? Why are gay bars closing?	Are economic or cultural forces more compelling predictors of gayborhood change? Do gay bars still matter? Is spatial singularity or plurality a more valid description of urban sexualities?	Census tracts, real estate ads, business and non-profit listings, collective memories, revenues, nighttime economy, pop-ups, cultural archipelagos

see and experience on the streets. By debating macro structural forces like gentrification, assimilation, technology, and demography, researchers who work in gayborhood studies elide matters of meaning, interactions, impressions, and interpretations. Whether a person finds the gayborhood significant—why it matters to them—is not a function of its statistical properties. A gayborhood is a collection of sentient people. To understand what it means, we need to ask people why they are drawn to it.

4.2 Why Do You Live in the Gayborhood?

I draw on more than six hundred national media reports about the gayborhood across several decades of coverage, particularly stories in which a journalist interviewed

local residents, to identify six major reasons why queer people say they live in a gay district and what about it appeals to them.² Non-residential stakeholders make “vicarious” claims on gayborhoods as well (Greene 2014), but these are precisely what the concept of vicariousness suggests: proxy experiences that take the place of, or are imagined as related to, the ones of residents. The patterns of association, interactional styles, and perceptions among the people who actually live in a place, like the gayborhood, provide more valid access to its local knowledges (Geertz 1983) and meanings. I use the empirical expressions that residents offer to reflect theoretically on how urban sexualities acquire their significance on the streets—or what I call a “street empirics.”

Voting Blocs and Elections. Former San Francisco supervisor Harry Britt famously asserted that sexuality and space are inextricably linked: “When gays are spatially isolated, they are not gay, because they are invisible” (Castells 1983: 138). Gayborhood residents echo Britt’s intuition by focusing on the political effects of clustering. One San Franciscan said, “Having a specific neighborhood that politicians can point to, can go to and shake hands or kiss lesbian babies, has really solidified the gay vote, our political muscle.”³ By organizing themselves into an identifiable voting bloc, LGBTQ people can exert electoral influence. A story from the *New York Times* that covered the Congressional election of Nancy Pelosi noted, “The election Tuesday is being watched as a test of the cohesiveness and political strength of homosexuals.” Voter turnout showed that queer people helped to seat Pelosi, who had “campaigning frequently in homosexual neighborhoods.” Her campaign manager concluded, “It appears that homosexual voters contributed to her victory.” Pelosi received 20% of the vote in the Castro district.⁴

Former president Bill Clinton used a similar strategy. A story in the *New York Times* observed, “Voter-registration tables line gay neighborhoods. In discos, between videos of Madonna and the Pet Shop Boys, images flash on the screen of gay men and lesbians exhorting the crowds to vote. ‘Voting for Our Lives,’ say the signs in gay bars, bookstores and churches.”⁵ Another article in the same press reported on activity in San Francisco, where local officials “estimate that 95 percent of eligible voters are registered, in large part because of intensive voter-registration drives in gay neighborhoods.”⁶

²For more information about this data set, see (Ghaziani 2014b). The public conversation that it represents includes 27 urban, suburban, and rural locations, and it spans 40 years of coverage (1970 to 2010). For a companion discussion about why straight people say they want to live in a gayborhood, see (Ghaziani 2019d).

³“S.F.’s Castro District Faces an Identity Crisis,” by Wyatt Buchanan. *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 25, 2007, page A1.

⁴Pelosi quote: “Homosexuals’ Political Power Tested in the West,” by Robert Lindsey. *New York Times*, April 5, 1987, section 1, page 1. Pelosi’s vote in the Castro: “House Race in West Goes on to Runoff,” by Robert Lindsey. *New York Times*, April 9, 1987, page A14.

⁵“Gay Politics Goes Mainstream,” by Jeffrey Schmalz. *New York Times*, October 11, 1992, section 6, page 18.

⁶“Voting Scared,” by Jeffrey Schmalz. *New York Times*, November 1, 1992, section 4, page 1.

The 2008 presidential race provides an example of the enduring capacity of gayborhoods to serve as voting blocs. A story in the *Windy City Times* reported, “Data available on voting in heavily gay precincts suggests the gay vote for Obama was at an unprecedented high. In the last several presidential elections, the percentage of LGB voters supporting the Democrat has hovered around 70 to 75 percent.” The ratio in the 2008 election was much higher. In Provincetown, 87% of the voters supported Obama, compared to 11% for [John] McCain. In San Francisco, 85% voted for Obama versus 13% for McCain. In Philadelphia’s gayborhood, 83% of voters supported Obama. He also won 89% of the vote in Dupont Circle, 63% of Dallas’s gay neighborhood, and 86% of Chicago’s Boystown.⁷

LGBTQ people are more interested in politics, more interested in public affairs, and more likely to be engaged in civic and political activities than their heterosexual counterparts (Egan et al. 2008). The examples that I have provided in this section suggest that the queer vote is often a determining factor in elections. During election cycles, gayborhood residents historically have often worn buttons on their bags to proclaim the power of their vote, and they have organized voter registration drives on the streets as well (Images 4.1 and 4.2).



Image 4.1 Voter registration drives in the gayborhood. Gay rights, gay votes campaign button (Source Image courtesy of: buttonmuseum.org)

⁷“Obama’s Win and the Gay Vote,” by Lisa Keen. *Windy City Times*, November 5, 2008.



Image 4.2 Gay rights and voter registration billboards at the corner of Christopher St. and Seventh Ave., Greenwich Village, New York City, 1978. The board was paid for by Man’s Country, a popular bathhouse chain that had branches in New York and Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s (Source Image © Bettye Lane. Photo provided by the New York Public Library. Reprinted with permission)

Sex and Love. Because homosexuality is not universally or unambiguously visible on the body, queer people encounter unique challenges in finding each other for sex, dating, and mating. Gayborhoods can make things a little easier. The *New York Times* interviewed residents of Greenwich Village who reflected on what drew them to the neighborhood before it gentrified: “Older residents recall another era, when

the street was paved not with gold, but with gays. That was what put Christopher Street on the cultural map, the old-timers say wistfully. ‘It was one big cruising street,’” said one resident who has lived in the neighborhood since the 1960s. The journalist added, “Gay men (the area never attracted a large lesbian population) carried the sidewalks as late as 1990, turning the street into a genuine carnival day and night. The waterfront, once a desolate truck yard, was a 24-hour playground of sexual trysts and flamboyant acts. By day, nude sunbathers staked out an urban beach on disfigured docks... ‘Straight people avoided Christopher Street,’” said the same resident, because it was “America’s gay Main Street.”⁸ Residents like these depend on the streets of gayborhoods, which are often shielded from the heterosexual gaze, to connect with each other.

Nearly four decades later and across the country, people still appreciate the streets of gayborhoods for their sexual networking opportunities. An editorial in the *Advocate* reflected on West Hollywood’s twentieth anniversary as “America’s first gay city” (it was incorporated on November 29, 1984): “I’m not arguing that West Hollywood is a perfect city, or even a gay mecca. But it is a special place... Whatever its flaws, it was a city that let people be themselves and make their own choices about whom they loved and how, without judgment or condemnation or shame.”⁹ A reporter from the *Village Voice* summarized a sensibility he heard from residents across the country: “Like any identity group, gay men and lesbians want to be with their own kind. It’s also easier to hook up—for a night or a lifetime.”¹⁰ Artistic renderings of this theme depict a same-sex couple in traffic lights in the gayborhood (Image 4.3).

Safe Spaces. Despite the statistical liberalization of attitudes toward homosexuality across the country (Twenge et al. 2015), many queer people find that the streets of gay neighborhoods feel safer than elsewhere in the city. Bob Witeck, CEO of Witeck Communications, Inc., a public relations and marketing communications firm that specializes in the queer consumer market, offered an observation based on his interactions with clients: “‘It’s about whether you can hold your partner’s hand in public, whether you’re safe from harassment or physical violence.’”¹¹ Brian Orter, a photographer and commercial lighting designer who lives in Hell’s Kitchen, agreed. “I remember growing up in the city being gay in the ‘70s and ‘80s, and it was scary. So, I’m not going to go and move into a neighborhood where I am scared. I want to be near Chelsea and the West Village, where there are safe, gay people.”¹² A reporter from the *Washington Post* compared the gayborhood with Ellis Island: “That’s what Greenwich Village has always been. A kind of Ellis Island for generations of gay

⁸“Street Fight,” by Denny Lee. *New York Times*, March 31, 2002, section 14, page 1.

⁹“WeHo, Warts and All,” by John Morgan Wilson. *Advocate*, December 21, 2004, issue 929, page unnoted.

¹⁰“The New Gayborhoods of Fort Greene, Sunset Park, and Jackson Heights,” by Michael Lavers. *Village Voice*, June 24, 2009, page unnoted.

¹¹“Cities Seek Lucrative Gay Tourist Dollar,” by Macenzie Carpenter. *East Bay Times*, February 2, 2007.

¹²“Under the Rainbow,” by David Shaftel. *New York Times*, March 25, 2007.

Image 4.3 Hooking up—for a night or a lifetime (Source Graphic design by Graham Gremore for *Queerty*. Reprinted with permission)



men and lesbians...[W]hat it provided was freedom.”¹³ Although the gayborhood shifted from the Village to Chelsea, the sense that its streets were safer followed it, as this passage from the *New York Times* suggests: “Chelsea has become the gay neighborhood because gays and lesbians feel comfortable here.”¹⁴

The safe space theme resonates among younger generations as well. A reporter for the *Philadelphia Daily News* interviewed a high-school senior who “felt like she was home yesterday, walking the streets in the Gayborhood during OutFest, the Philly Pride event held each year on National Coming Out Day. But she’s not ‘at home’ in her house. Her ‘very Christian’ parents are unaware that she’s a lesbian, the 17-year-old said. ‘In my area, it’s very conservative—going to these places is very freeing because you can be yourself here. It feels like you’re not alone.’”¹⁵

Safety is a pronounced concern for queer youth of color. A writer for the *New York Times* notes, “For as long as Darnell could remember, the western edge of Christopher Street, with its rotting piers and dark alleys, had been a refuge for so-called pier kids like him. Black and Latino, and often from poor families that reject them for being gay, they are drawn to the street’s bleak fringes by a need to define themselves through the company of soul mates... ‘Where I come from, you can’t be black and gay,’ said Darnell. ‘So we call this our home.’”¹⁶ Twenty-one-year-old college student Antonio Jones felt similarly. A journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*

¹³“Greenwich Time: On the Stonewall anniversary, a gay tour of Village history,” by Paula Span. *Washington Post*, June 22, 1994, page D1.

¹⁴“Gay Businesses Follow Influx of Gay People,” by Marvin Howe. *New York Times*, April 10, 1994, section 14, page 8.

¹⁵“For Some, Coming Out is Like Finding Home,” by Regina Medina. *Philadelphia Daily News*, October 12, 2009, page 6.

¹⁶“Street Fight,” by Denny Lee. *New York Times*, March 31, 2002, section 14, page 1.

observed, “Young gay men from the city’s South and West sides come to Boystown to visit the Center on Halsted [the LGBTQ community center], whose youth programs make them feel safe, affirmed, and valued.” Jones told the reporter that “many of the youth come from communities that historically have been hostile to gays” who then “find in Boystown a refuge. Often, it’s the first time the teens, the majority of whom are black, really can be themselves.”¹⁷

Image 4.4 shows an ad for a public programming event in Boystown that was produced by Honey Pot Performance, an Afro-diasporic feminist collaborative in Chicago that uses artistic expressions to examine questions of identity, belonging, community, and difference. Co-sponsored in 2019 by the Chicago Black Social Culture Map, the Modern Dance Music Archiving Foundation, and the Center on Halsted, the event included community archiving on site, oral histories, and panel discussions that celebrated nightlife’s queer roots, reflected on the significance of public events like Black Pride, and explored the importance of iconic spots and “anchor institutions” (Ghaziani 2014a: 383) in the gayborhood. The collaborators engaged with community members to collectively “tackle some of the challenging



Image 4.4 Queer youth culture (Source Graphic design by Kimeco Roberson and Chicago Black Social Culture Map. Reprinted with permission)

¹⁷“Boystown Grapples with Black Youth Influx,” by Dawn Turner Trice. *Chicago Tribune*, November 30, 2009, page 6.

issues of black, brown and white queer communities all navigating nightlife together in the defined space of Boystown.”¹⁸

The media vignettes and current events that I have curated in this section remind us that the idea of safety underlying the popular notion of “safe spaces” is relational, context dependent, and constructed through the collective experiences of people interacting with others on the streets.¹⁹

The Pink Economy. When gayborhoods were first forming, many people who moved there saw themselves as members of a minority group who needed to take care of each other—not just socially but also in an economic sense. Bars, bathhouses, bookstores, and other businesses that targeted a queer niche market emerged to service the newly visible residents (Ghaziani 2015b). A journalist writing for the *Advocate* interviewed Elmwood Hopkins, managing director of Emerging Markets Inc., a consulting firm in Los Angeles. Hopkins remarked on the historical arc of the pink economy, offering important lessons for urban planners who try to either preserve or reinvigate neighborhoods:

Most urban planners try to revive neighborhoods in a backward manner by building affordable housing and then hoping people move into the area. Instead, he says, restaurants, shops, art studios, and other services should be there first. Then the residents will come. Gay men and lesbians realized that years ago, he says, when in the 1920s and 1930s they gravitated toward certain neighborhoods in cities across the United States. Their presence led gay bars and other businesses to open, and then more residents arrived.²⁰

The pink economy gained momentum as gayborhoods became more institutionally complete. “We’re at a tipping point, with gays coming out in society and business,” said a queer hospitality consultant in San Francisco to the *USA Today*. “All of a sudden, we’ve become a great market for all industries to go after.”²¹ Peak visibility arrived on June 2, 2004 when the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Company (GPTMC) launched a multimillion-dollar television campaign to lure lesbian and gay tourists to their city. On a winter afternoon in 2003, in a conference room that overlooked the Ben Franklin Bridge, six marketing strategists met and devised a catchy campaign: “Get your history straight and your nightlife gay.” The ad made Philadelphia “the first destination in the world to produce a gay-themed television commercial. Never before has a U.S. city, resort, or international destination used television advertising to invite gay travelers to visit.”²² The *Washington Post* described the ad:

‘My dearest beloved,’ the voice-over starts, as a presumably 18th-century fellow writes impassioned in the television commercial. ‘How I long to be with you, to see your radiant

¹⁸<https://www.honeyotpotperformance.org/events/2019/10/19/chicago-black-social-culture-map-queer-nightlife-amp-youth-culture-northside-edition>.

¹⁹For a challenge to the argument that gayborhood streets feel safe for queer people of color, see (Hanhardt 2013).

²⁰“There Goes the Gayborhood,” by Fred Kuhr. *The Advocate*, July 6, 2004, pp. 34–36 (quote on page 35).

²¹“More Marketing Aimed at Gay Consumers: Companies covet their buying power,” by Edward Iwata. *USA Today*, November 2, 2006, page B3.

²²“Ground-breaking TV Ad Set to Promote ‘Gay-Friendly’ Philly,” by John Fischer.

smile. Please journey to Philadelphia, where we will be at liberty to meet this Monday, at Independence Hall, as the clock strikes 6.' In the next scene, the man in period attire waits with flowers. An attractive girl flirts with him as she walks by. Then, another man sneaks up behind him and they walk away together. 'Come to Philadelphia,' the voice-over then says. 'Get your history straight. And your nightlife gay.'²³

The success of the commercial motivated the city to produce a companion magazine ad as well. A front-page *Philadelphia Inquirer* article described the effort: "The theme is 'Get your history straight and your nightlife gay.'" The three-year, \$900,000 effort sought "to integrate Philadelphia's historical and cultural offerings with gay-specific attractions."²⁴ The strategy worked; Philadelphia saw a \$153 return for every dollar that it spent on its marketing campaign. Bruce Yelk, the Director of Public Relations, said that the ad took the "City of Brotherly Love" from an unranked position on Community Marketing's "Top 10 U.S. Destinations for the LGBT Traveler" list to the number ten spot. Image 4.5 shows several expressions from the campaign. Philadelphia's success motivated more than 75 cities around the world to adopt queer tourism campaigns.²⁵

Activism and Protest. An incitement to insurgency requires people to define their situation as unjust and to feel optimistic about their prospects for change. This type of culture work—redefining what a situation means—happens on the ground in specific places. Consider an example from Dade County (Miami). Former beauty queen (Miss Oklahoma, 1958, and second runner-up for Miss America, 1959) and recording artist-turned-born-again Christian evangelist mother Anita Bryant became involved in a campaign called "Save Our Children." Bryant proclaimed that "the recruitment of our children is absolutely necessary for the survival and growth of homosexuality." She personalized her message by expressing concern over the wellbeing of her own children: "As a mother, I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children." As part of her campaign and with the aid of fundamentalist churches and conservative Roman Catholic groups, Bryant displayed images from San Francisco's pride parades and argued that the city was "a cesspool of sexual perversion gone rampant." She then cautioned local voters, "Don't let Miami become another San Francisco." Residents found her message compelling and voted by a margin of more than 2-to-1 in a referendum to repeal a law that protected gay men and lesbians from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodation (Ghaziani 2008: 33).

The Florida fight unleashed protests across the country, many of which were organized in gay neighborhoods. A *Washington Post* story observed, "A gay cause can quickly become a neighborhood cause. Soon after Anita Bryant's recent victory in a Miami homosexual rights referendum, most of the restaurants around Dupont

²³"Philadelphia Invites Gay Tourists in TV Ad," by Robert Strauss. *Washington Post*, July 3, 2004, page A03.

²⁴"New Tourism Ads: Come out and visit," by Marcia Gelbart. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 14, 2003, page A01.

²⁵"Philadelphia Strikes Gold Catering to Gay Tourists," by Rubina Madan. *Chicago Sun Times*, August 5, 2007, page C2. Yelk quote: <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/11/13/get-history-straight-nightlife-gay-campaign-turns-10-today/>.



DEAR GUYS WHO LIKE GUYS
AND GIRLS WHO LIKE GIRLS,

WE'RE INTO THAT IN PHILLY. IN FACT WE HAVE A PLACE
AFFECTIONATELY REFERRED TO AS THE GAYBORHOOD.
HECK, OUR STREET SIGNS EVEN SHOUT "WE LOVE EVERYONE -
GAY, STRAIGHT AND NOT EXACTLY SURE."
SO COME HANG OUT WITH US AND BRING YOUR
FAVORITE GUY OR G-IRL. IT'LL BE FABULOUS.

P.S.
BOOK YOUR STAY AT
GOPHILA.COM



WITH
LOVE
PHILADELPHIA
XOXO

Image 4.5 Get your history straight, and your nightlife gay (Source Images 4.5b and 4.5c by J. Fusco. All images reprinted with permission from Visit Philadelphia)

Circle agreed—some without prodding—to stop serving the Florida orange juice Bryant advertises.”²⁶ The protest theme found its way to the first national March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1978.

In another well-known example, the San Francisco queer community united when Dan White assassinated supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Mascone on November 27, 1978. A front-page story in the *New York Times* described the power of gayborhood streets for social movement mobilization efforts: “While the Castro has been the center of a movement, it is also home to ‘an important political constituency.

²⁶“The Gay Life at Dupont Circle,” by Robert F. Levey. *Washington Post*, June 16, 1977, page DC1. See also coverage in the *New York Times*: <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/06/08/archives/miami-votes-2-to-1-to-repeal-law-barring-bias-against-homosexuals.html>.



DEAR GALS WHO
LIKE GALS,

LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT
OF HAPPINESS BEGAN WITH ME.

WITH LOVE,
PHILADELPHIA
XOLo

P.S. GET YOUR HISTORY STRAIGHT AND
YOUR NIGHTLIFE GAY.

Image 4.5 (continued)



DEAR GUYS WHO
LIKE GUYS,

LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT
OF HAPPINESS BEGAN WITH ME.

WITH LOVE,
PHILADELPHIA
XOLo

P.S. GET YOUR HISTORY STRAIGHT AND
YOUR NIGHTLIFE GAY.

Image 4.5 (continued)

When people were angry about Dan White, they were able to assemble quickly, spilling out of bars [into the streets]...Physical location mattered.”²⁷ White received a lenient sentence of voluntary manslaughter. Outrage in San Francisco’s gay and lesbian community sparked the “White Night riots” on May 21, 1979. Protesters set ablaze eleven police cars and smashed the windows of City Hall, holding up placards that read, “Did Harvey Milk Die for Nothing?”

In the 1980s, queer communities across the United States used gayborhoods to respond to the AIDS crisis. A reporter for the *New York Times* commented, “Sociologists and demographers alike say the concentration of homosexuals in core neighborhoods has grown in the last two decades out of gay political advocacy and the

²⁷“Gay Enclaves Face Prospect of Being Passé,” by Patricia Leigh Brown. *New York Times*, October 30, 2007, page A1.

AIDS crisis.”²⁸ A writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle* added that mobilization in gay districts helped to lower infection rates: “When AIDS finally was identified, white middle-class gays mobilized powerfully, and over time their efforts drove down infection rates in San Francisco’s Castro district.”²⁹

In response to escalating anti-gay hate crimes in the 1990s, queer people again used their residential concentration in gayborhoods to redefine their situation as unjust and to respond to it. Spikes in gay bashing and murders “accelerated our plans to do something to take back our streets,” one New Yorker said. Another remarked, “It’s one horror story after another. Every day I hear about a friend or someone I know getting hurt. My lover and I were almost physically attacked in the East Village. We’re verbally harassed all the time, called ‘dykes’ and ‘queers’ and ‘what’s wrong with you’ ... Our message is, ‘we’re bashing back.’”³⁰

Christopher Street residents formed a group called the “Pink Panthers,” a neighborhood foot patrol who monitored city streets. Writing for the *Washington Post*, Paula Span remarked on group’s name, logo, and activities:

They could have called themselves something more prosaic, neighborhood anti-crime patrols being nothing new, after all...But gay activism, New York-style, requires a certain ironic panache...The Pink Panthers title, with its echoes both of ‘60s politicization and silver-screen camp, won swift approval. The group’s logo – an inverted pink triangle bearing a paw print – was invented that very night. In the few weeks since, says founder Gerri Wells, about 150 people have volunteered to join the Panthers’ weekend patrols. From midnight until 3 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, armed only with whistles and squawky CB radios and a series of training sessions, patrols of eight to 10 people in paw-printed black T-shirts stride through the West Village. They watch; they jot down license plate numbers; they call the police if they see trouble; they blow whistles to scare off assailants; they intervene to extricate victims.³¹

The Pink Panthers provide “a searing response to the increased violence that has accompanied the general increase of gay visibility in America” (Berlant and Freeman 1993: 206). Activists appropriated confrontational strategies of the black power movement—but with a twist: “Dressed in black T-shirts with pink triangles enclosing a black paw print, they move unarmed in groups, linked by walkie-talkies and whistles. In choosing a uniform that explicitly marks them as targets, [they identify themselves] as successors of the Black Power movement” (ibid.). The Panthers cultivated their consciousness, and executed their protest campaigns, on gayborhood streets (Image 4.5).

Gayborhoods became a base camp for marriage protests as well. The LGBTQ movement put marriage on its national agenda for the first time in 1987 at its third

²⁸“Gay Presence Leads to Revival of Declining Neighborhoods,” by Karen De Witt. *New York Times*, September 6, 1994, page A14.

²⁹“AIDS Fear has Faded in U.S.,” by Marshall Kilduff. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 16, 2004, page B8.

³⁰Take back our streets: “Streets of Sanctuary Now Harbor Criminals,” authorship unnoted. *New York Times*, August 6, 1990, page B1. Bashing back: “Patrol of the Pink Panthers,” by Paula Span. *Washington Post*, September 19, 1990, page C1.

³¹“Patrol of the Pink Panthers,” by Paula Span. *Washington Post*, September 19, 1990, page C1.



Image 4.6 The Pink Panthers (Source T.L. Litt. Reprinted with permission)

March on Washington. Couples, Inc., a Los Angeles-based organization fighting for legal recognition of gay partners, organized *The Wedding*, a ceremony that celebrated queer relationships and demanded that their partnerships receive equal legal recognition as married heterosexuals (Ghaziani 2008). Three years after the Washington march, two lesbian couples and one gay male couple in Hawaii applied for marriage licenses. Like others, they were refused. Unlike others, however, they filed a law suit against the state for denying their civil rights. In 1993, the Supreme Court of Hawaii decided *Baehr v. Lewin*—a “ruling that roiled America” (Sullivan 1997: 104)—and declared that the denial of marriage licenses on the grounds of same-sex applications violated the equal protection clause of the state’s constitution that outlawed sex-based discrimination.

Fearing the effects of the ruling, California republican William J. Knight introduced a bill that would invalidate “any marriage contracted outside this state between individuals of the same gender.” The bill passed the Assembly 41 to 33 on January 31, 1996. In response, a protest group called the Freedom to Marry Task Force of Northern California “collected 1,600 letters in the heart of San Francisco’s largest gay neighborhood, opposing Mr. Knight’s bill.” One member commented on why the gayborhood mattered for their actions: “When we stand there [in the Castro] with the Freedom to Marry banner, people swarm over.”³² These early campaigns motivated activists to jump into the fray and organize for marriage equality (see Ghaziani et al. 2016 for review).

³²“Fearing a Toehold for Gay Marriages, Conservatives Rush to Bar the Door,” by David W. Dunlap. *New York Times*, March 6, 1996, page A13.

From Anita Bryant to Dan White, and from the AIDS crisis to hate crimes and marriage equality—each of these examples shows with particular force how spatial concentration cultivates political consciousness and protest. All of this happens on the streets. Building gayborhoods was “inseparable from the development of the gay community as a social movement” (Castells 1983: 157). In today’s climate of greater legislative equality, gayborhoods provide an abeyance (Taylor 1989) functionality, allowing queer people to stand on guard and ready to resist any injustices that may come their way.

Community Building. Like attracts like. This is a well-established fact of human life, one that sociologists call homophily. Geography is a key precondition for homophily. “We are more likely to have contact with those who are closer to us in geographic location than those who are distant” (McPherson et al. 2001: 429). These academic insights filter down to the streets of the gayborhood as well. One resident from Asbury Park, NJ explained why she moved to the area: “There’s an acceptance here, a feeling of community, and there are a few gathering places for gay and lesbian people.”³³ A New Yorker similarly pointed to the social aspects of seeking community in the city: “This is the only place to be ourselves, to be with people who are like ourselves and not be looked down on.”³⁴ A journalist for the *Village Voice* offered the same observation: “Like any identity group, gay men and lesbians want to be with their own kind.”³⁵

Whereas the social aspects of community building point to the relational benefits that gayborhoods provide, the cultural component highlights the symbolic and expressive aspects of its streets. Regina Quattrochi, the former director of the New York City AIDS Resource Center, argues that gayborhoods have always promoted the celebration of queer cultures: “Even as recently as the early and mid-1980s, I think the Village was symbolic of a sort of celebration of gay culture.”³⁶ The *Washington Post* playfully compared gayborhoods to Oz:

For decades, the gay neighborhoods of San Francisco, New York, and Washington embodied the promise of change, freedom, friendship, and acceptance. Greeting cards and T-shirts were emblazoned with the slogan ‘I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.’ To come out of the closet, to move to those gay utopias, was to be swept up by a tornado and dropped into Oz. The black-and-white landscape dissolved into color...Reborn, gay men often find that old assumptions about family, love, and community fall away as well. In the ‘70s, men once derided as sissies remade themselves into ‘Castro clones,’ with cowboy boots and button-fly Levi’s, plaid shirts and leather jackets, and studiously well-muscled bodies.³⁷

³³“Move Over, Fire Island, Here Comes Asbury Park,” by Jill P. Capuzzo. *New York Times*, August 6, 2000, section 14NJ, page 1.

³⁴“Race, Class, and Sex Breed Contempt in Greenwich Village,” by Michelle Garcia.

³⁵“The New Gayborhoods of Fort Greene, Sunset Park, and Jackson Heights,” by Michael Lavers. *Village Voice*, June 24, 2009, page unnoted.

³⁶“Neighborhood Report: West Village,” by Randy Kennedy. *The New York Times*, June 19, 1994, page 6.

³⁷“Fill-in-the-Blanks: For gay men, self-invention can be a key to self-discovery,” by Elizabeth Kastor. *Washington Post*, July 31, 1997, page B01.

We also hear the importance of community building in debates about whether to municipally mark gayborhoods. In 1997, Chicago became the first city in the world to use tax dollars to formally designate a section of its East Lakeview neighborhood as “Boystown.” It did so by installing rainbow-colored art deco pylons along North Halsted Street (Image 4.7).

A local paper published a front-page editorial article that expressed skepticism about the city’s decision: “Why should a neighborhood have a public sexual designation when sex is the ultimate private act? Why would gay people want to officially ghettoize themselves when they’ve fought so hard not to be ostracized?” The writer

Image 4.7 Rainbow pylons in Chicago’s gayborhood
(Source Photo by Gary Baker. Reprinted with permission)



Image 4.8 Rainbow street signs in Philadelphia (Source Photo by J. Smith. Reprinted with permission from Visit Philadelphia)



interviewed Tracy Baim, who managed local queer periodicals, for answers. In her response, Baim combined several themes from this chapter:

The city’s plan isn’t about sex, it’s about community. Society has forced us to define ourselves as a community to protect ourselves...Community has given gays the force to fight against hate crimes, against job discrimination and housing bias. The gay community has become family for gays whose families have thrown them out. The city’s plan simply would recognize that community, along with the work it has done to turn the neighborhood into a place where straight people, along with gays, want to shop, eat and live. Why does the city do it for Chinatown? Why does it do it for Greektown? Because it helps bring pride to an area of town that has traditionally been built by those communities.³⁸

Richard Daley, who was mayor at the time, agreed: “I knew from the beginning it was about fairness—fairness to this community. I am thanking you for what you (the LGBTQ community) have done for North Halsted Street for many, many years.”³⁹

A similar conversation happened in Philadelphia ten years later when Mayor John F. Street dedicated thirty-six new street signs to celebrate the city’s queer community (Image 4.8).

The *Philadelphia Daily News* remarked on the significance of the street signs:

‘Welcome to the ‘Gayborhood.’ A welcoming vibe is what organizers hope to inspire when visitors see new street signage that will designate a portion of the Center City District as the city’s official gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-sensitive neighborhood...the new street signs will feature the traditional GLBT rainbow, or ‘Freedom’ flag underneath the usual street signs... ‘The signage is an important symbol for this city,’ [said Tami Sortman of the

³⁸“Gaytown Enters Gray Area of Community Naming,” by Michael Schmich. *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1997, page 1.

³⁹“Gay-Pride Halsted Street Project Ends in Harmony,” by Lola Smallwood. *Chicago Tribune*, November 15, 1998, page 3.

Philadelphia Gay Tourism caucus]. ‘We can say that we have a neighborhood...Not only does this bring a sense of welcoming to the local community, it’s a symbol to the world.’⁴⁰

The image of gayborhoods as a cultural mecca occurs repeatedly in the national media. A front-page story in the *San Francisco Chronicle* from 1996 quoted a Castro resident who said, “I knew I had to get out of Nebraska in 1971. San Francisco was a mecca for gay people like me.” A year later, the same press described the Castro as a place that “drew thousands of gays from all over the country because they believed it was their own mecca-in-the-making.” By 1999, it declared that the district was “the world’s gay mecca.”⁴¹

San Francisco is not alone in its use of the imagery of mecca. Some reporters describe Provincetown, MA as “a gay mecca in the summer months,” while New Yorkers add, “To the old-timers, Christopher Street was, and should stay, New York’s Gay Mecca, where the promise of liberation remains alive.”⁴²

In 1994, New York commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. That year, the *Washington Post* ran a poignant story, worth quoting at length, that blended Islamic and American images to celebrate its gayborhoods:

There will be a constant stream of pilgrims coming to gaze at the brick-and-stucco facade of the Stonewall over the next few days. Because a police raid turned into a riot there 25 years ago, because the patrons of a gay bar did not go gently into a paddy wagon, hundreds of thousands of people will descend on New York for a weekend of commemoration. The neighborhood surrounding the old saloon, a hangout-turned-landmark, will become an international mecca, a symbol of gay liberation.

But that’s what Greenwich Village has always been. A kind of Ellis Island for generations of gay men and lesbians, a crucible of gay history since before the Jazz Age, it is America’s most celebrated gay enclave. What the Village offered was a handful of places where gay people could reveal themselves: a cafeteria here, a bar there, a park, a bookstore, eventually a community center. But what it provided was freedom. ‘It’s a mythic place,’ says Joan Nestle, co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

Sometime in the 1970s, San Francisco’s Castro district eclipsed the Village as a national mecca and a political power base... Other New York neighborhoods have drained away some of its functions. The gay middle class has largely decamped for Chelsea, a few blocks uptown, which now boasts blocks of new restaurants, bars and boutiques. The most vibrant lesbian community in the city is across the river in Brooklyn’s Park Slope. And the crowd that generates performance art, cutting-edge music, fashion and attitude is headquartered in the East Village. Yet the neighborhood’s hold on the imagination remains powerful. And this weekend, it will again be at the heart of everything.⁴³

⁴⁰“New Signs Make it Official: We have a ‘Gayborhood,’” by Damon C. Williams. *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 19, 2007, page 22.

⁴¹1996: “There Goes the Neighborhood: After 25 years at the heart of San Francisco’s gay movement, the Castro district is going mainstream,” by Dan Levy. *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 26, 1996, page 1/Z1. 1997: “A ‘Soft-Focus’ Look at the Castro,” by Dan Levy. *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 15, 1997, page E1. 1999: “Market Street’s Proud History is at Stake,” by Ken Garcia. *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 20, 1999, page A17.

⁴²“A Vacation Gone to the ‘Dogs,’” by Mick LaSalle. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 14, 1995, page C4. “Street Fight,” by Denny Lee. *New York Times*, March 31, 2002, section 14, page 1.

⁴³“Greenwich Time: On the Stonewall anniversary, a gay tour of Village history,” by Paula Span. *The Washington Post*, June 22, 1994, page D1.

The use of religious imagery to characterize gayborhoods is ironic but unsurprising. At the heart of any spiritual iconography is a communal affirmation (Durkheim 1912). An editorial from Chicago echoed, “Our eroticism is the closest thing we have to what in the past was called a spiritual life, and no one wants to be excommunicated from that church altogether. This is probably why people who are seen or see themselves as primarily homosexual have acceded to their own subculturalization in gay ghettos.”⁴⁴ In this sense, gayborhoods resemble the totems that Durkheim described in his study of religious life. In both instances, there is a common motivation to seek the sacred and celebrate as its source ourselves and our communities. This type of work—from socializing to community building and transcendence—happens on the streets of gayborhoods as people interact with their neighbors, visitors, and tourists alike.

4.3 Conclusions

In this chapter, I identified six major reasons that queer people have shared with journalists across the United States about why gayborhoods matter to them. My findings show that gay districts provide access to courtship and partnership possibilities, influence elections, provide a perception of safer streets, offer access to queer businesses and institutions, enable social movement organizing, and are the conduits of community building. Together, these residential logics provide insights into the motivations, meanings, interpretations, and interactions that uniquely happen on the streets of gay neighborhoods (Table 4.2).

Research in gayborhood studies often assumes that we need to isolate macro structural factors like the economy (e.g., real estate values), culture (e.g., assimilation), politics (e.g., legislation and public opinion), and technology (e.g., geo-aware apps like Grindr) to study these urban districts. This assumption originates from dominant theoretical traditions in urban sociology (e.g., Abrahamson 2005; Castells 1976; Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch 1976; Orum and Chen 2003; Sassen 2001; Zukin 1987), especially the Chicago School (Park 1915; Park and Burgess 1925).

A “supra-individual” approach (Sampson 2012: 23) like this, and the assumptions that it forces researchers to make, persists in contemporary research about the city as well. Consider a recent call by Wu (2016: 126) that “urban sociology should be understood as the sociology of city.” By making this move, scholars would focus less on “social problems within an urban context”—like influencing elections, finding a sexual or romantic partner, feeling safe, looking for specialty stores or non-profits, mobilizing against real or perceived threats, and desiring the company of similar others—and instead analyze “the city as an autonomous social unit” (ibid.). Wu’s recommendation is provocative, and productive, but unless we texture our impressions of the city with the meaning-making processes that happen on the ground—a street empirics, as call it—our knowledge will be incomplete. For Wu, the goal is

⁴⁴“Bringing Clarity to an Elusive Reality,” by Joseph Coates. *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 1991, page 3.

Table 4.2 The street empirics of the gayborhood

Residential logics: Why do you live in the gayborhood?	Street empirics: Why do gayborhoods matter?
Voting blocs and elections	“Having a specific neighborhood that politicians can point to has really solidified the gay vote, our political muscle”
Sex and love	“Gay men and lesbians want to be with their own kind. It’s easier to hook up—for a night or a lifetime”
Safe spaces	“It’s about whether you can hold your partner’s hand in public, whether you’re safe from harassment or physical violence”
The pink economy	“Restaurants, shops, art studios, and other services should be there first. Then the residents will come”
Activism and protest	“When AIDS finally was identified, white middle-class gays mobilized powerfully, and over time their efforts drove down infection rates in San Francisco’s Castro district”
Community building	“That’s what Greenwich Village has always been. A kind of Ellis Island for generations of gay men and lesbians”

“treating the city as the unit of analysis” (ibid.), but this mandate will also abstract our view too far away from the streets.

In this chapter, I have called on urbanists to embrace an analytic strategy of street empirics. Those sidewalks where people walk, talk, and interact with each other provide a foundational unit of analysis for scholars who are interested in understanding what a place means to its residents. By accepting this methodological directive, we can use the reasons that gayborhood residents provide for why they live in the area, like other residents in other neighborhoods, to explain the significance of a place.

My call for prioritizing street empirics to understand what a neighborhood means—why it matters to the people who live there—enables scholars to think broadly about the interactional and attitudinal mechanisms that produce place characters. As an analytic approach, street empirics is methodologically robust. Consider that I write these words in the middle of a pandemic. Covid-19 has motivated many people to recalibrate how and why places influence them. One headline wondered about the significance of cities: “Coronavirus may prompt migration out of American cities.” Others mused about queer cultures—“Of Pride in Pandemic Times”—and queer spaces: “Can LGBTQ bars survive the Covid-19 pandemic?”⁴⁵ My data

⁴⁵Migration out of cities: <https://theharrispoll.com/coronavirus-may-prompt-migration-out-of-american-cities/>; Pride: <https://shepherdexpress.com/lgbtq/my-lgbtq-pov/of-pride-in-pandemic-times/>; LGBTQ bars: <https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/2020/06/12/can-lgbtq-bars-survive-through-covid-19.html>.

predates the pandemic, but I imagine that future researchers can still use streets empirics to systematically analyze how Covid-19 affected the meanings of urban gay districts. Moments of crisis compel creative responses, and we now have another approach in our toolkit that we can use to advance gayborhood studies.

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Part III
Identity and Evolution

Chapter 5

The Rainbow Connection: A Time-Series Study of Rainbow Flag Display Across Nine Toronto Neighborhoods



Alex Bitterman

Abstract Recently, the display and use of the rainbow flag in historically defined gay neighborhoods has grown even as gay residents and businesses have been driven away by gentrification, rising real-estate costs, and cultural homogenization. At the same time, prevalence and use of the rainbow flag and the rainbow motif has increased in areas not usually considered part of recognized gay neighborhoods. This chapter explores the prevalence and persistence of the display of the rainbow flag and rainbow motif in nine neighborhoods across Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The visual assessment of rainbow flag use across these neighborhoods serves as a potential model for examining the rate of spread of rainbow flags and visual rainbow motif symbols as a means for tracking the movement of the LGBTQ+ community across urban neighborhoods. Initial results suggest potential significance of the prevalence and persistence of the rainbow flag and the rainbow motif. These include; (1) a possible diaspora of LGBTQ+ residents from traditionally defined gay neighborhoods to newly emerging gay or LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods, (2) a newfound inclusivity or pride among residents of other neighborhoods, and (3) “rainbow washing” due to overuse of the rainbow motif by non-LGBTQ businesses and organizations connected with pride celebrations. While overuse of the rainbow flag may diminish historically coded meaning of the rainbow, that well-intentioned use of the rainbow flag is a positive and welcoming indicator for LGBTQ+ individuals and it may lead to the emergence of additional LGBTQ-friendly enclaves that, over time, could potentially emerge as new gay neighborhoods.

Keywords Rainbow flag · Rainbow motif · Gay neighborhoods · Place branding · Toronto · Rainbow washing

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5.1 Rainbow Flag: Visibility, Implication, and Meaning

The rainbow flag has signified safety and community to LGBTQ+ people for fifty years. Display of the flag in and around gay neighborhoods has grown continually as a result of pride celebrations each summer, but concentrations of the rainbow flag and rainbow motif are beginning to appear in areas outside of established gay neighborhoods. This chapter examines the concentration and persistence of display of the rainbow flag across nine neighborhoods in Toronto, Canada—one established gay neighborhood, one affluent neighborhood to the north, and seven other neighborhoods concentrated in the West end of the city—using the rainbow flag (and rainbow motif) as a means to visualize the “gayness” or LGBTQ-friendliness of a specific neighborhood, but also as a means to identify the potential emergence of LGBTQ-inclusive neighborhoods and enclaves. This study relies on a planned and coordinated field data collection effort across these nine neighborhoods over a three-year period and charts the growth in use of the rainbow flag over this same period.

5.2 A Capsule History of the Rainbow Flag

The rainbow flag was designed in 1970 by gay-rights activist Gilbert Baker in San Francisco. San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk suggested that Baker develop a symbol of pride for the LGBTQ+ community as an alternative to the pink triangle which was commonly used by the gay community in an effort to reclaim the symbol used to visually brand homosexuals throughout Nazi Germany. For the prototype of the initial flag, Baker dyed fabrics of brilliant color that he sewed into a striped banner. Each color had a meaning: hot pink for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for the sun, green for nature, turquoise blue for art, indigo for harmony, and violet for spirit. Baker recounts the moment when his new flag was first raised: “it completely astounded me that people just got that this was their flag. It belonged to all of us. I knew right then that this was the most important thing I would ever do—that my whole life was going to be about the rainbow flag” (San Francisco Travel Association 2019).

Later, the rainbow flag was modified by using a seven stripe-version (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet) because fuchsia pink fabric proved too difficult to source (Martel 2018; Albin 2009) and has since been endlessly adapted to visually demonstrate inclusivity for all identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Throughout San Francisco the original rainbow flag slowly became recognized throughout the 1970s as a symbol of gay community. Following the assassination of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978, the flag became a rallying symbol for LGBTQ+ individuals and was flown from light poles along both sides of Market Street for the 1979 Gay Freedom Day Parade (San Francisco Travel Association 2019). The rainbow motif was used as the cover of the Parade program the following year, as depicted in Fig. 5.2. The flag was eventually modified

into a six-stripe Rainbow Flag and was used to identify gay-friendly homes and businesses throughout San Francisco (San Francisco Travel Association 2019) as shown in Fig. 5.1, which became a visual code to LGBTQ+ individuals implying a safe welcoming space under the rainbow banner (Martel 2018). The flag continues



Fig. 5.1 The rainbow flag and rainbow motif used as a place brand throughout the Castro in San Francisco (Source Image by author)

to grow in popularity and is ever-changing to include emergent groups that identify with LGBTQ+ rights.

Use of the rainbow flag to signify LGBTQ-friendly space continued, as shown in Fig. 5.3, and use of the flag spread to other gay neighborhoods outside of San Francisco. John Stout of West Hollywood litigated in 1988 for the right to display a rainbow flag on the balcony of his apartment (San Francisco Travel Association 2019). He won this fight and, as a result, display and popularity of the flag throughout the West Hollywood gay neighborhood grew. Similarly, LGBTQ-friendly establishments in other gay neighborhoods began to display the rainbow flag (Martel 2018) as a symbol of gay pride and inclusivity and to signify safe spaces for gay people. By 1993, the rainbow motif—not simply the flag—was being used at the then-largest LGBTQ+ march on Washington (San Francisco Travel Association 2019), claiming it as the predominant symbol of gay pride and inclusivity.

The rainbow flag (and the rainbow motif) are unique in that for much of the past fifty years, the codified significance of the flag required a degree of “insider” knowledge to understand the meaning signified by display of the flag. While the rainbow flag broadcast to LGBTQ+ individuals an open and welcoming invitation (Bitterman and Hess 2016b), for many years, most of straight society did not know about the flag or its meaning, and some thought it was simply a colorful banner. Even today, some still do (Wareham 2020). The coded significance of the flag is important to its evolution and adaptation over time.

The rainbow flag and motif was also not without detractors in the LGBTQ+ community, however. Doan (2015) cites one such case of a self-identified lesbian woman who wondered why anyone would want to fly a rainbow flag on their home and thereby advertise their location and potentially make themselves a target for criticism or discrimination. Some within the LGBTQ+ community felt that the flag was ostentatious, and some implied the colorful flag was “tacky” or “too gay” (WeHoVille Staff 2012). Popularity of the rainbow flag, and its important meaning of inclusion won over the small criticisms or concerns. Over the past fifty years, the rainbow flag has become a visual symbol of the struggle for LGBTQ+ inclusion and has been used to signify specific locations of gay-friendly businesses, homes, and accommodations across the world. The rainbow color motif, once a coded signal to LGBTQ+ individuals that they are welcome, included, and safe, (Bitterman and Hess 2016a) has become a widely recognized universal symbol and visual shorthand for LGBTQ+ inclusion especially among the LGBTQ+ and allied communities (Bitterman and Hess 2016b).

5.3 The Rainbow Flag as Place Brand for Gay Neighborhoods

The rainbow flag, an internationally recognized symbol of gay pride, could be considered a place brand. It has been used for about five decades to “brand” LGBTQ+ spaces



Fig. 5.2 The rainbow motif used on the cover of the 1980 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day program (Source Image by author)

and neighborhoods. However, unlike most place brands, the flag is no longer specific to any one location, but instead a “type” of location which makes it a highly unusual sort of place brand.

The rainbow flag is unique in that its origins are not only grassroots, but it is also place-agnostic, used to denote connection and acceptance of those under the

protection of the LGBTQ+ umbrella, regardless of location. Developed as a labor of love, the rainbow flag has been widely adopted and modified, and its success is perpetuated by its power to unite marginalized sexual minorities. The rainbow flag assists LGBTQ+ people in proudly expressing sexual orientation or gender identity, and it signifies the places these sexual minorities have struggled to designate as collective communities safe from persecution and marginalization from the dominant group. There are few examples of place brands which are used to demarcate particular spaces but that also transcend borders. Other rare examples of universally identifiable visual elements used to denote place include red, white, and blue striped barber poles and the red cross symbol used to denote first aid or medical facilities (Bitterman 2008).

More typical place brands encompass attitudes and perceptions about specific places and are used to promote these locales to visitors and potential residents as well as to boost civic pride among current citizens. Place brands can be constituted from a variety of elements—a sign, a slogan, a logo, or an advertising campaign—that denote place. The iconic Hollywood sign, the IAmsterdam sign and campaign, and the I ♥ NY logo and campaign are examples of visual efforts used to brand place (Bitterman 2008). Place brands range in type, scale, and application. Typically developed and promoted by a government, NGO, or corporation, Top-Down place brands tend to be planned, cohesive, and comprehensive. Controlled by various rules for use for each of the visual elements constituting the brand—color, typography, imagery, and scale—Top-Down brands are usually accompanied by a plan for dissemination and for administering the brand. These rules harmonize consistency in use of the brand across a broad range of media and scale in the built environment, which usually includes the design of street furniture, maps and kiosks, gateway signage, public transit systems (Hess and Bitterman 2008), wayfinding signage, smaller-scale print advertisements, and brochures, as well as digital applications such as websites and video productions. “Bottom-Up” or grassroots place brands, in contrast, are typically not sanctioned by an authority, but instead evolve in an organic fashion which tends to be spontaneous, decentralized, and fluid. I ♥ NY is one example of a grassroots place brand (Bitterman 2008) and the rainbow flag is another. Despite careful rules for use, very few top-down place brands persist beyond five years. In contrast, many “grassroots” bottom-up place brands persist for many years as they tend to be developed and supported by and for the people (Bitterman 2008).

As the reputation and identity of gay neighborhoods began to solidify and once-secretive marginal spaces of gay life became bustling centers of economic, political, and social revolution residents and businesses in gay neighborhoods proudly and publicly began to display the rainbow flag (Martel 2018) and motif as shown in Fig. 5.3. The rainbow flag—a place brand non-specific to any one city, region, or country—became an international symbol of gay pride (Martel 2018) and visually is used to delimit the boundaries of gay neighborhoods.

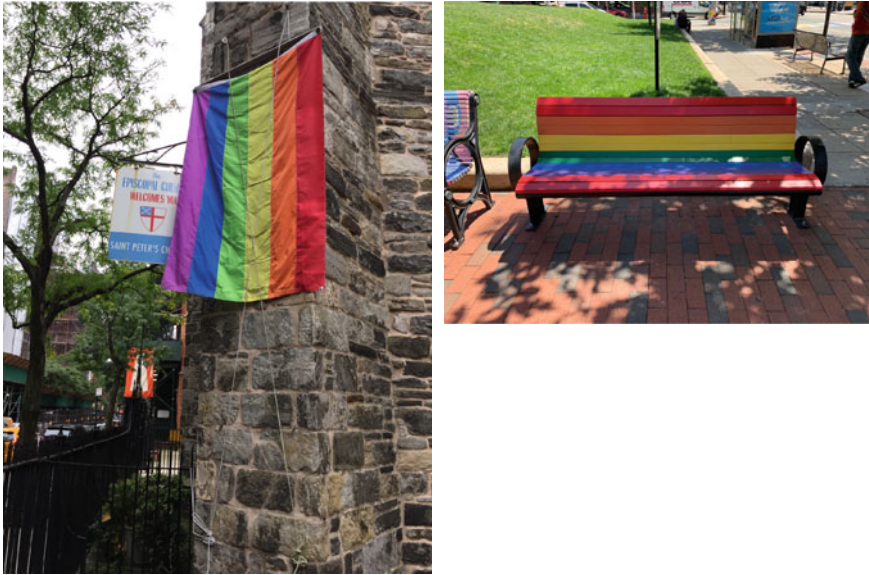


Fig. 5.3 Examples of the rainbow flag and motif used to denote inclusive place. At left in New York City, at right in Cambridge, Massachusetts (*Source* Image by author)

5.4 The Power of Graphics in the Built Environment

Graphics and visual elements—the constituent elements of place brands—are helpful in influencing behavior and cultivating or reinforcing a sense of community and belonging. Graphics also convey or signal meaning. Painted elements and color in the built environment are two of the most common visual elements on which place brands rely, and these graphic interventions across the built environment demonstrate the subtle power of surrounding graphics. A thin yellow or white line painted along lanes of travel on a highway is one example of the power of graphics in the built environment. Drivers and passengers in vehicles speed by in close proximity divided only by a thin painted line. Drivers have been taught to respect those simple lines, and pedestrians trust that when entering a crosswalk, the line will indicate to passing motorists the necessity to yield to their presence. Graphic elements—lines, color, logos—hold meaning and importance, even when our reaction to that meaning is so familiar it becomes automatic (Bitterman 2008).

Paint, color, and lines help humans to delimit space and to physically define boundaries (Bitterman 2013). In the early 2000s, NYC Department of Transportation commissioner urban planning Janette Sadik-Kahn led an effort to use little more than paint and street furniture to radically reorient streetscapes in Manhattan from vehicle-oriented spaces to people-oriented places (Bela 2015). These simple interventions helped to change the paradigm of urban design simply by using color, paint, and line to demarcate and suggest community space and separating forms of travel (driving,

bicycling, walking). These efforts may have been inspired by similar tactics in gay neighborhoods, which were among some of the first neighborhoods to use paint to proudly designate place by replicating the rainbow flag motif in crosswalks, trash bins, benches, murals, and other decorative applications, proudly identifying even the most mundane urban necessities as inclusive, friendly, and welcoming.

Visual devices such as color and symbol help to define place (Bitterman 2013). For example, ethnic neighborhoods are often proudly festooned with cultural pride denoted by festive flags, decorations, and symbols. The decoration of spaces as holidays draw near helps to visually reinforce the excitement of pending festivals. The display of a national or regional flag close to the time of ethnic holidays is common in ethnic neighborhoods. These practices are cyclical and occur at specific times each year to signify and commemorate specific holidays.

Street furniture and visual elements are necessary components of the urban environment—utility poles, crosswalks, benches, curbstones, and signage of all types (street, traffic, roadway, advertisements)—and are omnipresent, but so common these important elements have become forgettable. Urban street furniture and elements of the built environment are part of a visual cacophony that constitutes a typical urban streetscape. These public and prevalent elements in the built environment provide an empty canvas on which to decorate, and are sometime employ visual elements to identify the locations and culture of a specific neighborhood (Bitterman 2008).

Invisible neighborhoods in plain sight, except to those “in the know,” and often located in otherwise disused areas of cities, gay neighborhoods were figuratively and literally on the urban fringe for many years. The gay liberation and freedom movements of the 1970s and 1980s and the more recent gay pride movement paved the way for increased civil rights for LGBTQ+ individuals and greater acceptance among mainstream society in the 1990s and 2000s, and as a result the vibrant life, lively bars, and shops found among gay neighborhoods became a magnetic draw for LGBTQ+ visitors. Between the 1970s and the early 2000s, gay neighborhoods became centers of community life, commerce, and leisure for LGBTQ+ individuals and were—like all neighborhoods—in a state of constant change and reinvention.

The rainbow flag and the rainbow motif have similarly helped to establish place and visually delineate the presence and boundaries of gay neighborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Hess and Bitterman 2021). The rainbow motif is typically displayed as a striped fabric flag, but is sometimes painted onto crosswalks, applied to street furniture such as traffic control signs, public seating, trash receptacles, and banners, and incorporated into murals and public art (Hess and Bitterman 2021). Stickers featuring the rainbow motif are often applied to the doors and windows of LGBTQ+-welcoming businesses. Across gay neighborhoods, rainbow flags, painted stripes, and the rainbow motif have become commonplace on street furniture, murals, and other installations marking the neighborhoods as welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ visitors (Bitterman and Hess 2016b), and residents. Signs using the rainbow motif typically identify and welcome people to the neighborhood alongside light poles festooned with banners that identify the gay neighborhood. The prevalence of the rainbow motif helped to brand—as well as identify and demarcate—gay neighborhoods as distinct gay spaces (Hess and Bitterman 2021).

5.5 Concentration and Persistence of Rainbow Flags Define Boundaries of Gay Neighborhoods

Display of the rainbow flag, for much of its use throughout history, had been primarily confined to gay neighborhoods, but use of the flag and rainbow motif has more recently leaked beyond the boundaries of established gay neighborhoods into other neighborhoods not traditionally associated with outward support of LGBTQ+ residents and visitors and their human rights (Hinrichs 2020; Hess 2019). Over time, in concert with growing mainstream acceptance and increased legal and civil rights, the use of the rainbow motif has become more widely adopted, and now is common across LGBTQ-friendly businesses and spaces in many major cities. Observational data suggests that the rainbow flag and rainbow motif are now more widely adopted than other subcultural references that signify place in the urban environment. What does this sudden surge in display of the rainbow motif and rainbow flag indicate? The spread of the rainbow flag and rainbow motif in and around cities seems to suggest a certain level of positivity and support—reflected in inclusivity, tolerance, and safety—associated with certain urban districts (Neville and Henrickson 2010). The prevalence of the rainbow flag in areas of cities not typically considered “gay” may suggest a variety of possible conditions: a diminished importance of more established gay neighborhoods, newfound pride among previously “quiet” or previously closeted members of the LGBTQ+ community, the emergence of new or fledgling gay neighborhoods, or increased support among mainstream businesses and residents for LGBTQ+ rights and equality.

This study seeks to understand how the concentration of rainbow flags and the rainbow motif suggests the existence of a gay neighborhood or a LGBTQ-friendly neighborhood. A related part of this inquiry examines the persistence of rainbow flags and explores whether or not they appear only around the time of pride celebrations rather than year round. Could dense concentrations of displayed rainbow flags in areas of cities not previously thought of as gay neighborhoods indicate potential emergent gay enclaves or future gay neighborhoods? In this way, the rainbow flag can be considered a visual indicator of a potentially LGBTQ-friendly enclave or perhaps even an embryonic gay neighborhood.

The concentration of display and persistence in display of the rainbow flag are two measures that provide a possible means to gauge the physical *genus loci*, boundaries, and centers of gay neighborhoods. Similarly, rainbow flags can help to identify key institutions within gay neighborhoods. One high-profile measure of the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals (and their supporters) is the concentration of display of the rainbow flag and motif across a defined area. Persistence of display also provides a means to visually track the concentration and spread of LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ-friendly presence throughout gay neighborhoods and areas immediately adjacent.

“Rainbow washing” refers to the appropriation or corporatized use of the rainbow flag for the financial gain of a business (Wired Staff 2018); this practice compromises the coded mean of the rainbow flag and rainbow motif. Rainbow washing weakens LGBTQ+ symbology, making the rainbow flag simply LGBTQ-friendly decoration in mainstream space.

This study employs a visual assessment method to observe and chart the concentration and persistence and implied spread of the rainbow flag across urban space in Toronto. The purpose is to examine the prevalence and display of rainbow flags across urban districts as an indicator of identifiable gay neighborhoods; the method is further used to explore the possibility of a urban gay diaspora from established gay neighborhoods to new neighborhoods across Toronto. This particular assessment collected visual data bimonthly along main thoroughfares in neighborhoods across Toronto over a 3-year period between Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2019. In addition to the Church Street corridor (7) which anchors the established gay neighborhood in Toronto (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021), eight other areas were visually assessed. These include: Queen Street West (3), Queen Street along Bellwoods/Trinity/West Queen West (6), and Parkdale neighborhoods along Roncesvalles Avenue and Queen Street West (2) in West End; Roncesvalles Avenue in the “Roncy” Village (1); Yonge Street in the Central Business District (8), Bloor Street in Yorkville (9), King/Bathurst in Fort York (5), and King West in Liberty Village (4) as shown in Fig. 5.4.

Results from this exercise can shed new light on the use of the rainbow flag to designate urban space and on the shifting geographies of gay neighborhoods in Toronto. Quantitative data from this study may yield important clues to the “spread” of tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion across Toronto, or it may underscore a broader societal acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, making the prevalence of rainbow flags indicative but inconsequential. If indeed rainbow flags are simply residual visual

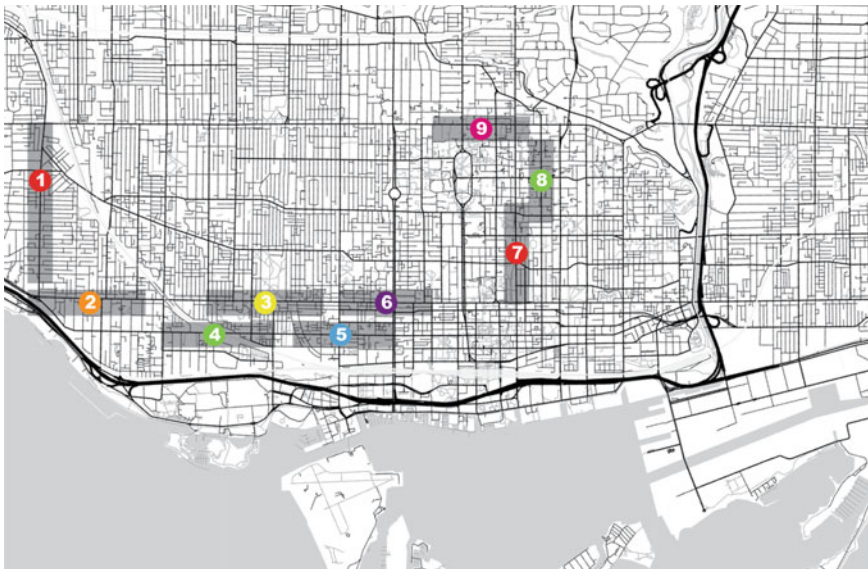


Fig. 5.4 Map of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, showing neighborhoods assessed: 1. Roncesvalles, 2. Parkdale, 3. Bellwoods/Trinity/West Queen West, 4. Liberty Village, 5. Fort York, 6. Queen Street West, 7. Church Street Gay Neighborhood, 8. Yonge Street/Central Business District, 9. Bloor/Yorkville (*Source* Map by author)

indicators of broader societal acceptance, then a relative increase in the prominence of flags would conceivably be found equally across most areas of the city. One potential limitation of this visual assessment is that as mainstream recognition and particularly as use of the rainbow flag grows (especially among large corporate entities around the time of pride celebrations), the risk of rainbow washing becomes more persistent. Further study will be required to determine consistent correlation and/or discontinuity over time.

5.6 Empirical Plan for the Visual Assessment of Rainbow Flag Display

Each “neighborhood” encompassed all building façades visible from both sides along a 1.5 km span of a major arterial road. These important commercial corridors provide important shops and amenities—bars, restaurants, cafés, access to public transit, gathering spaces—that anchor each neighborhood. During each assessment, the streets were walked, façades along each thoroughfare were photographed, and the presence of the any rainbow flag or motif was documented, geotagged, and time stamped. The photographs were assembled in a database and the number of instances tallied for each neighborhood on each observation day. Each photograph provides a snapshot of a specific place at a specific time and in series provide visual evidence of the emergence, retrenchment, and spread/retreat of the rainbow flag/motif. These images were cataloged and compared over time to quantify both concentration and persistence of the rainbow flag/motif. The aggregate number of instances for each neighborhood was then compared over time. See Fig. 5.5. Comparing these snapshots over time provides two important visual assessment indicators. The first is change related to seasonality (for example, a change in the number of rainbow flags around special events, such as pride celebrations). The second is longer-duration insights about neighborhood change provided by an increase in visual clues—rainbow flags and motifs.

The visual assessment survey aimed to minimize potential researcher bias when examining the data; that is, rainbow flags and motifs are counted as either present or not. Subjective assessments about the application and expression of the mode (fabric flag, painted mural, graffiti, etc.) were also made but were not used in quantifying measure. Similarly, quality (i.e., rainbow flags faded from the sun or tattered by weather which are no longer impressive) or size (i.e., very small stickers in shop windows that do not make a large visual impact) was neither measured nor recorded.



Fig. 5.5 Emergence of rainbow motifs in areas not typically identified as gay neighborhoods. Photos on the left are from 2015–16, photos on the right are from 2017–20 (Source Images by author)

5.7 Observations and Findings

Throughout the study area, the rainbow motif is prominently displayed in the streetscape environment on various street furniture elements and at various scales on building façades. Pride event-specific signs and flags on light posts or displayed over the street are clearly part of an organized effort. However, other examples—rainbow-painted benches and access ramps—are more grassroots, individualized efforts. Other examples of public art and graffiti that supports the LGBTQ+ population such as rainbow-painted stairs that lead to a neighborhood church or the rainbow motif storefront are arguably radical.

Figure 5.5 shows a small sample of before and after images of facades and street furniture from selected locations within the study areas. Over time, the emergence of rainbow flags/motifs become discernible and the concentration in specific study areas becomes notable. Figure 5.5 shows the evolution of one façade in the Roncesvalles neighborhood and two façades in the nearby Parkdale neighborhood. The rainbow-painted stairs at the church on Roncesvalles Avenue appeared around the late spring or early summer of 2018, and has persisted and been maintained since. The rainbow motif used to decorate the bench and adorn the entire façade of the nearby building on the other side of the road also appeared around pride celebrations in 2017, and have persisted and been maintained since. Notably, over the period of study, the rainbow motif on the Parkdale façade evolved slowly over time from a painted white façade, to a white façade with rainbow stickers in the window, to a white façade with large rainbow posters in the window, to a fully painted rainbow façade that can be seen in the image on the lower right.

Over the period of study, a steady overall increase is observed in the number of rainbow flags and rainbow motifs on display in all neighborhoods (except for one neighborhood, Yorkville). However, the pattern of increase fell into two general categories: steady cumulative increase (Roncesvalles, Parkdale, Bellwoods/Trinity/West Queen West) and unsteady cumulative increase (Queen West, Yonge Street, Church Gay Neighborhood, and to a lesser degree Liberty Village and Fort York) as shown in Fig. 5.6.

The neighborhoods with steady cumulative increase in rainbow flag display tended to be small community-oriented neighborhoods with a saturation of small businesses and adjacent residential density, as shown in Fig. 5.7. Neighborhoods with unsteady cumulative increases tended to be business districts populated by chain merchants and lower residential density. Community, in part is shaped by participation. Active participation by owner-merchants and those with a vested interest in the immediate neighborhood may tend to support neighborhood inclusively and diversity more than, perhaps, a chain store or corporate entity. Regardless, across both categories, the number of rainbow flags and use of the rainbow motif increased especially around the summer months (June, July, and August) in which Toronto holds pride celebrations. The “halo” effect of lingering flags and rainbow decorations seemed to slowly wane following this summer celebration period before being replaced by fall and winter holiday decorations. The pattern of increased display of rainbow flags leading up to, during, and immediately following pride was repeated year after year. However, the prevalence was significantly more hyperbolic in the unsteady cumulative increase neighborhoods and much more predictable in the steady cumulative increase neighborhoods, which suggests some degree of rainbow washing as the sharp increase in prevalence of rainbow flags is not matched by a likewise increase in persistence of flags over time.

The data in this observational study that suggests an explosion of rainbow motifs near pride month may suggest that outward display of rainbow motif around pride celebrations has become lucrative for local businesses. Each year more businesses participate than the year before. The unsteady cumulative increase group seems to be bolstered by businesses that commemorate the celebration of pride using the

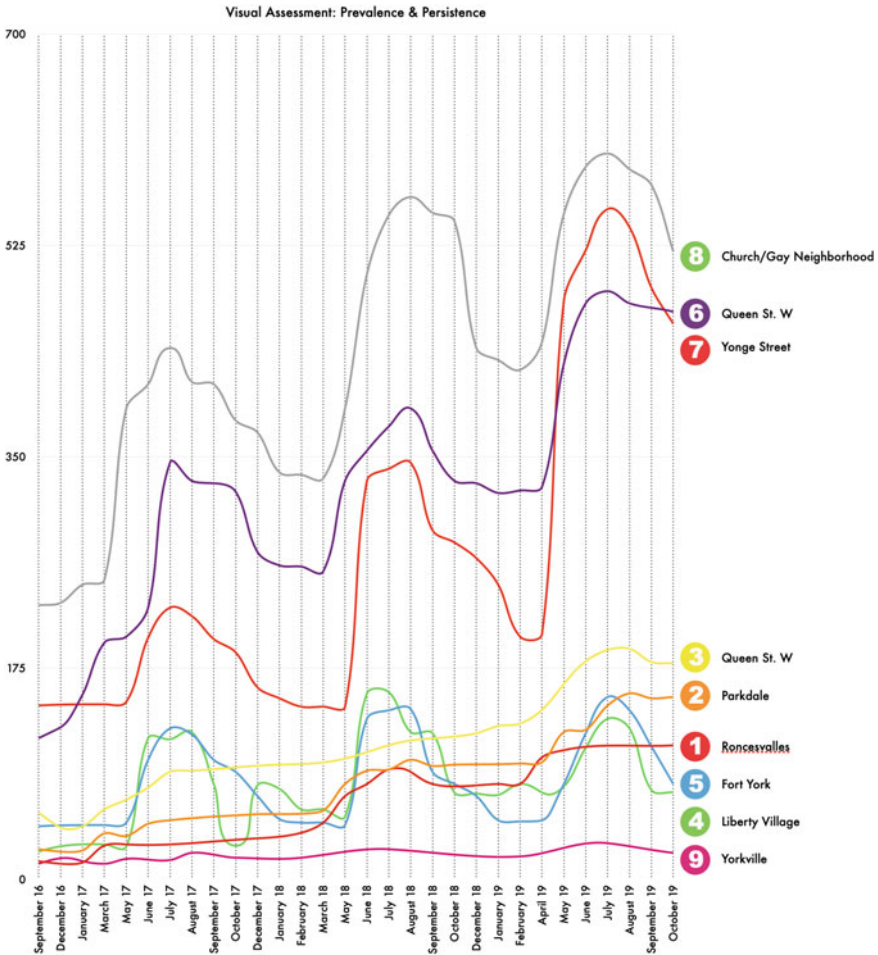


Fig. 5.6 Prevalence and persistence of rainbow flags/motifs across nine neighborhoods in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Numbers correspond to neighborhoods shown in Fig. 4 (Source Chart by author)

rainbow flag and motif. These businesses are likely encouraged by an increase in sales revenues when the rainbow flag is displayed, therefore the display is repeated again the following year, resulting in a cumulative overall increase. Other businesses seem to follow suit. The aggregate number of rainbow flags on display for this group increases steadily over time. This increase over time could be overt and intentional, or it could simply reflect remnant decorations that are forgotten or unintentionally left behind. Perhaps well-intended, the tattered remnants of forgotten examples may be a result of benign neglect, or may be evidence of a rainbow washing effort to support business foot traffic, more than an indication of genuine concern for LGBTQ+ inclusivity. For example, as the visual display of the rainbow motif diminishes in these neighborhoods, the rainbow flags and decorations are often replaced with decorations



Fig. 5.7 Examples of neighborhood and merchant participation in displaying the rainbow flag/motif (Source Images by author)

for other holidays like Halloween or Christmas. With this sort of use, the rainbow flag and motif become decorations used to celebrate a holiday in an inclusive manner, rather than a symbol of community acceptance, and this rainbow washing could eventually change the implicit message of the rainbow flag by diluting the coded meaning of the flag and its significance—safety and inclusion—to LGBTQ+ people.

Neighborhoods with steady cumulative increases, in contrast, do not appear to “bump” as much during summer pride months, but instead demonstrate a month-over-month increase in the numbers of rainbow flags on display. Across these neighborhoods, rainbow flags are displayed and then remain visible. Rainbow flags in these cases are not replaced or removed, but augmented by decorations for subsequent holidays. The aggregate increase over time in the display of rainbow flags seems to suggest increasing societal acceptance and a desire to denote support for LGBTQ+ individuals year round, rather than only during a specific festival or pride season (Hinrichs 2020).

5.8 Diaspora as Practical Identity

Neighborhood evolution occurs slowly over time, and neighborhoods are in a constant state of change (Hess 2019). Undoubtedly, the elements that constitute a gay neighborhood are complex and varied. It is impractical to account for an increase or decrease number of LGBTQ+ residents/visitors to a particular neighborhood (Frisch 2021; Spring 2021) and without reliable population and census data more careful longitudinal research is needed to determine whether or not this is indeed the case (Ornstein and McCaskell 2017). Therefore, other data must be examined to determine the degree to which a neighborhood can be classified as a “gay neighborhood.” One simple way to determine whether or not a neighborhood is welcoming to LGBTQ+ residents and visitors is the visual prevalence of the rainbow flag/motif. The degree to which the rainbow flag/motif is displayed, and the persistence of that display send a clear message of safety and inclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals. Prevalence and persistence can take the form of well-intended rainbow washing. In any case, the general direction indicates one toward greater acceptance and inclusion. Any increase in the concentration or persistence of rainbow flags is likely a positive forward trajectory for LGBTQ+ people.

Visible signs and changes are one way that neighborhood evolution becomes perceptible (Ghaziani 2021), especially when these signs reappear in concentration or persist with an increasing frequency. The binary descriptors of gay/straight are beginning to be replaced by multipolar—and inclusive—diversity. Because of this change, variants of the rainbow flag are used to denote specific constituencies encompassed by the LGBTQ+ umbrella, but also may reference groups not explicitly included by the LGBTQ+ acronym. As the gay/straight dichotomy becomes less relevant and as descriptors are replaced by an infinitely more inclusive and fluid gay/straight/queer/cis/metro/solo/non-cis/trans/fluid/+ ordinates, the dynamics of gay neighborhoods and the display of the rainbow flag and its variants will likely

change—and have changed—in response. These shifts do not imply that gay neighborhoods are waning or dying but signals a positive paradigmatic shift toward inclusivity that celebrates and recognizes everyone. Rainbow flags in and around gay neighborhoods will provide visual evidence—an “afterglow”—at the genesis points of inclusivity and acceptance (Coffin 2021).

As recently as twenty years ago, an increased concentration and persistence of rainbow flags—a nascent rainbow diaspora—would not have been as visually evident in urban districts outside of gay neighborhoods. For example, Roncesvalles, once an ethnic Polish neighborhood on the western edge of Toronto, had not been historically known as unusually inclusive, but is now a bustling urban village that is diverse as it is welcoming. The Roncesvalles neighborhood visually celebrates its Polish and other ethnic heritages along with a newfound celebration of inclusive LGBTQ+ diversity evident by the prevalence of rainbow flags and motif throughout the neighborhood. Similarly, most other neighborhoods assessed seem to be similarly evolving.

5.9 Rainbow Proliferation: Synthesis and Conclusions

The widespread proliferation of the rainbow flag/motif makes now an opportune moment to critically examine the display of the rainbow flag/motif in relation to demarcating place and as a potential visual indicator of the diffusion of LGBTQ+ individuals away from established gay neighborhoods. The scope of this visual assessment study is limited, but the proof of concept offered by the visual assessment method described in this chapter that tracks the display of the rainbow flag/motif which may help illustrate societal undercurrents and population movements or the change in broader cultural attitudes across urban space. More consistent and reliable census and ethnographic data is needed to adequately correlate the movement of LGBTQ+ individuals to the display of the rainbow flag in neighborhoods outside of historically defined gay neighborhoods.

This study also prompts new questions about the role of the rainbow flag in signaling safety and acceptance to a sexual minority group in a post-binary era, which may alter the inherent meaning—and importance—of the rainbow flag. While the prevalence and increasing use of the rainbow flag may signal greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in areas of a city outside of defined gay neighborhoods (Bitterman 2020a), increasing use may also indicate that the flag risks becoming “politically correct” window dressing—rainbow washing—and potentially less about pride and belonging. Placing the rainbow flag within a broader context of place branding can help to more clearly identify the symbolism of the flag as well as provide a structure to assess the proliferation and spread of the rainbow motif apart from the physical flag itself. Place branding provides one possible means to contextualize the meaning inherent (Bitterman 2008) in the concentration and persistence in display of the rainbow flag. These efforts will help to more clearly delineate between rainbow washing and the use of the flag as a meaningful signal to LGBTQ+ individuals. Careful future study and may also help to accurately predict

the long-term impacts of using the flag to define the limits of gay neighborhoods and to track the movement and settlement of LGBTQ+ individuals or LGBTQ-friendly areas across a particular city (Hess and Bitterman 2021).

5.10 Takeaway Messages

This visual assessment study produces five takeaway messages:

Takeaway Message 1: Concentration of rainbow flags indicates likely presence of LGBTQ+ individuals.

A visually discernible concentration of rainbow flags and rainbow motifs suggests perhaps greater populations of LGBTQ+ or LGBTQ-friendly individuals and implies perhaps a greater awareness and therefore acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals across a diverse urban environment. Conversely, the lack of visibility does not mean that there are no LGBTQ+ areas; but instead, means that planners must look more carefully at neighborhood patterns (Doan 2015). Over time, study and tracking use of the rainbow flag/motif will likely correlate with either population motility and/or an increasing integration of LGBTQ+ people into neighborhoods, in effect making these neighborhoods “more gay.”

Takeaway Message 2: Overall concentration of rainbow flag/motif increases around pride celebrations, which may imply rainbow washing.

Use of the rainbow flag/motif increases around the time of annual pride celebrations, which suggests a dilution of the meaning of the flag through well-intended—but nonetheless not fully authentic—rainbow washing. Display of the rainbow flag must certainly be beneficial to businesses, especially around pride celebrations. This relatively new use of rainbow decorations by large chain stores does not alone indicate any specific meaning, but is perhaps a strong indication that an increasing number of mainstream businesses and shops actively welcome LGBTQ+ customers.

Takeaway Message 3: Over time, use of the rainbow flag seems to be growing and persistent.

The persistence and semi-permanence of the rainbow flag and rainbow motif may suggest specific intention in the display of the flag as a deliberate choice. Some rainbow flags and rainbow motifs persist well beyond the pride celebrations that occurs annually during the mid-summer, and many of these lingering flags are prominently visible well through the winter holiday season. Persistence of the rainbow flag indicates potentially positive attributes for LGBTQ+ individuals and serves as a reminder that LGBTQ+ people “belong” year round and not only during pride celebrations. The most notable evidence to support this notion is simply that rainbow flags and other rainbow symbols are largely absent elsewhere in Toronto at the time of this study, reinforcing a common perception that outward symbols

of gay pride—such as the rainbow flag—“belong” to LGBTQ+ people and are used to identify gay or LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods.

Takeaway Message 4: Rainbow flag concentration and persistence may indicate gay neighborhoods that are focused on populations other than gay men.

Perhaps more than a symbol of gay neighborhoods that are fracturing and dispersing, the prevalence of the rainbow flag elsewhere in the city may indicate other LGBTQ-friendly neighborhoods that are focused on minority populations other than gay men. The rainbow flag could be a visual indicator that these communities are emerging with pride as enclaves for subgroups that are under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, but are not specifically “*gay neighborhoods*.”

Takeaway Message 5: Meaning associated with the rainbow flag is changing over time.

The rainbow flag and rainbow motif denote a broad spectrum of attitudes toward diversity and inclusion that is the cornerstone of gay pride, much as red hearts denote love near St. Valentine’s Day. However, the historical importance and meaning of rainbow symbols run deeper in that the rainbow flag—to LGBTQ+ individuals—is a coded representation of safe and welcoming space and suggests a vital sense of belonging. Widespread use of the rainbow flag may suggest on the positive side greater mainstream acceptance, tolerance, and equality, however, it may also erode the coded meaning of the rainbow flag through overuse or unintentional appropriation. Additionally, some non-LGBTQ+ individuals may even interpret the rainbow flag as a broader symbol of inclusion and diversity—social movements they want to support—and not so much as a marker or coded message of the gay civil rights movement. In other words, the original targeted meaning is now eclipsed by broader notions of inclusivity for everyone, not just LGBTQ+ people.

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Chapter 6

Wearing Pink in Fairy Town: The Heterosexualization of the Spanish Town Neighborhood and Carnival Parade in Baton Rouge



Amy L. Stone

Abstract The Spanish Town parade is currently the largest Carnival parade in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with hundreds of thousands of attendees dressed in pink costuming, cross-dressing, and wearing pink flamingo paraphernalia. This chapter traces the queer origins of the Spanish Town parade to the racially integrated bohemian gayborhood of Spanish Town in the 1980s. Using interviews, archival research, and participant observation, I argue that current LGBTQ residents of Baton Rouge, even those who have never lived in Spanish Town, claim a vicarious citizenship to the neighborhood and parade through an understanding of the queer origins of the parade in the 1980s and the parade's beginning in a gayborhood. This vicarious citizenship is tempered by the heterosexualization of the contemporary Spanish Town parade. Although LGBTQ residents still attend the parade in large numbers, there is more ambivalence about the homophobic imagery in the parade and the consumption of gay culture by heterosexual parade participants.

Keywords Spanishtown · Baton Rouge · Carnival · Pride parade

6.1 Introduction

Spanish Town, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is a small neighborhood built in 1805 by Canary Islanders who had moved from Spanish-ruled Galvez Town (Isch 2016). The Spanish Town neighborhood is not now nor has it ever been an ethnic urban enclave and it has had a complex history of racial segregation and integration. During the 1980s, the Spanish Town neighborhood developed a reputation as a bohemian neighborhood and gayborhood and began staging a neighborhood Mardi Gras parade. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people were visible in the neighborhood and parade during this time, with the most visible participation being from white gay men. The Spanish Town parade is now the largest Carnival parade in Baton Rouge, with hundreds of thousands of attendees

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dressing in pink costuming, cross-dressing, and wearing pink flamingo paraphernalia. In the 2010s, the event has retained some of its queer cultural influence, even as it is predominately organized by white heterosexual men.

This chapter traces the queer origins of the Spanish Town parade to the racially integrated bohemian gayborhood of Spanish Town in the 1980s. Although there are competing accounts of how the parade began, many LGBTQ residents of Baton Rouge describe a narrative of the parade as being started by drag queens in a gayborhood. I argue that current LGBTQ residents of Baton Rouge, even those who have never lived in Spanish Town, claim a vicarious citizenship in the neighborhood and parade through an understanding of the queer origins of the parade in the 1980s and the parade's beginning in a gayborhood. Greene (2014) has defined vicarious citizenship as "the exercise of rights and entitlements to community participation emanating from extra-neighborhood, symbolic ties to a neighborhood or locality" (99). This vicarious citizenship is tempered by the heterosexualization of the contemporary Spanish Town parade. Although LGBTQ residents still attend the parade in large numbers, there is more ambivalence about the homophobic imagery in the parade and the consumption of gay culture by heterosexual parade participants.

6.2 Consuming Gay Culture

The heterosexualization of the parade and neighborhood is related to the larger processes of historic preservation and second-wave gentrification in the neighborhood, along with tourism and the growing popularity of the parade, the largest Mardi Gras parade in Baton Rouge. The heterosexualization of previously gay-focused events and spaces is connected to a long history of heterosexuals consuming gay culture as a spectacle. This consumption focuses on the aspects of gay culture most easily consumed by heterosexual audiences such as aesthetics, camp, and drag (Stone 2016).

Many scholars study the way the culture of marginalized groups is commodified or viewed as a spectacle (Crary 2001; Debord 2012; Wetherell et al. 2001). In *Gay New York*, historian Chauncey (1994) describes the way neighborhoods like the Bowery and Harlem were a spectacle that white, middle-class observers would derive pleasure from visiting. Visitors can engage in "slumming it," temporarily participating in cultural events sponsored by marginalized groups without said visitors challenging their own ideas about that culture. Some festival attendees may still be "tourists" visiting "gay Disneyland," as part of a long history of heterosexuals consuming the experience of being in gay spaces, particularly gay bar spaces (Heap 2008; Orne 2017). Throughout his work, *Boystown*, Orne (2017) describes how straight women participating in gay spaces disrupts the sexual energy and culture of these spaces, and gay men often resent the intrusion of these women. In more ambiguous gay spaces like temporary festival spaces, these processes of slumming it or being a tourist may be more obscure. In these temporary spaces "the deliberate consumption of queerness" is complex in places "where queerness is performed and visible but where

it is not always evident who is the consumer and who is the consumed, and where the consumer regulates production in ways that are difficult to discern” (Rushbrook 2002: 198).

Conversely, participation in LGBTQ events by heterosexual participants may increase a sense of community for all participants. Sociologists have long observed that when people come together to enjoy something—whether that be a religious ritual, holiday, or festival—it creates a sense of community (Delanty et al. 2011). Browne articulates that “where celebration moves to imagined connections between individuals, there is a sense of collective partying” (Browne 2007: 75). Collective partying may be a “cultural bridging practice” that temporarily brings together diverse individuals for a common purpose (Braunstein et al. 2014). For example, these LGBTQ events with broad heterosexual attendance may also be a temporary reprieve from heteronormativity for participants and a challenges to internal homophobia or transphobia. Heterosexual participants, in studies of drag show and talk show viewers, often interrogate and challenge their own understandings of gender and sexuality (Gamson 1998; Rupp and Taylor 2015).

6.3 Baton Rouge Mardi Gras and the Spanish Town Parade

A common misconception about Mardi Gras is that the festival is a long weekend of debauchery celebrated in New Orleans in which drunk college students display their breasts to get beads and trinkets during parades. Mardi Gras is celebrated all along the Gulf Coast, from Galveston, Texas, to Pensacola, Florida, in both cities and rural areas. The festival is a season—the Carnival season—that runs from the day of Epiphany in January to Fat Tuesday or the beginning of Lent, which is typically in early March. Compared to the extravagant tourist spectacle and traditions of New Orleans Mardi Gras celebrations, Baton Rouge Mardi Gras parades and balls have always been considerably smaller in size. A network of private organizations called *krewe*s run parades and host private balls that are a central part of the local residents’ celebrations of the event. The ritual disrobement (or “boobs for beads”) in the French Quarter of New Orleans is the exception rather than the rule for Carnival parades, most of which prohibit such nudity. Most *krewe* members who ride in parades throw beads, candy, and toys to all attendees—children and adults.

Baton Rouge has a limited history of parading, and none of the parades reach the scale of the popular New Orleans Carnival parades. Few *krewe*s regularly paraded in the city of Baton Rouge until after World War II (Costello 2017). The Spanish Town parade began in 1981 and has since grown into the largest parade in the city. The Society for the Preservation of Lagniappe in Louisiana (SPLL) was founded in the 1980s to organize the parade and, later, the Spanish Town Ball. The parade grew so quickly that in 1985 it was protested against by Jimmy Swaggart and his ministry for questionable material (Hall 2016).

From the beginning, the parade themes emphasized the bohemian and tacky style of the parade. The 1982 parade theme was “Everyman a King”, which was both a

play on Huey P. Long's slogan for governor in the 1930s and on the ritual inversion of Carnival, in which the peasant becomes "king for the day." The most infamous theme was "Poor Taste is Better Than No Taste At All" in 1986, the same year that the plastic pink flamingo was adopted as the symbol of the parade. This theme became the kitschy placemaking narrative of the neighborhood, as residents embraced the tackiness of pink flamingo decorations on their lawns (Donlon, n.d.). One interviewee in this study who had lived in the neighborhood for several decades stressed that the flamingo became the symbol of the parade because gay Spanish Town residents often put them in their front yards.

The Spanish Town parade is definitely the largest Carnival parade in Baton Rouge history. In the 2010s, newspapers consistently report that over 150,000 attendees each year crowd the streets in and around the Spanish Town neighborhood to watch floats and walking krewes depicting political and social satire. Each float or walking krewe is organized by a "krewe," a term for private organizations that stage Mardi Gras parades and balls (Kinser 1990). These krewes are typically small groups of ten to twenty friends in the Spanish Town parade, with comical names like Krewe of Konfusion, Krewe of Damnifineaux, BeignYAYS, S'Krewe U, and Krewe of Mixed Nutz. Someone in the group has access to a truck and flat-bed trailer, which is lavishly decorated with flashy, tacky decor. Krewes throw traditional Mardi Gras beads and doubloons to the crowd, along with t-shirts, stuffed animals, candy, and items of dubious value, such as slices of day-old bread, CDs, and beer bottle tops. The entire parade is coordinated by SPLL, which is part of a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation that has donated over \$500,000 to local charities (Hall 2016).

6.4 Methods

The data in this chapter comes from multiple sources. First, studying the Spanish Town parades was one component of a five-year four-city comparative study of LGBTQ involvement in urban festivals of the South and Southwest, focusing on LGBTQ belonging and cultural citizenship in these four cities. Mardi Gras in Baton Rouge and Mobile, Alabama, were the two sites in which I studied LGBTQ Carnival history and current events. All data collection—including interviews and participant observation research—was approved by the Trinity University Institutional Review Board. In Baton Rouge, I attended multiple Carnival masque balls, parades, and other events, along with Carnival museum exhibits, archives, and academic presentations. Elsewhere I have written about the Krewe of Apollo of Baton Rouge, a Mardi Gras krewe run by gay men who put on an annual Carnival ball that over one thousand people attend (Stone, forthcoming).

Most of the research for this chapter comes from my data collection at the Spanish Town events, where I examined both contemporary practices of the parade and asked participants questions about the history of the parade and the Spanish Town neighborhood. I attended the Spanish Town parade twice (2014 and 2016). At each parade I arrived early and walked along the hundreds of floats as they were being queued up

before the parade. I took thousands of pictures of the content on the floats, chatted with float riders, collected ephemera, and took tours of a few floats. During the parade, I experienced the procession from multiple vantage points, including the exclusive judges' platform and the informal "gay area" and "family area" of the parade. I talked extensively with dozens of parade attendees about why they were at the parade, how often they came, and what they enjoyed. I met up with members of the Krewe of Apollo and attended house parties in the homes of gay men who lived in the neighborhood. These activities allowed me to understand the nuances and complexity of a large event like the Spanish Town parade. I also attended the Spanish Town Ball (2015), and a meeting with Spanish Town organizers while they painted the flamingo cut-outs for the annual "flocking" (the placement of pink wooden flamingos in a Baton Rouge lake).

This participant observation work was triangulated with interviews and archival research that I conducted in the summer, outside of Carnival season. These interviews provided important history and context for Spanish Town events. As part of my broader study on Baton Rouge Mardi Gras, I formally interviewed 21 Baton Rouge residents involved in local Mardi Gras events, three of whom were involved as organizers of early Spanish Town events. Almost all LGBTQ interviewees attended or participated in Spanish Town events in some way. We informally interviewed dozens of Spanish Town Parade and Ball participants. My research assistant and I spent an evening having dinner with one Spanish Town krewe of lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women, and we informally interviewed members of several other krewes during Spanish Town events. I also incidentally interviewed a group of white gay men in Mobile, Alabama, who annually drive to Baton Rouge to be part of a Spanish Town parade krewe. These interviews, which provided insight into the perceptions and experiences of the Spanish Town parade, were supplemented with historical research on the origins of the parade.

We collected archival information on Spanish Town from the Baton Rouge Public Library Archives and the Louisiana State University archives. The LSU archives included surveys of the Spanish Town neighborhood in the 1980s by architecture student Thomas Chandler.

Below, I use Chandler's study to illustrate the development of the Spanish Town neighborhood as a bohemian gayborhood in the 1980s and the origins of the Spanish Town Parade during this time (see Fig. 6.1). Then, I compare the origins of the parade with ethnographic impressions during the 2010s.

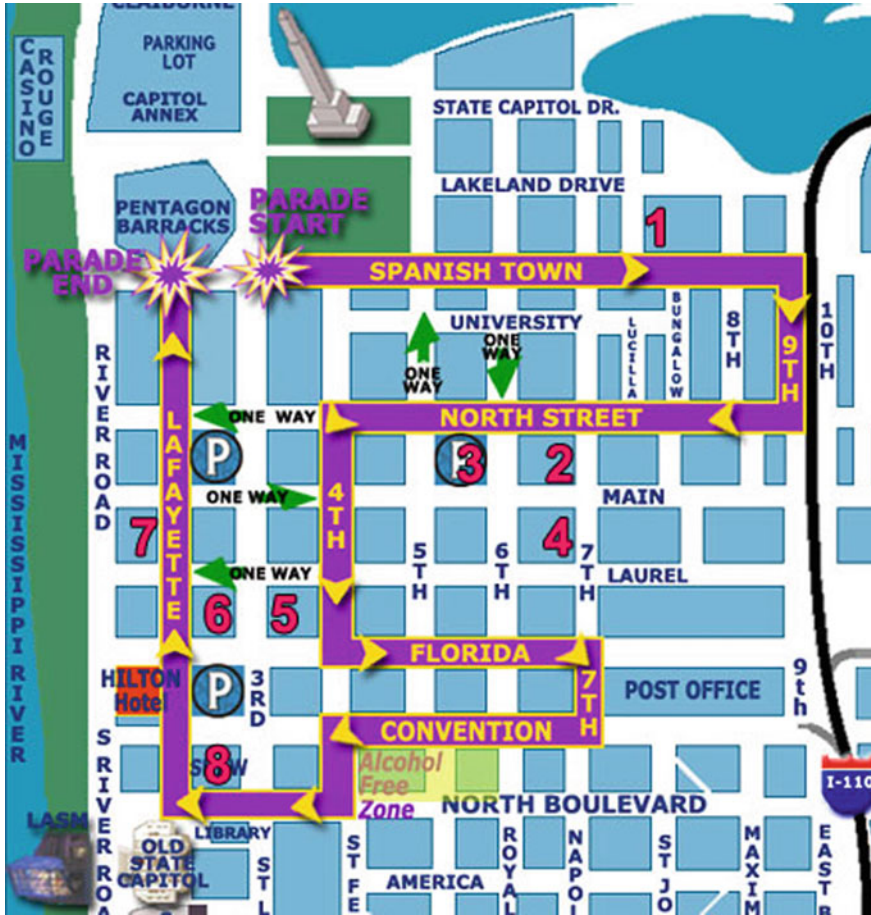


Fig. 6.1 Map of Spanish Town parade

6.5 The Bohemian 1980s in Spanish Town

The Spanish Town neighborhood has a complex history of racial segregation and integration as it developed into a bohemian gayborhood. After Spanish Town was razed by Union forces in the Civil War, formerly enslaved Black residents lived in the neighborhood until it was gentrified in the 1930s by white students and staff of the newly built Louisiana State University (LSU) campus nearby. Catholic families moved into the neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1957, the federal government constructed an interstate highway that ran through Baton Rouge and bisected the Spanish Town neighborhood. The plummeting oil market and white flight related to school desegregation emptied out Spanish Town in the 1970s (Hall 2016). It was in the 1970s and 1980s that Spanish Town developed a bohemian reputation, a “healthy

wild streak” as gay men flocked to the neighborhood (Hall 2016). One white senior citizen man who we interviewed described the residents of the neighborhood in the 1970s and 1980s as, in his words, “fruits without money” (in contrast to what he described as the “fruits with money” who live in the neighborhood now).

The work of Chandler (1985) set the groundwork for understanding the 1980s in the Spanish Town neighborhood. Completed in 1985, his study surveyed residents of the Spanish Town neighborhood about their sense of neighborhood as place, along with interviewing select residents in depth about their homes and neighborhoods. All of the surveys were archived at Louisiana State University, and the interviews were described in detail in his master’s thesis. The surveys and interviews provide insight into how residents of Spanish Town in the early 1980s understood their neighborhood, along with signs of how the neighborhood had changed into a bohemian gayborhood. Below, I use responses to this survey to capture the feel of the Spanish Town neighborhood in the 1980s.

Many residents described the neighborhood as eclectic and diverse in their surveys. White married couple Paula and George described their first Mardi Gras in Spanish Town. This couple described the bohemian feel of the Baton Rouge, Louisiana, neighborhood of Spanish Town in the early 1980s, including groups affiliated with the Spanish Town Parade (the Merry Minstrels and The Sluts of ’84 who dressed in drag). After moving to the neighborhood a month earlier, they invited a few neighbors over for the parade and their small gathering turned into a large house party:

By the end of the day, we had everybody; I mean we had heterosexuals, homosexuals, drag queens, blacks, whites, people we had never seen before. The Merry Minstrels, The Sluts of ’84, people in ape suits, Superman, dope smokers out on the back balcony... We had a really wonderful time, and even though we didn’t know any of these people—and some of them looked pretty shady—everyone was so well behaved. There was not a mar or a scratch anywhere. We had a great time. (Chandler 1985: 47–48)

Costuming is common during parades, so people in ape suits, drag, and dressed as Superman mingled with each other. Like many other residents, Paula emphasized the ways that everyone got along despite their diversity.

One of the most common themes in these surveys was describing the Spanish Town neighborhood as tolerant in a distinctly bohemian or counter-cultural way. One young white woman who lived in Spanish Town with her young husband and baby described Spanish Town as “a neighborhood. It is not a subdivision with people buying starter homes or whatever. People speak to each other on the street and tourists get lost here regularly” (Chandler 1985: 67). One interviewee of Chandler’s project described that the counterculture had been much stronger in the Spanish Town neighborhood in the 1970s and had kind of quieted down since then, but another Spanish Town resident wrote on their survey that the neighborhood “possesses more people (than other areas) who still live in a counter-culture type reality—therefore there’s much more tolerance, like color” (Chandler 1985: 84). One young single white woman wrote that “Spanish Town is unique! Just on my block, the consistency is: Black, senior citizens, young couples, young singles, students and people like me, not to forget the gays. The amazing thing is that everyone lives and accepts each other” (Chandler 1985: 139). These descriptions of the counterculture in Spanish Town

parallel understandings of bohemian laxity and openness to diversity in other American neighborhoods like Greenwich Village, which had a reputation for tolerating non-conformity, eccentricity, and “artistic types” (Chauncey 1994: 229).

Like Greenwich Village, the tolerance for racial diversity was relative to a history of racial segregation in Baton Rouge and the neighborhood itself and may have been limited. Baton Rouge was the site of the first successful bus boycotts in the 1950s, the model for future civil rights boycotts in Montgomery and Tallahassee (Sinclair 1998), but it is currently one of the most racially segregated cities in the South (Yee 2015). The neighborhood had gone through a history of being a predominately Spanish Canary Islander neighborhood, a battleground for the Civil War, a predominately Black neighborhood, a gentrified white professional and Catholic family neighborhood, an abandoned neighborhood, and then a racially integrated bohemian neighborhood. Black residents of Spanish Town in the 1980s may have been aware that they were living in a neighborhood that at one time had been a predominately Black neighborhood. One Black resident of Spanish Town recalled that before the building of LSU in 1936 a local road used to be called “Slocum Alley” before it was called University Walk and that Black doctors and professors lived in the neighborhood. The racial integration of Spanish Town neighborhood was a conflictual process, as many survey respondents described white flight out of the neighborhood. One single white elderly woman who had lived in the neighborhood for 64 years wrote that “When they started renting to the Negroes, some white folks moved out” (Chandler 1985: 103). When the interstate was built through Spanish Town, some survey respondents referenced that the small section of the Spanish Town neighborhood across the interstate had a larger number of Black residents. Additionally, like Greenwich Village, Spanish Town may not have been a safe haven for Black gay men and women. In Chandler’s surveys, few survey respondents reported that Black gay men and women were visible in the neighborhood.

Chandler’s surveys also provide insight into understanding Spanish Town as a gayborhood—a neighborhood with a strong visible presence of gay men and lesbian women that are often developed out of economically depressed or racially diverse areas of the city (Ghaziani 2015; Hunter 2015; Knopp 1997; Madden and Ruther 2015). In Greenwich Village, the ways that bohemians had forsaken social roles deemed appropriate for their class and gender often led to them being labeled sexually nonconforming, and gay people “used the openings created by bohemian culture to expand their public presence” (Chauncey 1994: 235). This bohemian neighborhood was the only legible gayborhood in the city of Baton Rouge in the 1980s. Several older interviewees told me that nicknames for the neighborhood in the 1980s, such as “Fairy Town” and “Fairy Ville”, gestured toward the visibility of white gay men in the neighborhood, particularly with the use of “fairy” imagery (Chauncey 1994).

Many survey respondents reported on the presence of gay men in the neighborhood as more common in the 1980s than in previous decades. Gay men were connected in these accounts to the gentrification and development of historical conservation in the neighborhood, which is consistent with a history of gay men as historic preservationists (Fellows 2005). Neighborhood resident Gill described in his interview with Chandler that future changes in Spanish Town centered on a growing gay community:

I think the homosexual element is going to stay big. There's really no better place for them to go. This is established, it's quiet, they're accepted, and there are a lot of 'em. I don't think they create the kind of up-tightness in the old people that we did ten years ago...the gay people interact with the older people and help them cut their lawns and do a little landscaping for them. A lot of the landlords love 'em because when they move into a place it can be shambles, and then when they move out it's beautiful. (Chandler 1985: 85)

Gill's narrative of gay residents in the neighborhood used images of gay men, particularly white gay men, as beautifying neighborhoods through renovation and historical restoration. Their role in beautifying houses that are "shambles" is a key role that gay men play in urban gentrification and the creation of areas of historical preservation (Brink 2011; Ghaziani 2015; Hunter 2015; Knopp 1997; Lauria and Knopp 1985; Madden and Ruther 2015). Gill's tone—referring to the "homosexual element" and using mild othering language—also suggests that like racial integration of Spanish Town, the influx of gay men into the neighborhood did not erase histories of homophobic attitudes in the neighborhood.

A few of Chandler's surveys and interviews hint at the presence of lesbian women in the Spanish Town neighborhood as well. Chandler's detailed interviews included insights from women who identified as gay in the Spanish Town neighborhood. Shannon, a 30-year-old white divorced woman, wrote in "gay" in the survey as a response to a question about race, gender, and marital status. Shannon lamented that the neighborhood is "zoned in such a manner so that we cannot vote as a whole community. Thus our strength is diminished on certain issues that effect [sic] our community" (Chandler 1985: 91). This survey comment suggests that there was some solidarity within the neighborhood—possibly based on sexual orientation—but also an inability to turn that solidarity into political action.

Spanish Town used to be a big drug area. Then I think it turned into a big gay area, but I don't think that's so true anymore. I know there are a lot of gays here, but I wouldn't call this a gay garden by any means. There have been a lot of couples and straight people move in. I didn't move here just because I'm gay; I moved here because I love the neighborhood. Gay people are so transient.... Of the people who stay here awhile, maybe ten to twenty percent are gay; it's really hard to say. On this street, I would say about fifty percent of the people are gay. If there is a lesbian district in Spanish Town, it would probably be around this street. (Chandler 1985: 94)

Shannon lives in a section of Spanish Town that she described as "about fifty percent" gay or a "lesbian district" but not a "gay garden." Yet she also reported that this gay population is transient, possibly renters like many of the neighborhood residents. However, Shannon's interview provides insight to the presence of lesbian or queer women, a potential "lesbian district" on her street in the neighborhood. Lesbian and queer women territorialize space differently and rarely form distinct urban neighborhoods (Brown-Saracino 2019; Gieseking 2013, 2016; Moore 2015). For example, Japonica Brown-Saracino (2019) argues that queer women may be more likely to use diverse urban spaces, such as hair salons, coffee houses, and book stores, than gay bars. Lesbians and queer women may not have the economic power and flexibility to buy houses in gayborhoods (Moore 2015), and also are more likely to live in rural

areas or small towns than gay men (Brown-Saracino 2019). So, the presence of a “lesbian district” in Spanish Town is noteworthy.

The culture of this neighborhood was a staging ground for the development of a wild Mardi Gras parade. The bohemian enthusiasm for eccentricity, artistry, and diversity coupled with the presence of young white gay men and lesbian women contributed to the grassroots development of a neighborhood parade that came out of this neighborhood solidarity.

6.6 Spanish Town Parades as Part of Gay Cultural History in Baton Rouge

I was walking through the Spanish Town Ball in 2015, a convention center packed with hundreds of krewe members in pink clothing dancing to live music, drinking, and displaying outrageous table decorations including huge light-up penises. I recognized one of my connections from the Krewe of Apollo, a tall white gay man named Chris dressed in a pink tutu and went over to say hello. Chris threw shade at my clothing selection—a sports coat with pink stripes and neon green pants—as being too formal and gestured to his own outfit as a better demonstration of what to wear. “This is like a block party, but inside and for everyone,” he told me. He mentioned that his aunt is here, along with several cousins, because they ride in krewe floats during the parade. I complained briefly that this ball feels so much *straighter* than the Krewe of Apollo Ball, reflecting my own feelings of discomfort with the décor that seemed to resemble heterosexual bachelor and bachelorette partying with the predominance of penis imagery. Chris grabbed me by the arm to pull me closer in a moment of queer solidarity. “Make no mistake,” he said into my ear, “*We started all of this.*” Chris asserted in this moment that although the Spanish Town Ball and Parade was now heavily influenced by heterosexual participants and culture, the parade had been started by members of the LGBTQ community. By bringing me into his declarative “we”, Chris argued that not only gay men but also people like myself—someone he understood to be a lesbian or queer woman—were involved in creating these events. Although Chris has never lived in the Spanish Town neighborhood and was a child when the Spanish Town Parade started, he asserted vicarious citizenship over the neighborhood and parade. Chris’s symbolic ties to the Spanish Town neighborhood through his gay identity contributed to his feelings of ownership and pride over the start of the major Mardi Gras event.

Throughout my interviews and fieldnotes, I often heard LGBTQ people in Baton Rouge describe the Spanish Town Parade as an event with queer origins that came out of an established gayborhood. There is not a clear documented history of the start of the Spanish Town Parade, and multiple competing narratives exist about how the first parade began. Two of these narratives position the origins of the parade within a history of racial integration and contestation within the neighborhood. One white heterosexual male interviewee and Spanish Town resident has loudly claimed that he

and a friend started the parade in the early 1980s by paying a few young Black boys to parade around the neighborhood and pound on cardboard boxes for the two years before the official start of the Spanish Town parade. When the boys did not reappear after the second year, he got his flat-bed trailer and towed it around the neighborhood instead. Other interviewees described that the parade was planned by two “very creative” white men in the neighborhood, one of whom was an anthropologist. Second line parades are walking parades (e.g., without floats) that are part of the Black Carnival tradition (Barrios 2010; Stillman and Villmoare 2010). These two men purportedly watched videos of second line parades in New Orleans to get inspiration for the Spanish Town parade. They made up the name of SPLL in order to apply for a parade permit. One male interviewee stressed with a positive and respectful tone how “very creative” these men were in a manner that may have been signaling their sexual orientation. These two narratives—that the parade was started by two white men paying Black boys or by two white men culturally appropriating Black Carnival traditions—position white men in the neighborhood as starting the parade tradition by using Black artistry, labor, and cultural traditions.

The most common story from White and Black LGBTQ Baton Rouge residents was that the parade was part of a gay cultural tradition. The Spanish Town Parade came to my attention that second day I was doing research in Baton Rouge, when I attended a local Pride festival. I walked among the tables of organizations, chatting with people at each table about the Baton Rouge LGBTQ community and Mardi Gras. While speaking with a young Black lesbian woman who helps run a local group for young Black LGBTQ women, she asserted that she was most likely to attend the Spanish Town Parade or the “pink flamingo parade” to support their friends who ride floats in the parade because it was “our parade.” In a phone interview with a white older lesbian who lived in Spanish Town and who I spotted at almost every Baton Rouge Mardi Gras event I attended, she exclaimed that “make no mistake, that parade was started by drag queens in a pickup truck.” Many other interviewees and informants mentioned the presence of drag and drag queens in the parade as an important part of the gay cultural history of the event.

Other studies of the Spanish Town Parade reference the presence of drag queens at the early parades in the neighborhood. In an interview with a Spanish Town resident who recalled the 1981 parade, “I looked out my apartment window [in Spanish Town] because I heard some music. A couple of drag queens and maybe two vehicles went by [on the street]. I remember thinking what the hell was that?” (Bowman et al. 2007: 299). Many interviewees and informants who went to the 1980s Spanish Town parades referenced the visibility of drag queens, including the walking krewe “The Sluts of ’84,” during those years. In a magazine interview, a longtime Spanish Town resident waxed nostalgic about the drag queens in the 1980s parades:

Then there were the drag queens; they would show up in, like, black leather and spiked heels, full beards. And we thought they were great, but they dropped out around ‘86 or something. *The Advocate* [the Los Angeles-based gay magazine, not the Baton Rouge newspaper] felt that the parade was getting way too heterosexual for them. (Hall 2016)

Some informants described these drag queens as not residents of the neighborhood, rather they lived “who knows where” and joined in the parade every year. The description of these queens—with black leather, spiked heels, and full beards—captures an erotic, amateur style of drag, as professional drag queens rarely sport full beards.

The visibility of drag queens in the 1980s was remarkable for several reasons. First, in the 1980s, drag queens had not yet become familiar to mainstream heterosexual audiences on shows such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. Drag queens were probably only familiar to attendees of gay bars. Second, the visibility of drag queens in this Baton Rouge Mardi Gras parade parallels similar efforts in the 1980s in two other cities with Carnival: New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro. Only a few scholars have documented gay men’s involvement in city-wide Mardi Gras events, and the only two cities with any information on them are New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro. In both of these cities in the 1970s and 1980s, gay men asserted their right to cross-dress and perform drag during Carnival events, often in defiance of municipal or statewide laws against cross-dressing (Carey 2006; Green 1999; Smith 2017). Drag played a symbolic role in the fight for public space and visibility for the gay community in these cities.

Third, drag queens became the symbol of gay visibility in the parade, regardless of whether or not the queens in question were residents of the neighborhood, rather than the mostly white gay neighborhood residents who were associated with gentrification and neighborhood beautification. Like my informant Chris from the Krewe of Apollo, these drag queens from outside the neighborhood may have been claiming a vicarious citizenship to the one visible gayborhood in Baton Rouge by showing up and being visible in the parade every year.

By marking LGBTQ community members as the originators of the parade, informants could also emphasize the cultural and social contributions of the LGBTQ community to Baton Rouge history. This unified community contribution may be part of establishing cultural citizenship and recognition (Lamont 2018; Rosaldo 1994; Stone 2016) or the right to be both different and respected. Drag definitely represents the ways that LGBTQ culture is different; gay respectability politics embraces neighborhood beautification and restoration more than drag, which is associated with gender non-conformity and queer radicalism.

Additionally, narratives of “we started this” may be emphasized by LGBTQ informants, because the queer origins of the Spanish Town parade are not as obvious anymore. In the magazine interview above, the Spanish Town resident decried the end of drag queen participation due to the parade getting “way too heterosexual.” LGBTQ Baton Rouge residents attend the Spanish Town parade and also may claim vicarious citizenship over the origins of the parade. Many informants also described the parade as run by heterosexual men who don’t live in the Spanish Town neighborhood, along with the parade being homophobic and transphobic at times.

6.7 Homophobia and Queer Culture in the Contemporary Parade

In 2014, the first year I went to the Spanish Town Parade the theme was “Flamingo Dynasty”, a play on the *Duck Dynasty* reality show set in Northern Louisiana and the controversy over homophobia in the show. A few weeks before the parade, I met the organizing committee members while helping them paint large wooden cut-outs of flamingoes bright pink for the annual “flocking” event of attaching the cut-outs of the flamingos to posts in a Baton Rouge lake. Baton Rouge Carnival had a tradition of people swimming out to steal the cut-outs and display the flamingos in their houses or yards. I was surprised at the time that all the Spanish Town organizers there were white men who were presumably heterosexual in demeanor and self-presentation. They answered my questions about the parade as a fundraiser and how to best approach conducting research at the parade. Chuck, a white man in his sixties who managed the fundraising for the group, flirted with me carelessly, even though I had been straight forward that I was a queer person studying LGBTQ involvement in the parade. He slipped me a t-shirt from last year’s parade that his krewe had made, remarking that he usually made girls show him their boobs for a t-shirt but winked as he told me that he would let it pass this time. Chuck outlined the spirit and intention of the parade: to raise money for charity, to have a good time, and to have adult-oriented fun. “Children already have Disneyland,” he remarked. “Not everything has to be for children.” Although children attend the parade, the adult-oriented ethos of the event evoked queer political resistance to children, family, and respectability (Edelman 2004). He confided in me that there was a section of the parade route without alcohol but also an area in the heart of the Spanish Town neighborhood where “boobs for beads” ritual disrobement was permitted. There’s a little bit of something for everyone at Spanish Town, and there is also something to insult everyone. The Spanish Town Parade is diverse politically and sexually, an ethos that was reflected in many interviews and conversations I had throughout my fieldwork in Spanish Town.

Yet my interactions with heterosexual organizers of the parade reflect a combination of heteronormativity and participation in queer culture. Jones, a white man in his forties with a bushy beard, regaled me with stories about his costuming and cross-dressing for the event. Traditionally, attendees and parading krewes wear hot pink accessories and clothing, along with flamingo-related gear. Jones commented that he had laid out all his pink clothing and realized he had more pink clothes than “a 10-year-old girl.” He told stories about what he described as “bad cross-dressing by straight men” at the parade and ball. The drag he described reminded me of cross-dressing that is done in fraternity hazing rituals and fundraisers. In my notes on the aesthetic of parade goers, I underlined in bold how often I saw “white middle-aged women in ponytails with pink tutus”, “bad white frat-boy drag”, and “white older men in pink shirts that said ‘This is Your Girlfriend’s Shirt.’” In her work on Pride parades, Katherine Bruce writes about heterosexual attendees of these parades; that

the parades allow even heterosexual attendees an opportunity to flaunt heteronormativity and that “they too challenge this code in the world while at the same time enjoying a rare break from its restrictions” (Bruce 2016: 186). My first impression is that the Spanish Town Parade is an opportunity for everyone to wear pink and be a little wild, embracing the bohemian spirit of the earlier days of the Spanish Town parade.

Touring the Spanish Town floats before the parade, I noticed that the floats included political and social commentary and often scathing satire that was both supportive and critical of *Duck Dynasty*. There was just as much homophobic commentary as there was LGBTQ-supportive commentary. Many floats supported the homophobic attitudes expressed on *Duck Dynasty*. These floats were dressed up for duck hunting, covered in camouflage, netting, and palm fronds, and exclaimed statements like “It’s just my opinion!”, in support of *Duck Dynasty* patriarch Phil Robertson’s anti-gay sentiments that led to the discontinuation of the show. Other floats were more blatantly homophobic, showing the patriarch with a duck call in his mouth stating “The Only Thing a Man Should Blow is a Duck Call” (Fig. 6.2). Many more floats mocked the homophobic attitude of Robertson. Over a dozen floats positioned Robertson as a gay man, a drag queen, or having sex with a male flamingo (Fig. 6.3). One float titled itself Flamingo(phobic) Dynasty and satirized well-known homophobic politicians’ statements by replacing their references to gay men to be ones about flamingos (Fig. 6.4). I remembered interviewing two LGBTQ members of Baton Rouge community—an older white lesbian and a young white transgender man—who abhorred the parade, suggesting it offered up LGBTQ culture as something to be mocked and allowed straight people to consume gay culture.

Walking through the parade floats, I was immediately aware of the limitations of the Spanish Town Parade diversity; almost all the floats were occupied by all-white krewes. Less than five krewes had Black participants on their floats and these floats had exclusively Black participants. This kind of racial segregation in Carnival krewes is startlingly common (Gill 1997), but I was surprised to see how dramatic krewes segregation was at an event so frequently described as bohemian and diverse.

Several informants described both the parade and the Spanish Town Ball to me as “everyone having their own party next to each other.” The Spanish Town Parade has grown and changed significantly since its start as a small gayborhood parade. The parade has become a large community event. From my vantage point on the lofty judges’ platform during one parade, I took a shot of the crowd, a sea of tens of thousands of people wearing pink crammed in the narrow streets of the Spanish Town neighborhood (Fig. 6.5). Walking through the streets of the parade while it took place, I wandered through blocks of families having a barbeque out on the street with their kids, corners that were mostly Black parents with young children, a block of mostly white teenagers making out, and a quiet block that included a large group of white queer senior women. One area in the heart of the Spanish Town neighborhood was blatantly queer, with drag queens, butch lesbians, and other queer partiers celebrating together. I wandered in and out of house parties being thrown by neighborhood residents. I could not decide whether this collective partying furthered or lessened the queer visibility of the parade.



Fig. 6.2 Spanish Town float about Duck Dynasty patriarch (*Source* Image by author)

The queer politics of the parade at times seems celebratory and at other times seems a project consumed by heterosexual participants. Elements of the queer origins of the parade are evident in the current event, particularly its anti-family sentiment, cross-dressing, flexibility, and diversity. The continuing ethos of “bad taste” at the event reflects its bohemian origins. Other scholars have suggested that longtime



Fig. 6.3 Spanish Town float (*Source* Image by author)

parade organizers and participants “argue that the high exposure [of the parade] has sapped the parade of its queer politics” (Bowman et al. 2007: 300). Throughout my fieldnotes I did note the consumption of queer culture and fashion by parade attendees, particularly the attention given to white gay men who were dressed in drag or outrageous costumes. Drag queens who I interviewed remarked that they often got frustrated by being constantly stopped by presumed straight attendees to take group pictures with them.

The Spanish Town Parade began in a quiet bohemian neighborhood that was the only visible gayborhood in the city of Baton Rouge. The small, spontaneous parade of “drag queens in pickup trucks” started in the 1980s and transformed into the largest parade during Baton Rouge Mardi Gras. The growth and diversity of the Spanish Town Parade may be linked to the same trends as the decline of gayborhoods, the emergence of post-gay culture in which sexual identity is less consequential (Ghaziani 2015). Instead, I approach the heterosexualization of the Spanish Town Parades as part of a broader trend of the consumption and appropriation of gay culture, fitting into studies of bars and other LGBTQ spaces that are transformed by the increased involvement of heterosexual participants (Orne 2017). In the case of the Spanish Town Parade, the increased participation by heterosexuals did not diminish the vicarious citizenship that LGBTQ residents of Baton Rouge expressed over the origins of the parade. The contemporary parade also still shows signs of its queer origins and is widely attended by LGBTQ people. However, the Spanish



Fig. 6.4 Spanish Town Flamingophobic Dynasty float (Source Image by author)

Town neighborhood and parade have both dramatically changed since the 1980s. Gay Spanish Town residents complained to me about how unaffordable the neighborhood



Fig. 6.5 Street view of Spanish Town parade crowd (*Source* Image by author)

had become as it became trendy and less connected to its bohemian past. Similarly, the contemporary Spanish Town Parade includes a complicated mix of homophobic sentiments, heterosexual celebration of temporary gender non-conformity, and heterosexual control over the parade organizing.

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Chapter 7

A Tale of Three Villages: Contested Discourses of Place-Making in Central Philadelphia



Greg Niedt

Abstract As the acceptance of queer identities has proceeded in fits and starts over the last few decades, the question has been raised, is it still necessary to have dedicated queer spaces? City dwellers often reason that with supposed improvements in safety and social mixing, the “gay ghettos” that form a transitional stage in neighborhood revitalization should now become common areas. Yet the capitalist logic that drives this thinking often trades the physical threat of exclusion or violence for an existential one, jeopardizing a distinctive culture that remains valuable in the self-realization process of local queer citizens. This is visible not only in changing demographics, but also in the production of discourse across multiple levels; language and semiotics help to constitute neighborhoods, but also to *conceptualize* them. This chapter examines how public signs and artifacts reify and sustain three competing narratives of a single central Philadelphia neighborhood in flux: the traditionally queer “Gayborhood” that developed shortly after World War II, the officially designated “Washington Square West,” and the realtor-coined, recently gentrifying “Midtown Village.” I argue that the naming and describing of these spaces, and how their associated discourses are reflected by their contents, continues to play a role in the ongoing struggle for queer acceptance. Combining observational data of multimodal public texts (storefronts, flyers, street signs, etc.) and critical discourse analysis within the linguistic/semiotic landscapes paradigm, I present a critique of the presumed inevitability of queer erasure here. This is supplemented with a comparison of grassroots, bottom-up, and official, top-down documents in various media (maps, brochures, websites, social media, etc.) that perpetuate the different discourses. Ultimately, a change in urban scenery and how a neighborhood is envisioned only masks the fact that spaces of queer expression, marked by their eroding distinctiveness rather than their deviance, are still needed.

Keywords Philadelphia · Queer identity · Gay neighborhoods · Pink economy · Gentrification

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Every year in early October, two street fairs take place in Center City Philadelphia, concentrated along the 13th Street corridor: Midtown Fall Festival and OutFest, the city's annual celebration of National Coming Out Day on October 11th. On occasion, they occur back to back on the same weekend, each drawing thousands of visitors, the Fall Festival on Saturday and OutFest on Sunday. Though they occupy the same geographic location, the goals of the organizers and nature of the events are quite different. Midtown Fall Festival is an outgrowth of the local business association and the many boutiques that have recently sprung up on 13th Street. OutFest, by contrast, arose from the queer community whose social and cultural life has been strongly visible in this part of the city for decades (Manley 2014). Depending on which day the visitor arrives, what will they perceive: a celebration of the commercial or of queerness? To the untrained eye, either of the two festivals might be seen as representative of the neighborhood, set against a backdrop of buildings and sensory media from which a number of discursive arrangements might be extracted.

The cityscape itself suggests who and what to expect within the borders of a neighborhood, their sensory and semiotic elements working together to indicate the "proper" occupants. As with other forms of media, when residents see themselves and their interests well-represented in the buildings, advertisements, objects, and bodies within the space, they will feel welcome, but within the blocks between Market and Pine, Broad and 11th Streets, there are multiple discourses of belonging operating simultaneously. The commonly used "Gayborhood" moniker is reflected in the rainbow signs and crosswalks, flyers and murals, and the display of queerness by individuals, especially in the evenings when patrons flock to the local nightclubs and bars. They announce their identity through dress, makeup, and movement, in ways that challenge heteronormative patterns of gendered interaction. Neutrally, the city's "Washington (Square) West" label (as the area lies west of Washington Square) appears in official signage, connected with other neighborhood names that line the municipal fabric of Philadelphia. And finally, "Midtown Village" appears in the promotional materials of the stores that constitute it, part of a cosmopolitan, "Globalese" (Jaworski 2015) register that echoes the area's gentrification. Implicit in that process is the erasure of queerness, putting the discourses into conflict.

In this chapter, I examine the case of this neighborhood in terms of how the different discourses that define it are put forward into the cityscape. I provide examples of semiotic texts that are representative of each of the three conceptualizations of the space, then discuss how they reflect the demographic, social, and economic changes occurring there. But from a broader perspective, what are the dynamics between the discourses themselves? Can they occupy the same coterminous space? Because their fundamental values are to some degree incommensurable—the reproductive logic of capitalism does not mix well with queer liberation, for example—there is little room for compromise. The underlying tension becomes noticeable when observing how adherents of each perspective use discourse and the built environment itself to try and elevate their take on the neighborhood above the other two.

7.1 Background

The meanings of a place are contested and contestable over time, as different groups attempt to center a given collection of streets, blocks, buildings, etc., on their own interests and history. Massey (1995) points out that *place* is a social construct, a locative idea that arises from the presence of, and repeated interactions between, the people who move within it. On the one hand, the efforts to define a place are grounded in a dynamic form of networked politics (Pierce et al. 2011) wherein both material realities of capital and the agency of individuals play a role. On the other, place is a discursive concept that is visibly manifest in the landscape, as different forms of architecture, artifacts, and bodies reinforce (or perhaps challenge) a person's notions of what "should" be there. As a blanket concept, urban gentrification provides a clear example of this duality: cycles of rising rents and taxes forcibly alter a neighborhood's demographic makeup, changing the visual semiotics of the cityscape and, in turn, how residents and visitors alike conceptualize it. The process is not an instantaneous one, and elements of a neighborhood's former character almost always peek through its current façade, providing a point of reference for what Massey calls the "feeling that there is or has been some kind of disruption between the past of these places and at least some elements of their present or their potential future" (Massey 1995: 183). Trinch and Snajdr (2017) meanwhile demonstrate that a familiarity with, and deployment of, the textual and visual indicators of previous landscape(s) can be translated into a kind of local cultural capital. After all, gentrification is partly cast as a struggle for a neighborhood's "authentic" self, and even those who profit from its socioeconomic changes recognize the benefit of calling forth the past. But Massey's use of the word *disruption* highlights the anger and bitterness that such change often engenders; as symbols of the different, often opposed, stages in a neighborhood's life, elements of the cityscape can summon these emotions forth, too.

Individual cases of gentrification are obviously rather different, but within the case of gay villages, a fairly regular pattern has been established. Marginalized by heteronormative society, queer folks move into "undesirable" neighborhoods, often sharing the space with others, e.g., artists, who depend on low rents, and in many cases displacing them (There is also a racial component to consider, as many white queers have in turn disrupted communities of color [Valentine 2002]). Over time, the cultural reputation of the neighborhood grows beyond its confines, attracting newcomers who see an opportunity for development; Philadelphia is no exception. It is important to remember that there has *not* been a concerted effort to expel queer individuals here, even though the economic realities have driven away many who do not fall into the white, cisgendered, male, affluent gay archetype (Those who do have not been directly marginalized, and many of them patronize bars, restaurants, and shops that are not overtly queer in character). But this shifting conception of the neighborhood poses a more existential threat. There is evidence that environments rich with examples of alternative sexuality are beneficial to the mental health of queer youth struggling to come to terms with who they are (Wienke et al. 2021); to

erode that is to threaten the well-being of this population. Doan and Higgins (2011) describe queer spaces as a “Foucauldian heterotopia” of possibilities and liberatory politics, geographic vessels for the first internal, then performed, process of building an identity. They further situate the traditional narrative of gentrification in the more recent logic of *branding*. This is to say, heteronormative interests will appropriate queerness (along with other elements) to position themselves as “cosmopolitan,” while ignoring and usually disenfranchising the actual people behind that label.

One common narrative casts queer spaces as “ghettos” not worth defending, since they keep heterosexuals from meeting and forming positive social ties with queer individuals. But this confuses integration with assimilation. Ghaziani (2014) points out the cognitive dissonance in this kind of “post-gay thinking,” wherein queerness becomes both obvious and invisible; same-sex couples are praised for marrying and raising children, yet also for not centering their public identity around the very characteristic that separates them. What this suggests is that queerness is only acceptable when it is suborned to straightness. The threat arises when the vocal queer population is displaced and scattered, creating what Ghaziani calls a *cultural archipelago*; despite many same-sex couples’ success in leading heteronormative lives, he equally cites many anecdotes of residents forced out by middle- or upper-class straight gentrification. True *gayborhoods* where queer identities are celebrated become so-called *gay-friendly* spaces that merely tolerate them.

7.2 The Space in Question

Founded in the late seventeenth century on Lenape land, Philadelphia is one of the oldest large cities in the USA, playing a prominent role throughout the history of the nation. It is commonly known as a “city of neighborhoods,” with over one hundred such spaces—notable for a city with not much more than 100 mi² of built-up land area. The city’s long history has contributed to the development of individual neighborhoods’ firm borders and distinctive character. As a center for immigration throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has a diverse demographic makeup, although there are the usual patterns of racial/ethnic and economic segregation that one sees in many US cities (Logan 2013). Within that context, the area considered within this chapter lies in one of the more recently affluent corners of Center City (the downtown district). After the economic hardships of the 1980s, revitalization projects transformed the neighborhood, pricing out poorer residents—many of them Philadelphians of color—and marketing it as a destination for visitors. In particular, there have been concerted efforts to draw affluent queer visitors into the local “pink economy” by highlighting a history of tolerance (Ghaziani, 2021). However, Center City is no longer the sole hub of queer life in the city. An influx of mainstream culture is most noticeable along 13th Street, where new restaurants and jewelry boutiques crowd out the gay bars and adult stores. Yet the Gayborhood remains a recognizable name to all, and the rainbow street signs, among other semi-otic markers, remind observers where they are. Interwoven with those two sets of

indicators are the impersonal arrangements of the City's municipal maps and tourist infrastructure: directional signs to other neighborhoods and landmarks, bike tour paths, etc.

Any one of those discourses could be used to delimit the neighborhood, depending on the lens through which one was observing the cityscape. They are coterminous, and the signs of each fall off abruptly at the same borders, though the City's official markers are similar in form and function to their signage in nearby areas. Despite this, in key ways the discourses are at odds with each other, the tension between them playing out in the changeable landscape.

7.2.1 *Gayborhood*

The evolution of Center City, particularly the area bounded by Chestnut, Pine, Broad, and 11th Streets, as a queer space has been a long, organic process echoing that in other cities. Manley (2014) links its growth to several factors. First, in the early twentieth century, theatres and performance venues multiplied and spilled over into burlesque and drag shows in local bars, creating a culture where the blurring of gender roles was more acceptable. Second, after Prohibition, many bootleggers became bar owners while maintaining their links with organized crime. They also understood that an establishment with (still criminalized) queer patrons would be less likely to call on the police. Skiba (2014) further elaborates the development of the area's tawdry reputation thanks to its growing role as a red-light district; the post-Stonewall opening of local bathhouses exacerbated this perception. And while Philadelphia's social mores were not libertine enough for an open queer culture until the liberation movement of the 1960s, the city's carnivalesque Mummers' Parade had since 1901 provided a liminal space for men, at least, to acceptably explore alternative gender practices (Dubin 1996; Leighton 2012). To the last point, the irony is that historically, the majority of the parade's participants have been cisgendered, heterosexual, white, working-class men—an intersection of identities commonly assumed to be homophobic.

Importantly, there is disagreement among researchers about when the neighborhood transitioned from being a place for socialization to a residential area. Stein (2004) shows that as the central district became whiter and younger with lower marriage rates, the concentration of queer residents was a natural consequence, while Manley argues that the change was driven by convenient proximity to the bars and cruising areas. In the early 90s, the term "Gayborhood" firmly replaced "gay ghetto" (Skiba 2014), with its implications of an active, dynamic community rather than one existing at the margins. By the time I began going out in the city as a young adult, the name was in common parlance, and semiotic moments discursively indicating that *this is a queer space* were highly visible in the landscape. The more enduring ones remain: posters at the gay bars, the purple newspaper boxes of Philly Gay News, rainbow street signs, etc., as seen in Fig. 7.1. While other areas of the city have gained their own reputations for alternative expressions of queerness (counterpoints



Fig. 7.1 Fixtures around the Gayborhood (*Source* Images by author)

to Center City’s ever-rising cost of housing and predominantly white, cisgendered population), the central location of the Gayborhood and its institutions has arguably allowed it to maintain its predominance.

7.2.2 *Washington Square West*

Beyond the boundaries of the Gayborhood “proper,” Washington Square West extends from Washington Square at 7th Street to Broad Street, between Market and South Streets (See Fig. 7.2). The name reflects the city’s supposed role as a neutral arbiter of space, relying solely on geographical cues to define its districts. It turns up as the proper name for the area on Google Maps (albeit with slightly different boundaries). Kromer (2000) describes how this residential area was intended to have many of the same cityscape embellishments as its ritzy neighbor Society Hill (a.k.a., Washington Square East): brick paving, streetlamps, green space, etc. However, postwar federal funding ran out before the City could attend to these blocks, opening the path for private investment and purchase of abandoned properties. Perhaps this stunted progress toward revitalization contributed to impressions of the neighborhood as seedy or rough around the edges, either improved or worsened (depending on one’s view) by the increasingly visible queer population. Regardless, property values have continued to increase under the auspices of the Washington Square West Historic District, the Washington Square West Civic Association, and other groups with vested interest in the area’s success.

Mostly, it seems to be realtors who are interested in using the Washington Square West moniker (often abbreviated to Washington West or even WashWest). Walking through this space, one is most likely to see the label on For Sale or For Rent signs, as well as on the City’s directional signs, capped by a stylized portrait of George Washington as a sort of local logo. These subtle markers in the built environment are noticeable in passing, even among the more glaring evidence of the other two discourses operating in the neighborhood. Putting aside the question of whether an area’s “official” name should be one that is divorced from its social and cultural life

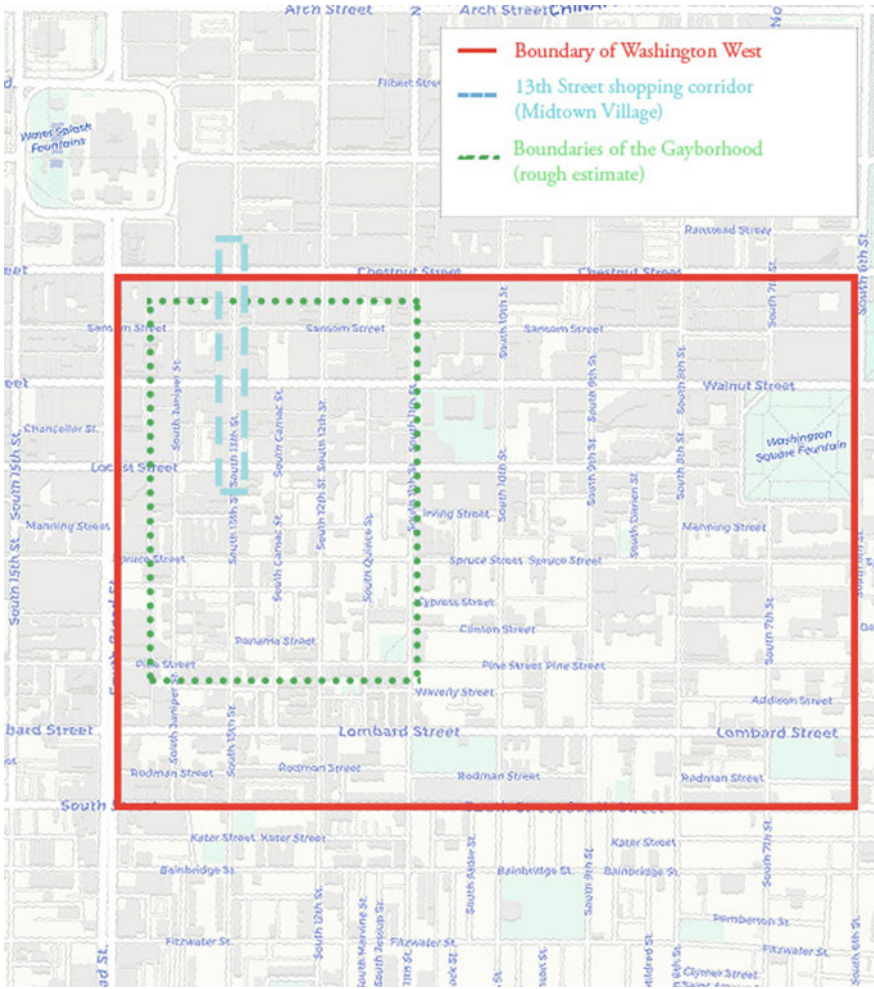


Fig. 7.2 Map of Washington Square West area (Source Image by author)

and history, it functions as a neutral reference point against which other possible constructions of the space can be compared.

7.2.3 *Midtown Village*

In the wake of the 2007–2008 recession, the recently formed Midtown Village Merchants Association (MVMA) saw an opportunity to acquire and redevelop multiple properties in the neighborhood, an initiative spearheaded by developer Tony Goldman. The group’s promotional materials refer to him as the “catalyst” for “recreating [the] neighborhood,” saying that the merchants brought “renewed vitality after many years of decline” (MVMA 2018). While there has been no shortage of new businesses opening in the neighborhood, some of them owned and operated by queer individuals, they are noticeably different in contents, character, and clientele. The sex novelties shop Danny’s, a fixture on 13th street for decades, now sits among quirky jewelry shops and upscale restaurants. Many nightlife spots that overtly catered to queer customers, bars like Woody’s and Sisters, have been replaced and/or become spaces with a mixed crowd, to the consternation of long-time residents and visitors (Owens and Dent 2017; Spikol 2012). Perhaps because of this friction, the Midtown Village name has not widely caught on outside of the merchants’ own use. Nevertheless, the social, cultural, and economic changes wrought by the expansion of this alternate commercial landscape reverberate beyond the few blocks of the 13th Street Corridor where the “Village” is focused.

Why is it problematic if Midtown Village merchants choose to deploy different semiotic tools to index another kind of identity, which attracts a new audience to their stores? The main issue is the newer arrivals’ sense of entitlement to dictate the norms of the neighborhood. Owens (2019) recounts an encounter with a straight classmate in line at Voyeur (formally known as “Pure,” a prescient name change) who asked if “this [is] where the fags go,” seeing it as indicative of the heteronormative colonization of queer space. The *overall* acceptance of queerness in mainstream culture is used as an argument for allowing neighborhoods to become more mixed—but this doesn’t entail that queer life should be remarkable within their borders (Ghaziani 2014). The introduction of heteronormativity means that those who follow it will also follow its precept that straightness is the default, and preferable to queerness. MVMA’s website declares that its business owners are “open minded” without specifying how they enact that quality, nor mentioning the queer population at all. And while incidents like the one Owens reports are moments in time with personal repercussions, they punctuate the ongoing, low-level reminders in the materiality of the built landscape about the encroaching discourse’s presence. Its associations with mainstream capitalism and majoritarian identity stand at odds with queer observers who are not affluent, cisgendered, and/or white, leading to conflicting ideas of what the neighborhood represents.

7.3 Discursive Moments

The role of text and image in establishing the layers of affective geography is well-established in the literature, especially in the foundational texts of the *linguistic/semiotic landscapes* paradigm (See for example Blommaert 2007; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010; Scollon and Scollon 2003; Shohamy et al. 2010). The central idea of the discipline, which draws heavily from spatial production theories by Lefebvre, Tuan, and others, is that public texts that form a meaning-filled *semioscape* offer a glimpse into the sociolinguistic and discursive realities of an area. Each artifact gives visibility and adds weight to discourses about a neighborhood, block, intersection, or even smaller units of space. These accumulate into overall impressions about the character of this or that neighborhood. But it is not simply a numerical question of which discourse has the most signs; occupants who hold different ideologies and backgrounds will resonate to different degrees with the array of possible discourses available to unpack from a space. For example, the sex shop Danny's, with queer trappings regularly featured in its front window, can be perceived as either an integral part of the Gayborhood, a taxpaying business at an address located within the official Washington West district, or a lurid eyesore among the boutiques that make up Midtown Village. Meanwhile, the wine bar next door is simultaneously a symbol of unwanted gentrification, another taxpaying business, or a valued member of the growing commercial district. The signs that Scollon and Scollon (2003) refer to as *transgressive* with respect to a given discourse only become so in the ideological eye of a given beholder.

This chapter's purpose is not to determine whether conflict exists between residents from one side or another; mass media articles and social media are evidence enough of those opinions. Instead, I consider here a number of locations and artifacts from the neighborhood in terms of how they fit into the competing discourses. Like certain branches of geography, linguistic landscape researchers commonly employ photography, urban walking, and ethnographic observation to gather data, tools that function as part of a "place-making" process (Pink 2008). The examples presented here were documented during photo walks throughout the area; I attempted to capture a wide variety of signs and objects representative from each of the three discourses. There were hundreds of ready examples to photograph on each outing, but with the qualitative slant of the method, volume is less important than semiotic significance. I must also acknowledge that, as a queer resident of the city and a frequent visitor to the neighborhood in question, my own experience with the space forms a degree of bias that can only be acknowledged, not erased.

7.3.1 *Snapshots from the Gayborhood*

The buildings and physical objects that signify the Gayborhood show a diversity built up over decades. Mainstream emblems, such as the use of rainbows, mix with the local to create a cityscape that signifies queerness in a number of ways, each requiring a different kind of familiarity with the visual language to recognize the text (Moriarty 2002). For example, the street scene at the top left in Fig. 7.3 shows one of the smaller, colonial-era side streets nestled in the neighborhood, lined with nineteenth-century houses and a bar flying a queered USA flag. The sign for Latimer Street shows one of the City's rainbow stripes designating the intersection as part of the Gayborhood, a convergence between the popular and "official" conceptions of the neighborhood. Compare these more universal markers with the mural in the top right, found on the site of the former 12th Street Gym less than a block away. The artwork depicts Gloria Casarez, the City's first director of LGBT Affairs and a leader in the local community, who passed away from cancer in 2014. While Philadelphia is also known as a city of murals, with thousands of them bedecking walls across the city, not many of them in the downtown area feature direct portraits of local, contemporary figures, especially women of color. The fact that the building in question was a popular gym for the gay community before its closure in early 2018 adds further weight for passerby who have the local knowledge to fully "read" the mural's significance.

The Gayborhood is also characterized by various types of ephemera that circulate in the space: the flyers and posters advertising drag shows and cabarets on the wall outside Franky Bradley's (a restaurant and bar that occupies the site of former lesbian bar, Sisters), books arranged in front of Giovanni's Room (now the oldest LGBT bookstore in the USA), the Bud Light banner aimed at a queer clientele outside the deli on 12th Street. Following McLuhan's famous dictum that *the medium is the message*, Scollon and Scollon (2003) emphasize the importance of multimodality in accounting for the meanings of various objects and how they are positioned in a spatial discourse. The mobility of these objects suggests, on the one hand, a kind of impermanence and fragility; they can easily be removed or blown away. On the other hand, such media add a sense of dynamism, change and growth to the landscape and are often the province of those who have less capital to express themselves through public signage. Ephemera reflect a more grassroots, performative, and adaptable ethos—qualities that have served residents of the Gayborhood well throughout the decades—but might cause a viewer to assign the discourse they represent less value.

Perhaps the temporary nature of these texts and artifacts in the landscape reflects another part of what Midtown Village merchants are referring to when they talk about the neighborhood's decline. The Gayborhood has always been flamboyant but not flashy, libertine but not (neo)liberal. And sexuality is undoubtedly part of the discourse's makeup, expressed through adult store signage, cheeky wordplay (such as Woody's, one of the most popular local bars), and signs like the Club Philly bathhouse logo in Fig. 7.2 (center right). Even though it is tucked away on another side street and the masculine silhouette only hints at the building's purpose, no

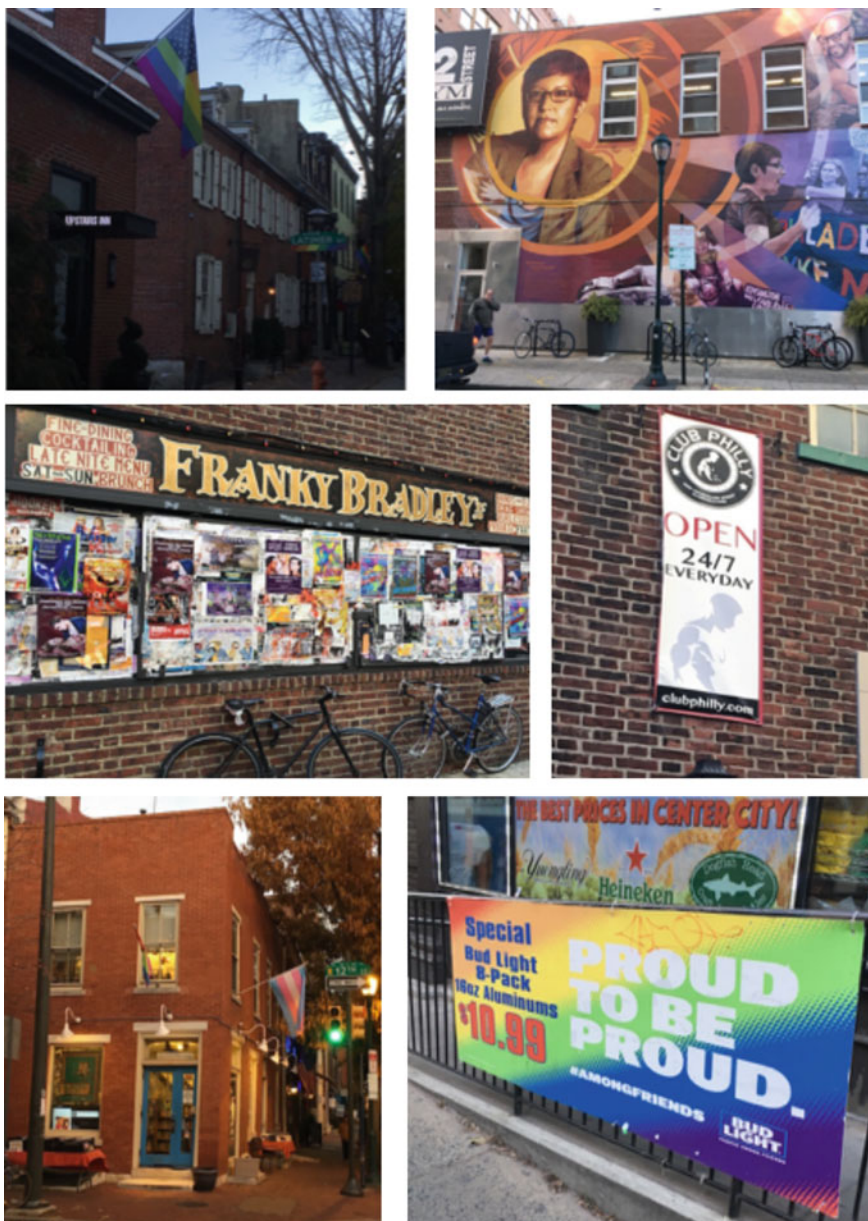


Fig. 7.3 Indicators of the Gayborhood discourse (Source Images by author)

doubt even this display is too noticeable a reminder of the area's past for some of the more straitlaced new residents. Yet the discourse of sex is a necessary item of semiotic analysis in any landscape, queer or otherwise (Milani 2014), as it dictates attitudes toward occupants' presentation of bodies, their performance of gender, and their behavior toward each other. The Gayborhood has historically offered freedom from the confines of other, heteronormative interaction orders encountered almost everywhere else. To efface this aspect in the name of commerce or so-called decency would be a disservice to the generations of queer residents who wanted not to be forced to define themselves by how they were different.

7.3.2 *The Skeleton of Washington West*

So much of how the Washington West discourse is expressed relies on linkages with other neighborhoods—geographically, infrastructurally, semiotically. Scollon and Scollon (2003) categorize city signage as *infrastructural* when it alludes to the functional aspect of the city, which is perhaps the most significant portion of this discourse, exemplified by the signs in the top row of Fig. 7.4. The sign on the left directs passerby to locations both within and without the neighborhood, a mix of cultural sites and generalized commercial areas, while the one on the right provides a map with color-coded districts and distances to points of interest for cyclists. In neither case is the Gayborhood or Midtown Village alluded to, despite the presence of their semiotic markers near both signs; instead, on the left, the drawing of George Washington serves as an echo of the neighborhood's name and the city's historical role. Functional as it is, the sign still carries an allusion to the discourse in which it is emplaced.

Signs of this format can also be found throughout the surrounding neighborhoods, creating a recognizable visual language that indexes Philadelphia writ large, and positioning Washington West as part of that whole. These blocks become unique not because of any historical, cultural, or demographic distinction, but solely by their geographic differentiation. The materiality of the official signs is also worth noting, as the durability of signage can be read as an indicator of its provenance and authority, or at the very least of sufficient economic capital for a high production value. While there are also some signs in the Gayborhood discourse, and rather more in the Midtown Village discourse, that are crafted from metal, hard plastic, and other long-lasting materials, the Washington West discourse notably does not feature paper and cloth ephemera. Even objects created by ostensibly independent groups, such as the Mural Arts program that coordinates a great deal of tourism for Philadelphia's public art, or the Historical Society whose blue plaques are crafted from metal, have the literal weight of the city's backing. They cannot be torn down or easily defaced, and they are anchored to the landscape; compare this with the wall of flyers on the side of Franky Bradley's, or the rainbow flags that eventually tatter.

One could make the counterargument that signage such as that seen in the bottom row is durable and alludes to the queer heritage of the neighborhood; the rainbow



Fig. 7.4 Snapshots from Washington West (Source Images by author)

stripes on street signs are a further concession that could not have happened without City Hall’s blessing. Yet subtle multimodal indicators in their construction and interpretation matter; “Washington West” is far more prominent on the health center sign than “LGBTQ” and the formal metal-on-brick apartment sign notes that the community is LGBT *friendly*. It isn’t that these signals are unwelcome or especially

problematic, but they are not exactly the active celebration of queer life characteristic of signage aligned with the Gayborhood. The photograph on the right of the middle row in Fig. 7.3 directly illustrates the disconnect between the two overlapping spatial discourses. Behind the historical marker for the location of the Philadelphia Sketch Club is a rainbow flag marking the entrance to Tavern on Camac, one of the oldest gay bars in the city; the Venture Inn, which survived nearly a hundred years until its closure in 2016, lay a bit farther down the street. Yet these do not qualify for historical recognition. Perhaps in time, there will be other historical markers that memorialize the queer past of the neighborhood, integrated into the sanctioned discourse of the city, but for now they remain separate, articulated by two different logics of expression.

7.3.3 *Welcome to Midtown Village*

Like the Washington West discourse, producers of signage that reflects the Midtown Village discourse make much ado about their open-mindedness. However, while the City has made tacit moves toward at least acknowledging the presence of queerness, there is little to back up the claim of tolerance by the merchants along 13th Street. The textual and visual semiotics of the corridor instead reflect the same preoccupations with cosmopolitanism and commerce that one sees in other gentrifying neighborhoods, both in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

The images in the top two rows in Fig. 7.5 are representative of what one sees in the storefronts along 13th Street and its immediate environs. On the shop wall in the top left, the “story” presented draws on conventions that index upscale shopping: vocabulary (“unique,” “a true boutique experience,” “we are passionate,” etc.), the “established in (year)” marker of authenticity, an array of professionally designed fonts. Next to it, the display of an award for “Best Shopping Experience” in the city begs the question, according to whom? In the middle row, the jewelry store’s name, Bella Turka, provides an example of the deployment of linguistic codes for their cosmopolitan meaning rather than their actual content (Curtin 2014). The Italianate name with its connotations of elevated culture is more important than its translation; other shops in the district also feature Italian names, as well as French and Japanese. And then there are connections to other trends, such as (in this case) the recently reawakened tiki bar craze sweeping the nation. Capitalist overtones of these semioscapes, bolstered by materiality—the fashion items in Lou Lou and Bella Turka’s windows, the bombastic décor of Tiki—are in keeping with the primary reason for Midtown Village’s existence: generating profit. But they also reflect broader trends in the country’s consumer culture as it reflects patterns of gentrification. Trinch and Snajdr (2017) demonstrate the subtle affective impact of businesses that embrace these semiotic codes; they connote worldliness and aspirations of wealth, but lose their connection to the local. For the resident who can afford to live and/or shop on these increasingly expensive blocks, participation in the life of the neighborhood in accordance with the Midtown Village discourse requires

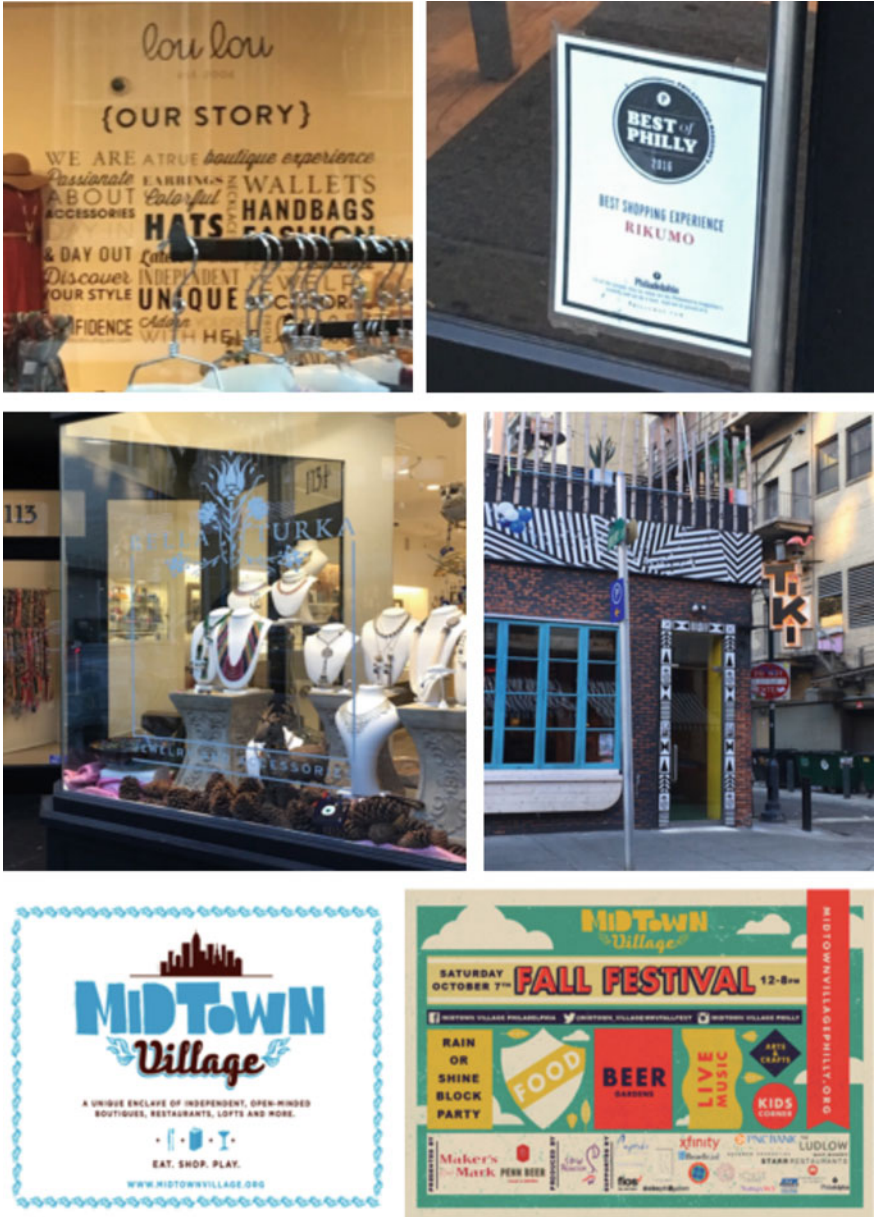


Fig. 7.5 Midtown village moments (Source Images by author)

being a *homo economicus*, contributing to circuits of capital. Implicitly, if one isn't shopping, dining out, or otherwise purchasing some kind of experience at a premium, then what are they doing there?

Images from the business association's website drive this point home. On the left of the bottom row in Fig. 7.4 is an official placard declaring that Midtown Village is a "unique enclave of independent, open-minded boutiques, restaurants, and more." Leaving aside the question of what makes them unique, the word *enclave* implies that they are surrounded by a city that is *not* independent or open-minded, that they stand alone in a gritty wilderness. In one sense, the merchants' assessment of difference rings true: on nearby blocks, there is homelessness, drug use, and other issues that city downtowns often face. By closing themselves off from their surroundings rather than growing organically from the neighborhood, they do not solve any problems, but instead exacerbate the rising cost of living. The fall festival flyer on the bottom right aligns the Village with corporate sponsorship and heteronormative values (a "Kids Corner") that stand in contrast to the largely self-constructed community of the Gayborhood. Extending Edelman's (2004) proposition that queer individuals have "no future" (in straight terms) because there is no imperative to have children and accumulate for them, they are further shut out if they are not able or willing to participate in the logic of these spaces. Or perhaps the open-mindedness touted by these boutiques certainly extends to queer individuals—but only to those who can afford to be there, and who fit the mold of straight expectations.

The underlying problem with "re-vitalization" in any context is its semantic implication that what came before was broken, low-quality, or unappealing, even when there is evidence to the contrary. Discursively, the shopkeepers who espouse the Midtown Village name and ethos have to rely on this narrative in order to justify their presence and the erasure of the neighborhood's previous character. An example: one business on 13th Street distributes postcards telling their story, saying that they "helped transform the once-desolate neighborhood into trendy Midtown Village." While I was not present for the urban decay of the 1980s, I can vividly recall the early 2000s in this part of Center City, when there was plenty of activity along the 13th Street corridor associated with queer spaces. But the *desolation* referred to in this piece of media is relative; certainly, in my adolescence, there was a dearth of the kind of fashion boutiques and expensive restaurants that one is liable to find now. Lurking under the surface is the idea that this lack stands in opposition to *trendiness*, and trendiness is beneficial for the neighborhood. In fact, it is beneficial for the owners of successful brick-and-mortar stores who market themselves to visitors, and perhaps for the visitors themselves who want another location to shop. It is beneficial for homeowners who are financially stable enough to afford the increase in taxes and reap the rewards of higher property values. Yet there isn't much overlap between these groups and a queer community that is more concerned with socialization and the development of identity than with accruing material wealth.

When it comes to the semiotic landscape, there is one moment that stands out to me as indicative of the neighborhood's dynamics and the manifestation of tension between these three discourses. At the intersection of 13th and Locust streets, the epicenter of the club scene in the Gayborhood—there are a dozen bars focused on a

queer clientele within a two-block radius—the City painted rainbow crosswalks on the asphalt in 2015. A reflection of the stripes underneath street signs in the area, the gesture served as an official acknowledgment of the local demography, even as queer folks were being priced out of the area: an alignment between Washington West and the Gayborhood. However, in subsequent years, the crosswalks faded into dull, chipped paint, crisscrossed with utility workers’ marks and riddled with tire tracks, becoming more a symbol of decay than lasting support from the City (Boren 2018; see also Fig. 7.6).

Although one enterprising local individual took it upon himself to freshen up the paint in time for Outfest 2019 (Shaw 2019), it is difficult not to interpret this erosion as a reminder of the City’s priorities with regard to the communities in the area. The former inhabitants who gave it life have been, if not forgotten, then at least brushed off in favor of new, moneyed arrivals. While the latter group has no qualms about appropriating the cultural cachet of queerness to further their own goals, local businesses must adapt to the new economic realities or fade away. Returning to the example with which I opened this chapter, when the Midtown Village Festival was announced on social media this past autumn, this struggle was more directly on display. Once again deploying the language of globalized cosmopolitanism, the event’s Facebook page stated that:



Fig. 7.6 13th and Locust, before the temporary touch-up work for Outfest 2019 (Source Image by author)

Midtown Village has a collection of unique, independent, entrepreneurial, open-minded boutiques, restaurants, lofts, and much more. The Midtown Village Fall Festival attracts thousands of visitors in one day to experience a variety of activities including multiple stages of live entertainment, food and beverage sampling, merchant and vendor displays, crafters, children's activities, and much more!

The immediate response from several users included comments like, "WTH is a midtown village? The gayborhood has a fall festival? Cool" and, "That's the Gayborhood, not Midtown Village. Midtown Village is in Wilkes-Barre." Statements like these are a bit tongue-in-cheek, but still illustrate locals' sense that the Fall Festival and the business association that runs it represent a threat to the geodiscursive identity they are so familiar with. Note that once again, "open-minded" is the only possible allusion to queerness in the description of the festival, and the specific mention of "children's activities" serves as a subtle reminder of heteronormativity. The promotional materials associated with the festival also stand in stark contrast to that used for Outfest. The Fall Festival's visual media, presumably collected from previous years, showed crowds of mostly white, straight families and couples, drinking beer and browsing tables of wares; as shown in Fig. 7.5, they are also not shy about their corporate sponsorship. Outfest's photos, on the other hand, are populated by mostly young people with a variety of gender expressions, queer couples, people of different races and ethnicities, cheering and waving flags. The former is a demonstration of capital; the latter is a celebration of liberated sexuality (Not that Outfest doesn't also have vendors, but they are not the discursive focus of the event).

What is clear from these interactions is that the fight for the soul of the neighborhood is not yet over, as various interests attempt to have their discourse come out on top. Is it possible to have these competing ideas of the area coexist? Arguably, no: by its nature, the capitalism represented by Midtown Village must eventually swallow and assimilate all competition, while the queerness represented by the Gayborhood is theoretically defined by its resistance and refusal to capitulate to those norms. The two have hitherto managed to occupy the same space, with the moderating influence of the City—permits for events, structural boundaries, laws that have to be followed—somewhere in between. But as prices continue to rise, the significance of Center City as a primary nexus of queer socialization in Philadelphia will continue to erode, a process visible in the changing built environment and visual semiotics of the area. At some point, there must be a reckoning that will determine the identity of the neighborhood moving forward.

7.4 Further Directions

Dense urban areas often prove to be rich sources of data for research, such that it is impossible for any single paper to fully delve into all their aspects. This one should not be treated as anything but an opening of critical inquiry into the discourse of the Gayborhood, one which could lead to a number of other investigations. I list three possibilities here.

First, many of the examples given in this paper reflect my personal experience with the shifting nature of the neighborhood and the anecdotes of friends and colleagues. While the local newspapers and online media give some more weight to the attitudes that I have encountered as a resident of the city, formal interviews could illuminate the emotional repercussions of the landscape's evolution. In linguistic landscape studies, pairing interviews with visual data (see for example Garvin 2010; Modan 2008) is a common method for moving from the quantitative counting of signs to the qualitative analysis of what they signify to individuals. In the case of the Gayborhood/Midtown Village, perhaps the best group to interview would be the business owners, to hear more about their intentions with respect to how they present themselves in the space. Interviews on the street, *vox populi* style, could also shed some light on the case; simply asking, "What is this neighborhood called?" while within its bounds might give some sense of how deeply each discourse has penetrated the Philadelphia psyche.

There are also points of connection with media, artifacts, landscapes, and other semiotic moments outside the boundaries of the zone discussed here. For example, do the City's official signs in other neighborhoods perform a similar discursive role? Another corridor that has been rapidly gentrifying is East Passyunk Avenue, a handful of blocks to the Gayborhood's south. As older Italian American occupants are priced out and new boutiques open along the length of the street, the same concerns have been raised as the City re-brands the area to reflect its changes. Along a different axis, how do the processes occurring in other cities, as indicated in this volume, reflect those taking place in Philadelphia? No two cities and no two neighborhoods will have the exact same struggle for the right to determine their "meanings," but parallels do arise. There is a kind of intertextuality—or perhaps interdiscursivity—that enables comparisons to be made and lessons to be learned from one case to another, allowing producers and consumers of the landscape alike to understand the semiotic codes at play. The "globalese" deployed by Midtown Village would have no effect if it did not recognizably encode wealth and status to those who read it. While I have provided several examples of media items and snapshots of the city in this chapter, there are countless others to discover, though any researcher must be careful not to exhaust a question beyond the point at which it has been answered.

Finally, examining a single moment in the evolution of the cityscape, even in the midst of an identity crisis for the neighborhood, is limited to a relatively static perspective. A more diachronic (and probably extended) study would account not only for how the Gayborhood reflects current ideologies, but also the past and likely futures. Beyond anecdotes like the one provided by Owens above, oral histories from long-term residents are useful for giving context to the historical development of a space. They add a personal dimension to the argument that having the freedom to develop one's minority identity is invaluable, and shed some light on how the evolution of a neighborhood impacts the evolution of attitudes toward the bodies that occupy it. Archival research can further reveal when the identities of spaces were determined, and how conversations around them unfolded over time. Again, one must consider scale: how did the local discourses about space, gender, and sexuality align or disalign with those at the regional or national level? And how have discourses of race, ethnicity, and class at different levels fit in? As a "majority minority" city with

a liberal slant and a historically strong working class, these aspects are all highly relevant to the Philadelphia equation.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described and given examples of the three discourses circulating in the space traditionally ascribed to Philadelphia's Gayborhood. Each has its supporters and detractors, and all are visible in the neighborhood through the use of semiotic markers like signage, ephemera, and the construction of the cityscape. While they are predicated on historical and material realities of the city, these discourses are connected to other proximate ones, both geographically (elsewhere in Philadelphia) and conceptually (queer spaces in other cities). They help to produce localized identities and patterns of interaction, as well as affective ties among residents to the space itself, its meanings, and each other.

I close by stating that ideally, the presence of multiple discourses should not have to cause friction. As with other instances of gentrification, if new arrivals would respect the preexisting culture and population, this would mitigate (though not fully counteract) some of the social effects. The problem for the Gayborhood is when straight individuals invite themselves in with no interest in queerness beyond how it can benefit them and their own ways of being, insisting that they know what's best. Whether this stems from the idea that separate queer space is no longer necessary or a belief that capital is the cure for all ills, the upshot is that their approach is destined to ruffle feathers among residents who are more or less content with the way things are. The stability of a neighborhood depends in part on the comfort its members feel with the space where they live, work, play, meet, and celebrate. In order for the queer population of Center City to continue to feel at home, their struggle for recognition and acceptance over the past decades must not be overridden by those for whom it has no weight. And in the end, it is the responsibility of these new entrepreneurs to ensure that what they bring to the table does not diminish a community that has already fought to achieve so much.

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Chapter 8

Are “Gay” and “Queer-Friendly” Neighborhoods Healthy? Assessing How Areas with High Densities of Same-Sex Couples Impact the Mental Health of Sexual Minority and Majority Young Adults



Chris Wienke, Rachel B. Whaley, and Rick Braatz

Abstract Neighborhoods with large concentrations of gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities have long served as places where sexual minority young adults find self-enhancing resources. Yet, it is unclear whether such neighborhood environments also confer health benefits. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, we explored the relationship between the proportion of same-sex couples in neighborhoods and the mental health of sexual minority and majority young adults, controlling for other neighborhood- and individual-level factors. Results indicate that for sexual minorities, neighborhoods with higher percentages of same-sex couples are associated with lower levels of depression symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem. Conversely, for heterosexuals, there are no differences in health outcomes across neighborhood contexts. Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of striving for neighborhood-level understandings of sexual minority young adults and their mental health problems.

Keywords Mental health · Gay neighborhoods · LGBTQ+ adolescents · Health outcomes

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8.1 Introduction

Gay neighborhoods have been a familiar part of America's urban landscape since at least World War II. Famed examples during this time include New York's West Village and the Castro in San Francisco, though distinct gay districts also surfaced in places like Buffalo, New York; Worcester, Massachusetts; and Columbia, South Carolina (Ghaziani 2014). Even today, despite evidence showing that many historic gay neighborhoods are in decline, there are still numerous residential areas across the country where gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities are disproportionately concentrated, as indicated by the percentage of households headed by same-sex couples, a measure based on U.S. Census data (Gates and Ost 2004). These include areas that continue to have businesses and other institutions that specifically cater to sexual minorities, such as bars, bookstores, sex shops, churches, nonprofits, and community centers, as well as areas that may be better characterized as "queer-friendly" (Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009), in that heterosexuals tend to dominate the residential and commercial spaces, but sexual minority residents, businesses, and organizations are generally welcomed in the neighborhood.

Like ethnic neighborhoods, residential areas with relatively large concentrations of sexual minorities can be understood as places where marginalized people find resources, including protection from discrimination, a sense of community, shared values, and opportunities for social support (Carpiano et al. 2011; LeVay and Nonas 1995; Green 2003). In ethnic neighborhoods, such resources often have important health benefits, especially for mental health (Yuan 2008). For example, studies have found that for some ethnic minority groups, living in areas with high concentrations of people from similar ethnic backgrounds is associated with better mental health and, on some measures, better physical health than living in areas with low concentrations, even when other neighborhood factors are taken into account (Halpern 1993; Pickett and Wilkinson 2008; Stafford et al. 2010). In this chapter we consider whether gay and queer-friendly neighborhoods may have similar health effects for sexual minorities.

In general, sexual minorities are more likely to self-report problems with mental health than other men and women (Meyer 2003). This includes internalizing symptoms, such as depression and low self-esteem (Marshal et al. 2011; Ueno 2010a). The pattern holds not only for persons who identify as sexual minorities, such as gay men and lesbians, but also for those who report same-sex attractions and/or behaviors (Ueno 2010a, b). Although multiple factors appear to contribute to sexual minorities' poorer mental health (Ueno 2010b), most researchers believe that the stress caused by sexual stigma and prejudice is the biggest factor (Meyers 2003). To the extent that "minority stress" is the main culprit, it seems plausible that living in areas where sexual minority people form a sizable portion of the population will mitigate some of the effects, not to mention the degree of stress exposure. Although the health consequences of these environments may not close the sizable mental health gap that exists between sexual minorities and members of the sexual majority, there may in fact be health benefits to living in areas where sexual minorities are especially numerous.

This chapter explores this issue with a focus on young adults, comparing the mental health of those who live in neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of sexual minorities to that of those who live in neighborhoods with relatively low concentrations. Further, because many individuals residing in neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of sexual minorities are not themselves sexual minorities, we also compare the mental health of sexual minority young adults to that of their nonminority, heterosexual peers. In each comparison, we use the proportion of same-sex couple households as a proxy measure of sexual minority neighborhood concentration. Our data come from a nationally representative sample of young men and women, and our analysis controls for both neighborhood- and individual-level factors, including those that may influence neighborhood selection.

8.2 Background

Gay Neighborhoods and Minority Coping. Meyer’s (1995, 2003) minority stress perspective, which is an elaboration of social stress theory, provides a useful theoretical starting point for thinking about how neighborhoods with higher densities of sexual minorities might promote or protect the mental health of sexual minority young adults. According to this perspective, individuals who belong to stigmatized minority groups have unique, chronic stressors in their lives as a result of their disadvantaged social status. Meyer (1995) refers to these unique psychosocial stressors as “minority stressors” because they are activated when individuals encounter experiences that reinforce their minority status, including prejudice events, such as discrimination and violence, stigma, including expectations of rejection, and the internalization of negative societal attitudes. The contention is that these stressors, which are experienced over and above the routine stressors that all people encounter, increase the likelihood that minority group members will experience mental health disparities. Although Meyer (1995) had self-identified sexual minorities in mind when he first proposed this perspective, similar arguments have been used to explain the poorer psychological well-being observed among persons with same-sex attractions and/or behaviors (Ueno 2010a, b), as well as that of other minority groups, including women, racial-ethnic minorities, and poor people (Amato and Zuo 1992; Kessler and McLeod 1984; Turner and Avison 2003).

This perspective also recognizes that minority individuals have a range of unique resources available to them that may help to alleviate the impact of minority stressors. Meyer (1995, 2003) uses the term “minority coping” to describe any group-level resources that are related to a stigmatized group’s ability to establish self-enhancing structures and values in the face of stigma. As part of the larger social structure, these group-level resources are potentially available to all minority group members, and thus differ from individual-level resources, which vary from person to person (Meyer 2003). From this perspective, the residential clustering found among minority group members can be conceptualized as a collective coping mechanism with possible health promoting and protective effects. This may explain why for certain ethnic

minority groups, areas of high ethnic density are associated with lower rates of mental health disparities (Halpern 1993; Stafford et al. 2010). It may be that those who reside in such areas are better shielded from exposure to minority stressors and have more resources to cope with stressors.

Much of the scholarly literature describing neighborhoods with relatively large sexual minority populations mirrors Meyer's conceptual framework, with its emphasis on minority coping. From early ethnographic accounts of gay and lesbian enclaves to more recent work using U.S. Census data on same-sex partner households, the literature almost uniformly describes these types of neighborhood environments as "safe spaces" for sexual minorities—meaning, places where they can openly express their sexuality, find refuge from sexual prejudice, and meet and form relationships with others without fear (Castells 1983; Frye et al. 2008; Ghaziani 2014; Hayslett and Kane 2011; Weston 1995). In theory, such spaces allow individuals who feel constrained by heteronormativity, whether because of their sexual behavior, attractions, or identity, to experience social environments that challenge the heterosexual status quo. This, in turn, should lessen their likelihood of encountering stigma and other minority stressors. Feeling included and welcome in such spaces also may offset the sense of isolation and difference that many same-sex attracted people face in everyday heteronormative spaces, such as the workplace or school, and may well improve their self-esteem (Finkelstein and Netherland 2005).

Neighborhoods with sizable sexual minority populations also offer greater opportunities for members to develop social networks with one another than what might be possible elsewhere (Finkelstein and Netherland 2005). In turn, these social networks may provide the kind of social support and solidarity that they need to adequately cope with exposure to minority stressors (Ueno 2010b). These social connections may be particularly important for sexual minorities who have little or no family support, an experience which is not uncommon among young adults with same-sex desires and/or behaviors (Needman and Austin 2010). For example, in a qualitative study of young people living in sexual minority enclaves, many participants described their social networks as substitutes for family relationships (Valentine and Skelton 2003). Also, given the relatively large pool of potential same-sex interested partners in such neighborhoods, young people may have more opportunities than elsewhere to realize sexual desires and to date and connect romantically, conditions which may provide additional coping resources (Finkelstein and Netherland 2005).

Finally, many neighborhoods with significant gay and lesbian residential concentration have amenities and services that either cater to or are tolerant of sexual minorities, as well as social events that celebrate sexual diversity (Levay and Nonas 1995). Having these kinds of institutional resources readily available in the neighborhood may reinforce a sense of pride and affirm people's non-normative expressions of sexuality. Some areas also may have more tangible health resources, including LGBTQ health programs, queer-friendly counseling and support services, and educational workshops on issues related to gay life, including HIV-prevention (Carpiano et al. 2011). In short, because of the greater availability of these types of resources, it is plausible that, when all other relevant factors are controlled, young sexual minorities

living in their areas will report better mental health outcomes than their peers who live elsewhere.

This is not to say that neighborhoods with substantial sexual minority populations pose no health risks to sexual minority young adults. For example, many neighborhoods with high densities of sexual minorities also have high levels of sexual orientation-based hate crimes, a finding which raises questions about the level of safety in these locations (Stotzer 2010). In fact, the very visibility of sexual minorities in neighborhoods may aid perpetrators in identifying victims. Further, residence in these areas may include exposure to subcultural groups that engage in risky behaviors, including substance use, heavy drinking, and risky sexual behaviors (Buttram and Kurtz 2012; Carpiano et al. 2011; Green 2003; Kelly et al. 2012). In this respect, sexual minority young adults who live in such neighborhoods may be at greater risk of immersing themselves in a subcultural context that promotes risk taking. Finally, as prior studies show, these neighborhoods are places where young sexual minorities may encounter various forms of social exclusion, including by race, class, and gender (Valentine and Skelton 2003). For example, Green’s (2008) research of a gay enclave in New York City suggests that there may be a collective status order in many gay neighborhoods that strongly favors white men, in addition to those who are young, masculine, and middle-class. As a result, women, nonwhites, and other lower status residents may be more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes (Green 2008).

Gay Neighborhoods and Heterosexual Residents. Many individuals residing in neighborhoods with high concentrations of sexual minorities are not themselves sexual minorities. In fact, in most instances, nonminority heterosexuals constitute the majority of the neighborhood population (Carpiano et al. 2011). Further, many historically gay neighborhoods, such as the Castro in San Francisco and West Hollywood, California, are undergoing demographic change. Soaring property taxes and rents have driven many sexual minorities out of these areas, while many straight professionals and their families have moved in and replaced them (Ghaziani 2014). It is unclear how these types of environments, if at all, influence the lives of nonminority heterosexuals.

There has been some research on the experiences of straight women in gay-identified venues, such as bars and clubs (Casey 2004; Skeggs 1999). According to this work, these spaces may benefit women by providing them a measure of protection from “the constant male gaze present in heterosexual space,” which can objectify them in potentially threatening ways (Skeggs 1999: 225). On the other hand, heterosexuals may encounter risks, as they are not always welcomed by gay and lesbian patrons; nor do they have the same protections and privileges they experience in other contexts, where heterosexuality is generally assumed and institutionally enforced (Casey 2004). It should also be noted that in historically homophobic societies like the U.S., at least some straight individuals may feel uncomfortable being in areas where sexual minorities are relatively numerous. In short, it may be expected that for heterosexual young adults, living in neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of sexual minorities will have weak or no effects on their mental health, or possibly even a negative association.

8.3 Method

Data. The current study uses The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), conducted by the University of North Carolina's Population Center. The Add Health data rely on a national longitudinal stratified random sample of adolescents enrolled in school beginning when respondents were in grades 7–12, with the first wave collected in 1995 (Tourangeau and Shin 1999). Subsequent waves were collected in 1996, 2002, 2008, and 2016–2018. The third wave, collected in 2002 when respondents were young adults, provides the dependent measures for our analyses. Advantages of this data set include a very large nationally representative sample, which is particularly necessary for this project as it allows for the identification of a sufficient number of sexual minorities. The data also provide information on neighborhood (i.e., Census tracts) characteristics by linking respondents' addresses to Census data.

The final sample ($N = 13,888$) used in these analyses was restricted to respondents who had valid weights, valid data in the neighborhood characteristics used, and valid data on all of the dependent measures. In the final sample, 13% ($f = 1875$) of respondents are classified as sexual minority young adults, 47% of respondents are male, 18% are Latino/Hispanic, 21% are non-Hispanic Black, 1% non-Hispanic Native American, 7% non-Hispanic Asian American, and about 52% non-Hispanic White. The average age is 22 years old and ranges from 18 to 28.

Dependent Variables. All dependent measures are from the Wave III data. The first mental health outcome examined is a measure of "self-esteem." This 4-item scale is comprised of items asking respondents how much they agree with the following statements as representative of the past 7 days: I have many good qualities, I have a lot to be proud of, I like myself just the way I am, I have been doing things right. Responses on individual items, ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree, were reverse coded so that higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem and then averaged (range: 1–5; $M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.6$, $\alpha = 0.79$). The second indicator of mental health is an index of "depressive symptoms," comprised of 9 items asking respondents how often certain things were true in the past week (e.g., couldn't shake off the blues, felt too tired to do things, felt sad, were bothered by things that usually don't bother you, etc.). Responses on individual items, ranging from 0 = never or rarely to 3 = most or all of the time, were averaged (reverse coded when necessary) so that higher scores indicate higher levels of depressive symptoms (range: 0–3; $M = 0.5$, $SD = 0.4$, $\alpha = 0.81$).

Wave I versions of the dependent measures were included in regression models to control for initial levels. Including the lagged measures of the dependent variables means that regression coefficients should be interpreted as effects on (or multivariate associations with) change in self-esteem and depression symptoms.

Focal Independent Variables. One of the two main predictors of interest in this study is whether or not respondents are "sexual minority young adults" (SMYA). In the most general sense, a sexual minority is an individual who has experience with same-sex sexuality, whether at the level of attraction, behavior, or identity. The term reflects the fact that regardless of how one self-identifies, any experience with

same-sex sexuality violates societal norms prescribing exclusive heterosexuality, thereby making that person a sexual minority (Diamond 2008). For this study, we use 3 measures of sexual minority status. (1) Respondents can indicate that they self-identify as 100% heterosexual, mostly heterosexual, bisexual, mostly homosexual, or 100% homosexual. Respondents answering something other than 100% heterosexual were classified as SMYA. (2) If respondents were currently involved in or had been involved in a sexual or romantic relationship since Wave II, they were asked the sex of their partner. If the partner was of the same sex, they were classified as SMYA. (3) Respondents were also asked if they had ever been romantically attracted to a male, and separately, to a female. If they answered “yes” in regard to the same sex, they were classified as SMYA.

The other focal predictor for this study is the extent to which respondents live in neighborhoods with a relatively high concentration of sexual minorities. To ascertain this information, we use a U.S. Census measure of the proportion of same-sex couple households in a neighborhood (i.e., Census tract). Respondents live in neighborhoods that range from 0 to 0.19 (19%) same-sex partner headed households, with the average respondent living in a neighborhood that is 0.0058 ($SD = 0.008$) same-sex partner headed households (0.58%). In our sample, 53.1% live in neighborhoods with no same-sex couple households, 46.9% live in neighborhoods with at least 1% same-sex couple households (with 38.9% living in tracts with 1%), 8% in neighborhoods with at least 2% same-sex couple households (with 6.3% living in tracts with 2%), and 1.7% live in neighborhoods with 3% or more. If these percentages seem low, it is because we are using a proxy measure of sexual minority neighborhood concentration. The Census does not ask about sexual orientation directly, so it leaves out sexual minorities without partners, those who do not live with their partners, and those unwilling to report living with a same-sex partner. This results in a likely underestimation of the proportion of sexual minorities in neighborhoods. On the other hand, according to the 2010 Census, same-sex partner households account for just over half of one percent of all households in the U.S. (Kolko 2012). Thus, even a neighborhood with just 3% same-sex couple households is nearly 6 times the national average. In fact, a neighborhood with a concentration of sexual minorities of that size would be on par with other, more researched types of neighborhood concentration, including ethnic concentration (Spring 2013).

Other Neighborhood-Level Predictors. The proportion of same-sex couple households in a neighborhood may be associated with other neighborhood characteristics that influence mental health. Thus, we used Census measures to control for other significant neighborhood characteristics that may be associated with the proportion of same-sex households. Following precedent (Carpiano et al. 2011), we measured the relative concentration of neighborhood economic disadvantage with a “concentrated disadvantage” index by using a weighted factor score variable based on the proportion of the population over age 16 who are unemployed, the proportion receiving public assistance, the proportion over age 25 without a high school diploma, and the proportion living below the poverty level. Further, to assess the relative rate of residential turnover, we created the variable “residential instability,” which indicates the percentage of the population that has moved in the last 5 years. To ease interpretation

of regression coefficients, we collapsed the percentage of those who had moved into deciles (1 = 0 to 9.9%, 2 = 10 to 19.9%, etc.). We also included a measure of the percentage of residents who reside in an urban area (in each tract), collapsed into deciles.

Concurrent Individual-Level Predictors. We also included several Wave III individual-level measures. One variable was the respondents' relationship status—that is, whether or not they are “currently in a relationship.” Other variables were created in lieu of more conventional socioeconomic status variables. As others have noted (Booth et al. 2012), there are unique challenges involved in measuring the socioeconomic status of young adults. To crudely capture their financial status, we included a dummy coded variable indicating whether or not the respondent receives any public assistance. To measure economic potential, we included a dummy coded variable indicating that the respondent attained at least a junior college degree. We also include a variable coded 1 if the respondent lives with a parent and 0 if no parent figure is recorded in the household roster, because while many were independent in their twenties some were still living with a parent, which could impact mental health. Finally, because we are essentially examining change in self-esteem and depression symptoms between adolescence and young adulthood, we include a dummy coded control for whether or not the respondent moved (0) or still lives in the same house as indicated in Wave I.

Other individual-level factors were included simply as demographic controls. These controls include age, sex (dummy coded into Male = 1 if male; Male = 0 if female); and a dummy set measuring racial/ethnic identity. Hispanic or Latino ancestry was coded 1 if respondents indicated such and 0 if not; Latino ethnicity took coding priority as respondents could identify with any racial group. Most respondents identified with one racial group (non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Native American, non-Hispanic Asian, and non-Hispanic White). Those who identified as multi-racial were subsequently asked which single category best defined them.

Selection Factors. We also included several controls for possible selection into neighborhoods with varying concentrations of same-sex couple households. Specifically, we considered factors that may be important in determining whether or not sexual minority young adults choose to reside in neighborhoods with higher densities of other sexual minorities. In our study, young adults aged 18 to 28 may have transitioned between Wave I and Wave III from a home with a parental figure to one without. Using data from the parent interview at Wave I, we measured whether the responding parent was employed or not (1 = employed) and whether or not the responding parent received any public assistance (1 = received assistance). A measure of the frequency of parental alcohol use is included and ranges from 1 “no alcohol use” to 6 “nearly every day.” To tap into parental concerns about their residence, we include the parent's perception of how crime ridden their neighborhood was on a scale of 1 “no problem” to 3 “big problem.” We also include a proxy for family of origin's economic potential that is the average educational attainment of the responding parent and their spouse (if no spouse, we used the parent's education alone). Parental educational attainment was coded 1 “no formal schooling or 8th grade and less” to 6 “professional training beyond 4 year university.” Finally,

using the youth’s Wave I report, we include a measure of positive parental relationship. This index is the average of three items regarding the how frequently the parent-youth relationship is warm and loving, how satisfied the youth is with the way they communicate, and their overall satisfaction with the parent-youth relationship. Reverse coded items were scored so that higher scores indicate greater agreement (warmer relationship) where 1 was “strongly disagree” and 5 was “strongly agree.” For most respondents this index taps their relationship with mothers. If data on the mother was missing, data on the father-respondent relationship were utilized.

We also included a Wave III measure of the incidence of violent victimizations in the last year, as it may influence residence choice. It is also associated with our dependent measures (see for example, Meyer 1995; Ueno 2010b). Violent victimization is a summed index of 6 items tapping the number of different incidents experienced, including whether someone pulled a gun on the respondent, someone pulled a knife on them, someone shot them, someone stabbed them, someone beat them up without robbing them, and someone beat them up and robbed them. Respondents who said “don’t know” to individual items were assigned the mode of no for those items which may result in an undercount of victimizations while respondents with missing data were omitted. The final index ranges from 0 to 6; on average respondents experienced 0.13 different incidents ($SD = 0.54$).

Analytical Strategy. Descriptive, bivariate, and regression analyses using OLS (ordinary least squares) are presented. Given the complexity of the data’s sampling method, all appropriate sample and individual-level weights are used in all analyses (weights for strata, cluster, and individuals). Stata 13 was used to run the regression analyses. We first estimated equations for the total sample and include a product term for concentration of same-sex headed households centered at its mean (which is essentially 0) and sexual minority young adult status and all other variables. Subsequently, we estimated separate equations for sexual minority and sexual majority young adults. To determine if coefficients are significantly different across equations by SMYA status, we re-estimated equations for the full sample and included product terms for SMYA status and all other variables in the model. Significant product terms (where *t values* are significantly larger than by chance) indicate that the coefficients displayed in the separate equations are significantly different from each other; these differences are noted in Table 8.3 with bold ($p < 0.05$) and bolded italicized font ($p < 0.01$). This method produces results similar to z-tests for the equality of regression coefficients across equations (Paternoster et al. 1998). Lagged levels of the outcome measures, initial levels during adolescence, are included in the model allowing us to focus upon change in depression, self-esteem, logged drug use, and logged excessive drinking.

8.4 Results

Table 8.1 presents the sample characteristics, as well as compares sexual minority and sexual majority young adults in terms of those characteristics. We can see that

Table 8.1 Sample description

	Total Sample	Sexual minority	Sexual majority	Test
Wave III dependent measures	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %	
Depression	0.51 (0.45)	0.68 (0.52)	0.49 (0.44)	$t = -15.0^{**}$
Self-esteem	4.22 (0.58)	4.07 (0.63)	4.24 (0.56)	$t = 11.1^{**}$
<i>Wave III</i>				
SMYA (1 = sexual minority)	13.2%			
Prop. SS headed households	0.0058 (0.008)	0.0067 (0.01)	0.0057 (0.01)	$t = 4.9^{**}$
Current relationship	59.4%	59.2%	59.5	n.s.
Missing relationship (1 = yes)	17.8%	15.5%	18.2	$\chi^2 = 7.9^{**}$
College degree (1 = at least 2 yr)	19.0%	18.4%	19.1%	n.s.
Public assistance (1 = yes)	13.3%	15.0%	13.0%	n.s.
Lives with parent (1 = yes)	43.9%	38.5%	44.7%	$\chi^2 =$
Same house since Wave I (1 = yes)	18.5%	15.3%	19.0%	$\chi^2 = 15.2^{**}$
Violent victimizations (0–6)	0.13 (0.54)	0.16 (0.63)	0.13 (0.52)	$t = -2.3^*$
Male	47.3%	29.8%	50.0%	$\chi^2 = 260.2^{**}$
Age	22.04 (1.76)	21.94 (1.74)	22.06 (1.76)	$t = 2.6^{**}$
Latino/Hispanic (any race)	18.0%	18.8%	17.9	n.s.
Non-Hispanic Black	20.9%	18.3%	21.3%	$\chi^2 = 8.6^{**}$
Non-Hispanic American Indian	1.1%	1.6%	1.0%	$\chi^2 = 6.1^*$
Non-Hispanic Asian	7.4%	5.9%	7.6	$\chi^2 = 6.6^*$
Nhood: % Urban (1–10)	7.66 (3.80)	8.04 (3.58)	7.60 (3.83)	$t = -4.9^{**}$
Nhood: % Moved (1 = 10)	5.32 (1.53)	5.45 (1.55)	5.29 (1.52)	$t = -4.1^{**}$
Nhood: Concentrated Disadvantage	0 (1.00)	-0.07 (0.98)	0.00 (1.00)	$t = 2.7^{**}$
<i>Wave I</i>				
Positive maternal relationship (1–5)	4.21 (0.80)	4.06 (0.89)	4.23 (0.78)	$t = 8.1^{**}$
Missing maternal relationship	1.9%	2.3%	1.8%	n.s.
Parent’s report crime-ridden Nhood	1.48 (0.59)	1.50 (0.61)	1.48 (0.59)	n.s.

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

	Total Sample	Sexual minority	Sexual majority	Test
Wave III dependent measures	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %	M (SD) or %	
Parent on public assistance (1 = yes)	23.3%	22.7%	23.4%	n.s.
Parent employed (1 = yes)	63.6%	64.0%	63.5%	n.s.
Parent’s alcohol use (1–6)	1.60 (0.77)	1.67 (0.82)	1.58 (0.77)	$t = -4.3^{**}$
Missing parent data W-I	16.4%	15.7%	16.6%	n.s.
Parent’s education (1–6)	3.64 (1.21)	3.70 (1.24)	3.63 (1.20)	$t = -2.4^*$
Missing parent’s education	14.3%	13.7%	14.4%	n.s.
<i>Lagged dependent measures</i>				
Depression (0–3)	0.66 (0.48)	0.77 (0.53)	0.64 (0.46)	$t = -10.3^{**}$
Self-esteem (1–5)	4.07 (0.64)	3.93 (0.69)	4.09 (0.63)	$t = 9.4^{**}$

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, n.s. = not statistically significant

sexual minority young adults differ significantly from their sexual majority peers in several important ways. Our data shows that SMYA have significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms and significantly lower levels of self-esteem (see Table 8.1). The patterns we see when the respondents were in their 20s also appear to have existed in adolescence. SMYA reported significantly higher depression and significantly lower self-esteem at Wave 1.

In our sample, sexual minority and sexual majority young adults are equally likely to be in a current relationship (59%), have at least a two-year college degree (19%), and be on public assistance (15% and 13%, respectively). SMYA are less likely than their sexual majority peers to still live with a parent and are more likely to have moved since Wave I. They are also significantly more likely to live in urban neighborhoods and neighborhoods where there is more population mobility but where there is slightly less concentrated disadvantage.

In our sample, sexual minority young adults are significantly and substantially more likely to be female (70%) than sexual majority young adults (50%). This is consistent with other research which shows that young women are more likely than young men to report same-sex attractions and same-sex behaviors (Diamond 2008; Ueno 2010a, b). SMYA report a slightly lower average for positive maternal relationship. Their parents self-reported slightly higher levels of alcohol use at Wave I and levels of educational attainment. Parents of sexual minority and sexual majority young adults reported equal perceptions of how crime ridden their Wave I neighborhoods were, and were equally likely to be employed and on public assistance.

Table 8.2 presents the weighted least squares regressions of 2 dependent variables on a set of contemporaneous correlates including neighborhood characteristics and demographics, Wave I controls including parental support and social characteristics, and a lagged version of the dependent measure to examine how proportion of same-sex households, SMYA status, and their interaction affect change in mental health.

Table 8.2 Weighted OLS regressions of 2 health indicators on sexual minority young adult status, neighborhood concentration of same-sex headed households and other factors

	Depression	Self esteem
Focal variables ¹	b (se)	b (se)
SMYA (1 = SMYA)	0.129** (0.014)	-0.119** (0.022)
Prop. SS headed households	1.284 (1.402)	0.237 (0.950)
SMYA * SS Hhlds	-4.591* (2.093)	6.096** (2.252)
<i>Current status and experiences (WAVE III)</i>		
Current relationship (1 = yes)	-0.055** (0.011)	0.070** (0.016)
College degree (1 = at least 2 yr)	-0.070** (0.012)	0.058** (0.017)
Public assistance (1 = yes)	0.088** (0.014)	-0.043* (0.022)
Lives with parent (1 = yes)	0.023* (0.012)	-0.060** (0.014)
Same house since Wave I (1 = yes)	0.004 (0.016)	0.025 (0.020)
Violent victimizations	0.053** (0.013)	-0.022* (0.013)
Male	-0.050** (0.011)	0.021 (0.014)
Age	-0.012** (0.003)	0.005 (0.004)
Latino/Hispanic (1 = yes)	0.056** (0.018)	0.021 (0.023)
Non-Hispanic Black	0.052** (0.016)	0.071** (0.020)
Non-Hispanic American Indian	0.016 (0.054)	-0.000 (0.053)
Non-Hispanic Asian	0.046* (0.024)	-0.001 (0.030)
Nhood: % urban	0.003* (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)
Nhood: % moved	0.000 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)
Nhood: concentrated disadvantage	-0.010a (0.006)	0.025** (0.008)
<i>Wave I controls</i>		
Positive maternal relationship	-0.024** (0.007)	0.038** (0.009)

(continued)

Table 8.2 (continued)

	Depression	Self esteem
Focal variables ¹	b (se)	b (se)
Parent’s report crime-ridden Nhood	0.005 (0.009)	0.006 (0.011)
Parent on public assistance (1 = yes)	0.014 (0.014)	−0.011 (0.017)
Parent employed (1 = yes)	−0.018 (0.011)	0.010 (0.017)
Parent’s alcohol use	0.006 (0.006)	0.002 (0.008)
Parent’s education	−0.011** (0.004)	0.013* (0.006)
Lagged dependent	0.278** (0.014)	0.229** (0.013)
Intercept	0.704** (0.082)	2.872** (0.111)
<i>R</i> ²	0.158	0.109
<i>N</i>	13,706	13,705

p* < 0.05, *p* < 0.01 one-tailed tests (except race/ethnicity dummy set and % urban, % moved, concentrated disadvantage which are 2 tailed)

As seen in Table 8.2, key bivariate differences by sexual minority status remain significant in the multivariate context. Sexual minorities report a greater increase in depression symptoms and lower self-esteem, net all other variables. The product term for sexual minority young adult status and proportion same-sex headed households suggests a differential effect of the latter for sexual minority and sexual majority young adults in the case of depression symptoms and self-esteem. We explore this difference and others in separate equations for sexual minority and sexual majority young adults in Table 8.3.

Our primary interest was in the association between the proportion of same-sex headed households and our 2 outcome measures. As seen in Table 8.3, neighborhood concentration of same-sex headed households significantly decreases depressive symptoms for sexual minority young adults and significantly increases self-esteem for sexual minority young adults, net adolescent levels of depression and self-esteem and the effects of all other variables. A one unit increase in the proportion of households headed by same-sex couples decreases depressive symptoms by 3.2 for sexual minority young adults and has no effect for sexual majority young adults. The difference in these two coefficients is statistically significant (*t* = 2.22, *p* < 0.05). A one unit increase in the proportion of households headed by same-sex couples increases self-esteem for sexual minority young adults by 6.1 and is not significantly related to self-esteem for sexual majority young adults. Again this difference across equations is statistically significant according to the full sample model with all SMYA interactions included.

Table 8.3 Separate weighted OLS regressions of 2 health indicators for sexual minority and majority young adults

	Depression		Self esteem	
	Minority	Majority	Minority	Majority
<i>Focal variable</i>				
Prop. SS headed households	-3.240* (1.639)	1.295 (1.401)	6.097** (1.983)	0.208 (0.967)
Current relationship (1 = yes)	-0.123** (0.032)	-0.045** (0.012)	0.168** (0.045)	0.053** (0.017)
College degree (1 = at least 2 yr)	-0.124** (0.031)	-0.061** (0.012)	0.010** (0.039)	0.051** (0.018)
Public assistance (1 = yes)	0.148** (0.040)	0.078** (0.016)	-0.046 (0.049)	-0.044* (0.023)
Lives with parent (1 = yes)	-0.012 (0.031)	0.026* (0.012)	0.034 (0.041)	-0.072** (0.015)
Same house since Wave 1 (1 = yes)	0.056 (0.058)	0.000 (0.015)	-0.030 (0.061)	0.029 (0.020)
Violent victimizations	0.082** (0.024)	0.047** (0.014)	-0.002 (0.029)	-0.028* (0.015)
Male	-0.119** (0.029)	-0.041** (0.012)	0.044 (0.042)	0.020 (0.015)
Age	-0.019** (0.007)	-0.011** (0.003)	0.025* (0.013)	0.003 (0.004)
Latino/Hispanic (1 = yes)	0.173** (0.048)	0.035 (0.019)	-0.071 (0.053)	0.036 (0.027)
Non-Hispanic Black	0.085 (0.049)	0.045** (0.017)	0.118* (0.060)	0.068** (0.022)
Non-Hispanic American Indian	0.236 (0.127)	-0.043 (0.056)	-0.172 (0.129)	0.044 (0.057)
Non-Hispanic Asian	0.034 (0.068)	0.045 (0.024)	0.008 (0.079)	-0.002 (0.033)
Nhood: % urban	0.001 (0.004)	0.003* (0.002)	0.001 (0.005)	0.001 (0.002)
Nhood: % moved	-0.006 (0.011)	0.001 (0.004)	0.013 (0.015)	0.003 (0.005)
Nhood: concentrated disadvantage	-0.031 (0.019)	-0.006 (0.006)	0.018 (0.019)	0.026** (0.008)
<i>Wave 1 controls</i>				
Positive maternal relationship	-0.042** (0.018)	-0.019* (0.008)	0.070** (0.024)	0.031** (0.009)
Parent's report crime-ridden Nhood	0.031 (0.025)	0.001 (0.010)	0.027 (0.030)	0.003 (0.012)
Parent on public assistance (1 = yes)	-0.041 (0.040)	0.022 (0.014)	0.021 (0.050)	-0.015 (0.018)

(continued)

Table 8.3 (continued)

	Depression		Self esteem	
	Minority	Majority	Minority	Majority
Parent employed (1 = yes)	0.062* (0.030)	-0.029* (0.012)	-0.111** (0.042)	0.026 (0.018)
Parent’s alcohol use	0.008 (0.017)	0.006 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.020)	0.002 (0.009)
Parent’s education	-0.012 (0.013)	-0.011* (0.004)	0.048** (0.015)	0.008 (0.006)
Lagged dependent	0.260** (0.031)	0.283** (0.015)	0.164** (0.028)	0.242** (0.014)
Intercept	1.108** (0.231)	0.652** (0.089)	2.211** (0.381)	2.943** (0.118)
R ²	0.188	0.140	0.111	0.104
N	1,808	11,898	1,806	11,899

p* < 0.05, *p* < 0.01 one-tailed tests (except race/ethnicity dummy set and % urban, % moved, concentrated disadvantage which are 2 tailed)

8.5 Discussion

The results from this study suggest that gay and queer-friendly neighborhoods are important contexts for understanding the mental health of sexual minority young adults. While prior studies have shown that sexual minority young adults experience poorer mental health than their sexual majority peers, including higher levels of internalizing symptoms, such as depression and low self-esteem (Marshall et al. 2011; Ueno 2010a), our study finds that this relationship may depend on the characteristics of the neighborhood environments in which they live. Specifically, the proportion of same-sex partner households in a neighborhood appears to influence the degree to which sexual minorities, but not heterosexuals, report poorer mental health, over and above the influence other neighborhood- and individual-level factors.

Our analysis shows that for sexual minority young adults, living in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of same-sex couples is associated with significantly better mental health outcomes than living in neighborhoods with lower concentrations of same-sex couples. Specifically, we found that those who live in areas with higher densities of sexual minorities have lower rates of depression symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem. Conversely, for heterosexual young adults, we found no association between the proportion of same-sex couples in a neighborhood and mental health outcomes. Thus, it appears that only sexual minorities are advantaged by living in neighborhoods where same-sex couples are more densely concentrated.

Neighborhood selection factors, such as the respondents’ past experiences with victimization, their level of parental support, parental perceptions of neighborhood crime, and their parents’ financial status, cannot account for the lower rates of depression symptoms and higher rates of self-esteem found among sexual minority young

adults who live in neighborhoods with heavier concentrations of same-sex couples. Nor can other individual-level factors, such as race-ethnicity, education, or the respondents' relationship status. This suggests that there is something about the neighborhood environment, rather than characteristics of the individuals, that explains why sexual minorities living in neighborhoods with higher levels of same-sex couples report better mental health. Given that we controlled for other neighborhood-level factors, including the relative concentration of economic disadvantage, it seems likely that the presence of other sexual minorities in and of itself is the driving protective factor.

Why might living in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of same-sex partner households lead to better mental health outcomes among sexual minority young adults? Although we cannot definitely answer this question based on the data used in this study, our results are consistent with the assumptions of the minority stress perspective, with its emphasis on minority coping (Meyer 1995, 2003). This perspective asserts that while sexual minorities have unique stressors in their lives as a result of their disadvantaged social status, they also have unique resources to cope with stressors, including potentially protective and health promoting neighborhood environments. As is the case in some ethnic minority neighborhoods (Stafford et al. 2010; Yuan 2008), neighborhoods with relatively large concentrations of sexual minorities may function protectively to generate resiliency in the face of minority stress, with potentially positive consequences for mental health. Sexual minority young adults who live in such neighborhoods may be better shielded from exposure to minority stressors, such as discrimination and violence, and have more resources to deal with stressors, such as social and institutional support. The implication is that sexual minorities who choose to live in neighborhoods with large numbers of other sexual minorities are not just acting out their personal preferences; they also may be seeking the health benefits that these neighborhoods confer (Valentine and Skelton 2003). Then again, even if some sexual minorities choose to live in such neighborhoods for other reasons, such as economic or cultural, they may still reap health benefits by virtue of their proximity.

This is not to say that neighborhoods with substantial sexual minority populations pose no health risks to sexual minority young adults. As prior studies have shown, gay and queer-friendly neighborhoods also may be places where young sexual minorities may encounter antigay violence, subcultural norms that promote risky behaviors, including substance use, heavy drinking, and risky sexual behaviors, as well as various forms of social exclusion, including by race, class, and gender (Buttram and Kurtz 2012; Carpiano et al. 2011; Green 2008; Kelly et al. 2012; Stotzer 2010; Valentine and Skelton 2003). Yet, whatever risks young people may face in these kinds of neighborhoods, they do not appear to have a negative effect on their level of depression symptoms or self-esteem. In this regard, the risks of living in areas with higher than average sexual minority populations do not outweigh the benefits, at least not for sexual minority young adults.

8.6 Limitations and Conclusion

This study involved several limitations. First, for practical reasons related to data availability, we determined the proportion of the neighborhood population that is composed of sexual minorities using a census-driven measure of the percentage of same-sex partner households. This is a crude proxy that measures sexual minority population concentration indirectly, as it leaves out sexual minorities without partners, those who do not live with their partners, and, as in the case of all surveys, those unwilling to identify themselves. Unfortunately, the Census only collects data on the residential patterns of same-sex partner households, resulting in a significant underestimation of the presence of sexual minorities in any given neighborhood. On the other hand, while the Census may not be ideal, the fact that it significantly underestimates the extent of sexual minority neighborhood concentration gives us greater confidence that the neighborhood effects we did find in this study are robust.

Second, while our sample included a sizeable number of sexual minority young adults ($n = 1875$), the subsample living in neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of same-sex partner households was quite small. Small sample size reduces statistical power and makes it difficult to detect group differences in the population. Further, sample size limitations precluded us from exploring other potential variations among sexual minorities, including by gender, racial-ethnicity, and class. When possible, future work should consider how sexuality intersects with other social statuses. Studies also need to consider if variations exist among sexual minorities depending on their sexual identity. Not all young people with same-sex attractions or behaviors adopt a sexual minority identity, such as “gay” or “bisexual,” and there may be differences in neighborhood effects between those who do and do not.

Third, the age range of our sample was restricted to 18- to 28-year-olds. Thus, while the findings presented here may generalize to this particular age group, it remains to be seen whether the same effects will be found in older populations. We also dealt with a single age cohort. Neighborhoods with higher concentrations of sexual minorities may have different effects on different cohorts, including future cohorts. For example, there is some evidence that historic gay neighborhoods are on the decline (Ghaziani 2014). If so, this may alter their impact on the mental health of sexual minorities in the future.

Finally, despite our attempts to control for potential selection effects, we cannot be certain of the causal direction between neighborhood residence and mental health. Although we believe that it is more plausible that neighborhood contexts influence mental health, it is also possible that these associations reflect the selection of persons into neighborhoods based on other characteristics related to mental health. For example, with respect to sexual minority young adults, it is possible that healthier sexual minorities are “selected into” neighborhoods with higher densities of same-sex headed households, while their less healthy peers are “selected out.” On the other hand, the reverse could also be operating, which would have significant implications for thinking about the health effects of high-density sexual minority neighborhoods. While we were able to control for whether the respondents moved between Waves

I and III, we could not track when Wave III depressive symptoms and self-esteem scores started vis-à-vis the move to the Wave III residence.

Despite these limitations, our study provides suggestive evidence that gay and queer friendly neighborhoods—i.e., residential tracts with relatively large concentrations of sexual minority residents—have a positive impact on the mental health of sexual minority young adults, above and beyond the influence of their individual characteristics. Our study thus underscores the importance of striving for contextual understandings at the neighborhood level of sexual minorities and their mental health problems. Future work should consider exploring the mechanisms underlying the protective association between neighborhoods with relatively high concentrations of same-sex couples and mental health, and if the mechanisms at work in these areas are similar to those found in ethnic minority neighborhoods.

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Part IV
Co-Relation and Dialectic

Chapter 9

Let's (not) Go Outside: Grindr, Hybrid Space, and Digital Queer Neighborhoods



Sam Miles

Abstract Developments in mobile digital technologies are disrupting conventional understandings of space and place for smartphone users. One way in which location-based media are refiguring previously taken-for-granted spatial traditions is via GPS-enabled online dating and hook-up apps. For sexual minorities, these apps can reconfigure any street, park, bar, or home into a queer space through a potential meeting between mutually attracted individuals, but what does this signify for already-existing queer spaces? This chapter examines how smartphone apps including Grindr, Tinder, and Blued synthesize online queer encounter with offline physical space to create a new hybrid terrain predicated on availability, connection, and encounter. It is also a terrain that can sidestep established gay neighborhoods entirely. I explore how this hybridization impacts on older, physically rooted gay neighborhoods and the role that these neighborhoods have traditionally played in brokering social and sexual connection for sexual minorities. Few would deny that location-based apps have come to play a valuable role in multiplying opportunities for sexual minorities. However, the stratospheric rise of these technologies also provokes questions about their impact on embodied encounter, queer community, and a sense of place. A decade on from Grindr's release, this chapter evaluates the impact of location-based media on gay spaces and reflects on what the increasing hybridization of online and offline spaces for same-sex encounter might mean for queer lives of the future.

Keywords Technology · Geography · Hybridization · Space · Location-based media · Coronavirus

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9.1 Introduction

*Let's go outside (let's go outside),
In the moonshine
Take me to the places that I love best*

George Michael, *Outside* (1998)

In October 1998, mere months after his arrest for ‘engaging in a lewd sex act’ with another man in a Los Angeles park, singer George Michael released the hit single ‘Outside’, a musical celebration of sex in public. ‘I think I’m done with the sofa/I think I’m done with the hall/I think I’m done with the kitchen table, baby’, the singer suggests, before confessing: ‘You see I think about it all the time, 24/7’. The song concludes with a knowing wink to other cruisers: ‘Keep on funkkin’, just keep on funkinn’. As a musical riposte to heteronormativity, the message was clear: queer life is best lived outside.

Two decades later, queer life is happening rather more inside, and when it comes to gay neighborhoods more widely, things are changing fast. Developments in mobile digital technologies over the past decade are refiguring previously taken-for-granted spatial traditions in today’s towns and cities in ways that incorporate online spaces more than ever before. One way in which this shift is occurring is via online dating, sex, and hook-up apps. The US digital dating app market alone is worth nearly \$1 billion (Clement 2020), with disproportionately high LGBTQ subscription: 65% of same-sex couples now meet their partner online rather than in person, against 39% of heterosexual couples (Rosenfeld et al. 2019). Location-based media—that is, products that utilize the GPS location-sensing technologies offered by today’s smartphones¹—now comprise the dominant platform for partner seeking across the global North. Male-male offerings including Grindr, Hornet, Scruff, and Blued, and female-female platforms including HER and Lex, as well as more mainstream apps increasingly utilized for same-sex searching such as Tinder and Badoo, have proven popular for both socialization and sexual encounter (Ahlm 2017; Ferris and Duguay 2020; Mearns 2020; Miles 2018).

Same-sex partner-seeking platforms, of which Grindr is the (in)famous market leader with users in 234 countries worldwide (Grindr 2020), have enjoyed particularly high adoption by gay, bisexual, and other men who seek sex with men. Membership of these platforms has become the norm not just throughout wealthy cities in North America and Europe, but also surprisingly widely around the world, including within sociopolitical cultures popularly perceived to be sexually conservative (Dasgupta 2017; Miao and Chan 2020) and economically marginalized settings in the global South (Birnholtz et al. 2020; Bryan 2019). This rapid and widespread shift to online, smartphone-enabled partner-seeking generates significant implications for offline gay neighborhoods, compounded by the economic impact of the 2020–21 coronavirus pandemic on what are, in many cities, already struggling queer commercial

¹Variouly called locative media, Location-Based Social Apps (LBSAs) and People Nearby Applications (PNAs).

and community venues. For the LGBTQ app user, Grindr or Scruff or HER can reconfigure any street, park, bar, or home into a queer space by brokering a meeting between mutually attracted individuals. What, then, might this signify for already-existing queer spaces? Or to put it another way: what does a gay neighborhood look like today when *any* bar can constitute a gay bar for those meeting through location-based platforms? And how might this technologically hybridized route to encounter shape gay neighborhoods of the future?

For the purpose of this chapter I define hybridization as the layering, synthesizing, or collapsing of digital and physical realities. The result is a hybrid reality, landscape, or place, in this scenario for navigation by the dating app user seeking to make contact with a new partner(s). This chapter calls upon ideas of technological hybridization to explore how dating and hook-up apps synthesize online queer spaces of connection with offline, in-person meetings between interested parties—in what follows, primarily men, given their disproportionately high subscription to location-based apps.² I also explore possible impacts of this hybridized encounter on older, physically rooted gay neighborhoods, and I reflect on future scenarios for online and offline neighborhoods in a post-coronavirus pandemic urban landscape. Few would deny that GPS-enabled apps have come to play a significant role in multiplying opportunities for sexual minorities; however, their unprecedented rise in popularity equally provokes questions about their impact on embodied encounter, community and a spatially oriented sense of place. When it comes to research, debates percolating around online self-presentation in queer technology use are now well-established (see for example Anderson et al. 2018; Bonner-Thompson 2017; Callander et al. 2015; Conner 2019; Miles 2019), but sustained examination of the lived, applied realities for these technology users in a digitally ‘enhanced’ but demonstrably physical context are still relatively limited. This chapter offers just one approach to how we might think about the changing relations between gay neighborhoods, communities, and mobile technologies.

Before going any further, there is a point here that needs to be emphasized regarding technological change. The location-based media landscape is continually evolving, and industry behemoths such as Grindr and Tinder that dominate today may in the near future be replaced by competitors, which will themselves be replaced over time by yet newer upstart platforms. Technological research is characterized by seemingly ever-changing developments, but the wider analyses offered in this chapter of how contemporary digital platforms impact on gay neighborhoods will hold true for technologies of the future, much as the patterns I explore here themselves echo interactions with desktop programs of the 1990s, from Yahoo listservs to Gaydar and PlanetRomeo, seen at the time as pioneering technological offerings (Miles 2018; Mowlabocus 2010). Understanding today’s platforms and how they function for users usefully informs exploration of related (and indeed seemingly unrelated) technologies of the present and future, even as the products themselves

²Though see for example Duguay (2019) for queer women’s experiences of ‘scarcity’ in geospatial partner-seeking.

change. Indeed, the growing ‘digital turn’ in urban geography (Ash et al. 2018; Barns et al. 2017; Datta 2018; Engin et al. 2020; Kitchin 2014) strongly suggests that technological processes will become ever more dominant in our epistemological and empirical studies of urban life.

9.2 Situating Sexualities, Cities, and Technologies

Understandings of space as a conventional cartography have been superseded in the last quarter-century by more humanistic and relational interpretations of space as flexible, multiple, and continually produced (Harvey 1989; Lefebvre 2004; Thrift 2006). Spaces are also sites of political, cultural and social negotiations and re-negotiations between groups and individuals. The development of these more contested social constructions of space have allowed critics to explore the exclusionary spaces and segregated spaces that have so often characterized queer urban life, from the social—and therefore spatial—primacy granted to heterosexual family life (Edelman 2004) to the red-light zones to which queer life has often been relegated. Excluded or undesirable spaces have played host to countless gay neighborhoods, liminal zones, or informal settlements wherein sexual minorities have built alliances and communities with each other as well as with other marginalized groups (Berlant and Warner 1998; Brown 2009; Hartal 2017; Irazábal and Huerta 2016; Orne 2017; Ross and Sullivan 2012). The diversifying populations of these gay neighborhoods meant that they became ‘centres of community that welcomed “the other”’ (Bitterman 2020: 100), whether defined as such by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, class, health, or intersections of these identities. Thus, even as contemporary understandings of the ‘gayborhood’ increasingly pivot on capitalist endeavor, exclusionary wealth, and homonormativity, there exists a queerer history of these same spaces as representative of the physical manifestations of normative hegemonic forces that work to decenter minorities, and by association their practices, in public spaces. Or to put it a different way: even the most commodified present-day gayborhoods have grown from more radical roots.

Certainly, while cities have constituted—and continue to constitute—spaces of sexual possibility, they are also sites upon which ‘sexuality is most intensely scrutinised’ (Hubbard 2011: xiv). Given a history of surveillance, criminalization and homophobia and transphobia, sexual minorities have long had to negotiate and navigate both private and public spaces in complex and often subversive or dissident ways. As chapters elsewhere in this volume demonstrate (Eeckhout et al. 2021; Ghaziani 2021; Stone 2021), gay neighborhoods have developed over time as the spatial, generally urban manifestation of networks of sociability and solidarity between non-heterosexuals (Aldrich 2004; Gieseking 2020). Few would disagree with the idea that the city holds a particular cachet as a sexually stimulating environment (Bech 1997); within this environment, an historical synchronicity between urban terrain, sex, and sexuality, from cruising to commercial venues, still dominates today (Fig. 9.1).

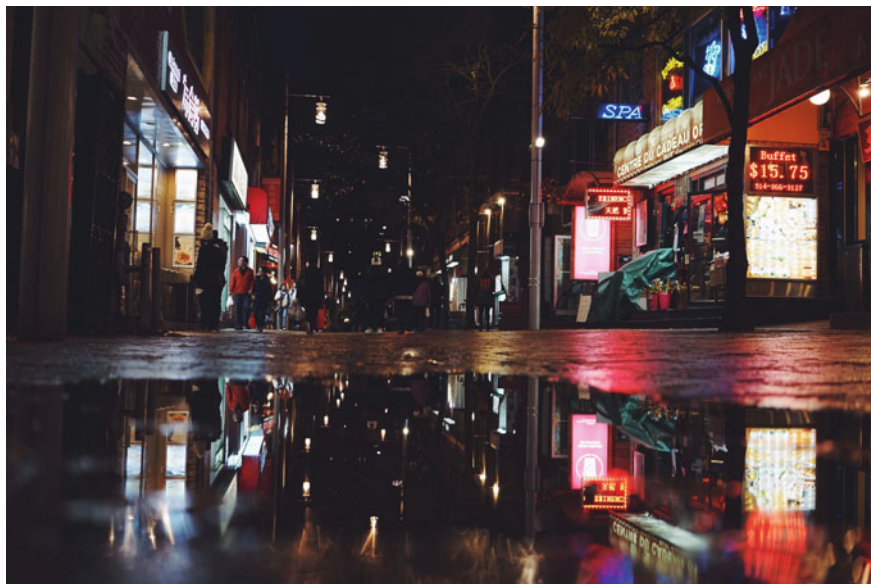


Fig. 9.1 Urban streetscape at night (Source Guillaume Jailleton for Unsplash (2017). Used with permission)

To this distinctive history of place-making, technological hybridization has come to play a growing role in everyday queer life. Technology has become deeply incorporated into our lived environment. With an estimated 4.4 billion internet users worldwide (Kemp 2019), the internet has for many become ‘part of everyday life and sexuality’ (Johansson 2007: 118), and for many LGBTQ populations, including a sizeable proportion of gay, bisexual and other MSM, the integration of mobile and continuously connected internet into daily life has come to dominate sexuality and sexual practices. In the recent past, virtual worlds were considered distinct from ‘real’ spaces, but as technology has progressed in sophistication and portability, hybridization has developed as a more sustained relationship between the two entities. Technological hybridization challenges the assumption that digital space is predicated on transcending borders, boundaries, and geography to an ‘Othered’ cyberspace. Instead, it offers an overlaying of physical environments with virtual connectivity and virtual and/or hybrid environments. The relationship between virtual and material worlds has become so intertwined as to now rarely be conceptualized as separate in any meaningful sense (see Barns et al. 2017; Kitchin and Dodge 2011; Farman 2012; Miles 2017). As Robyn Longhurst (2013: 667) argues: ‘people conduct their personal, familial, and emotional lives in a myriad of ways in a variety of different spaces. Bodies and spaces—cyber and ‘real’—are entangled’. These circulations generate pertinent questions about the way that we practice online life and what that looks like embedded in physical experience. Location-based media apps such

as Grindr and Tinder offer a useful case study to witness some of these circulations in practice.

9.3 Location-Based Dating Apps and Their Hybrid Queer Spaces

Central to the growth of digital-physical hybridization is the use of mobile phones, which are now the dominant platform for online connectivity worldwide (Clement 2019; O’Dea 2020). Contrary to anxieties raised by scholars including Zygmunt Bauman (2003) and Sherry Turkle (2011) regarding the negative implications of mobile virtual (un)reality on face-to-face communication, the reality borne out by technology users’ experiences seems to paint a significantly more relaxed picture. App users tend not to ‘escape’ or stop attending to their physical proximate environment due to their online connection(s); on the contrary, these location-based media figuratively overlay a user’s embodied reality with virtual connections with other people and places (see for example De Falco 2019; Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011; Miles 2017; Race 2015).³ If we recognize the ability of the internet as a *broker* for embodied connections, the threat of unintentionally disconnecting from local territory is neutralized. Space again finds potential as something that can be practiced, imagined, and differently figured for each of its inhabitants, and this equally impacts on a physical sense of place. Whether this re-mediation of space and place via technology holds when it comes to a gay or queer neighborhood is less easily assumed, not least because ideas of what a gay neighborhood *is*, and its conceptual parameters, may actually be differently defined by different location-based media users, with conflicting attitudes and ambivalences (Miles 2017). Meanwhile, parallel debates permeate popular contemporary discourse: queer dating and hook-up apps are variously blamed for destroying gay neighborhoods and celebrated for reinvigorating them; dismissed as impediments to queer community by some and hypothesized by others as virtual sites for new and liberatory communities. Talking with users soon reveals that there are as many diverse attitudes to these apps as there are products themselves.

The major attraction of apps such as Grindr, Hornet, and Blued that dominate online socialization for male-male encounter is their GPS mapping function. This feature pinpoints a user’s physical coordinates in order to filter potential matches by proximity, with the aim of expediting localized physical encounters developed from online introductions. By displaying a visual grid (Grindr) or shuffled card deck (Tinder) of potential matches for sex, relationships, and dating ordered by distance (see Figs. 9.2 and 9.3), these platforms streamline the process of meeting and allow the user to filter extensively for desired characteristics in any potential match:

³This can hold in reverse, too: today’s smartphones contribute to an embodied experience within online space(s) from which they can influence a user’s affective, physical realm.

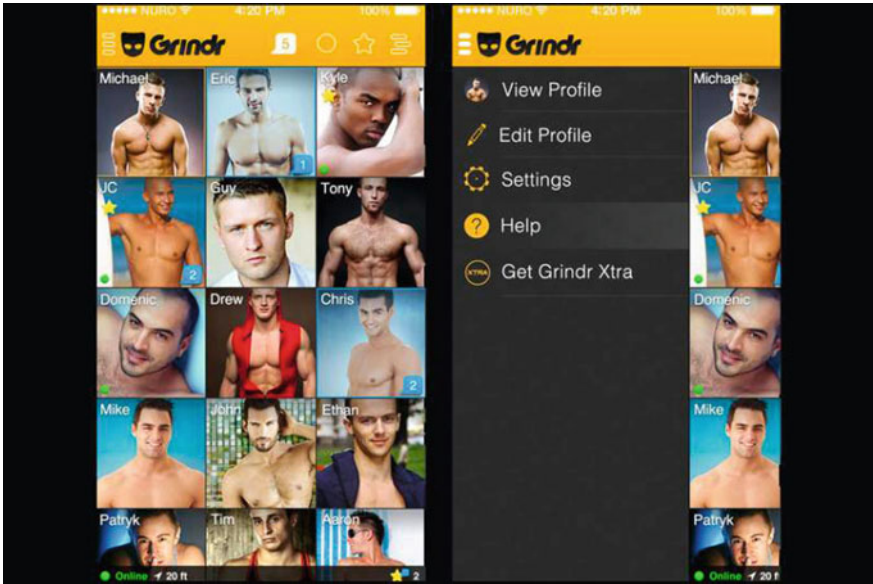


Fig. 9.2 Grindr application (Source Grindr (2020). Used with permission)

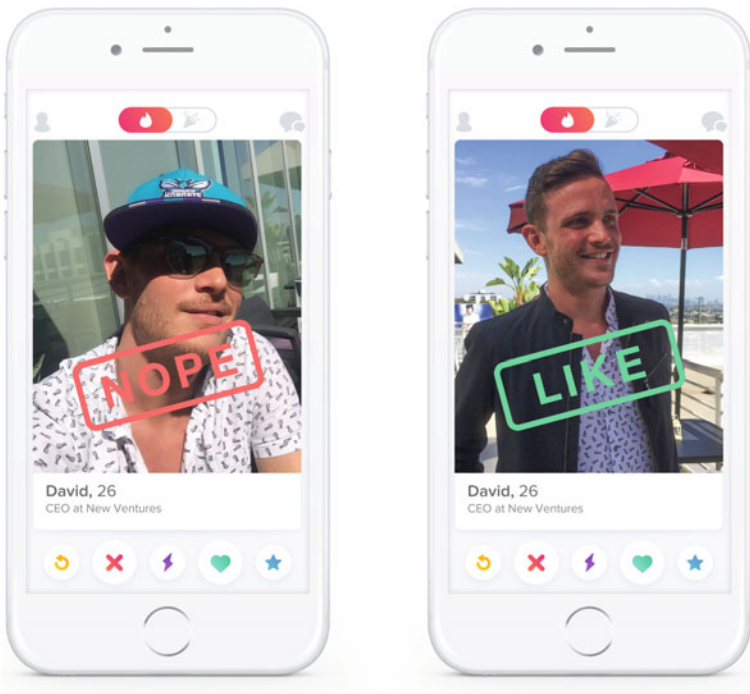


Fig. 9.3 Tinder application (Source Tinder (2020). Used with permission)

including, controversially, ethnicity and HIV status⁴ (Conner 2019; Lim et al. 2020; Shield 2018). In fact, visiting a town center, new neighborhood, or high street for the first time and loading the Grindr app makes for a curiously postmodern pastiche of cruising, parsing as it does the likeminded from the uninterested (Miles 2018). But these apps also mark a departure from the spontaneity of traditional ‘analog’ cruising. Dating apps allow the user to filter potential matches by age, body type (‘bear’,⁵ ‘jock’, ‘geek’, ‘mature’), and distance before even an online introduction, let alone a physical encounter. These are algorithmically gifted digital matchmakers, and their filtering abilities are staggering.

Queer men have long used subcultural codes, from fashion items like a single earring or colored handkerchiefs, to language and slang such as Polari, to assist in identifying each other in public. Now this peer identification is expedited through digital algorithms in users’ pockets and executed in real-time. Kane Race (2015: 271) captures the distinctive qualities of the spaces created by this location-based technology when he argues that apps are ‘participating in the construction of a specific sphere of sociability and amiable acquaintance among men in urban centers that prioritizes sex as a principle mechanism for connection and sociability’. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these apps influence how users conceive of urban spaces and how they navigate for social or sexual opportunities in ways that echo traditional histories of flâneurie or homoerotic cruising in the metropolis (Turner 2003; Delany 1999), whether in terms of an initial shared gaze of interest or traversing the district or neighborhood in search of brief *physical* sexual contact. By opening up supposedly ‘straight’ sites for queer encounter, these apps thwart the heteronormative status quo that often undergirds public urban space. Even the most intimidating sports bar can play host to a same-sex encounter, if the 4G reception allows. App users can thus use the technology in their hands to queer dominant norms in ways that can feel novel and refreshing when outside of established gay neighborhoods.

However, while this queer overlay of otherwise heterosexual space is in many ways welcome for its capacity for opening up new spaces and places for non-heterosexual encounter, it inevitably lessens the centrality of what were formerly go-to queer venues and neighborhoods. It is certainly worth thinking about ‘how gay men experience the division between dating apps and other online gay venues, and moreover, the division among user groups clustered around different dating apps’ (Wu and Ward 2017: 8). It is also pertinent to consider *which* sexual minorities are most able to capitalize on the potential of digital platforms for their partner seeking. As recent scholarship demonstrates, lesbian and queerer online partner-seeking networks suffer from some of the same marginalization as their physical counterpart spaces (Ferris and Duguay 2020; Duguay 2019; Murray and Ankerson 2016).

⁴In June 2020, days into U.S. and then international Black Lives Matter protests, Grindr announced it would be removing its ethnicity filter in all versions of its app (Hern 2020).

⁵Commonly referring to hairier, larger-bodied or more homomascuine men, but subjectively interpreted; as Yoel Roth (2014: 2122) argues, ‘defining these terms any more precisely than as sexual stereotypes is a task best left to the imaginations of individual users’.

In addition to these inequalities, perhaps the yet more urgent need is to get a better grasp on how app users experience the division between dating apps and *offline* venues. More than their novel disruption of ostensibly heterosexual (and heterosexist) physical spaces with their virtual matchmaking abilities, these apps offer users the chance to find partners without needing to be physically rooted *in any kind of gay neighborhood at all*. David Harvey's (1989) theory of time-space compression is usually applied to contemporary global flows, but if we conceptualize the city as a huge space to be processed and queer nightlife, for example, as a 'portion' of time, location-based apps compress the two variables so that from one spot on a night out the app user can survey thousands of meters in radius, and do so in mere seconds. This expert hybridization process not only matches interested partners and expedites physical meetings but also accelerates external factors in the privatization of queer space. Now any bar or restaurant can be a site for a first date; any home, hotel, or park can be a site for a sexual encounter. These spaces need not be gay bars or gay neighborhoods or gay saunas, because the obstacle of ascertaining mutual interest in a potential encounter has already been tackled and successfully overcome via the online scoping undertaken. Spaces with 'gay inscriptions, both physical or symbolic, are not necessarily required' (Visser 2013: 273). What *is* generated is a small gay neighborhood (indeed so small as to be in most cases dyadic, involving only (but not always) two people), with an entirely different 'sense of place'. We turn now to consider the impact of these impromptu, digitally hybridized spaces on already-existing gay neighborhoods.

9.4 The Ambiguous Impact of Location-Based Media on Existing Gayborhoods

Location-based media are by no means the first digital intervention into physical same-sex encounter, not least because they echo partner-seeking apparatus popularly utilized in the 1990s via desktop listservs and static websites. Yet location-based media do seem to capture both the critical and cultural imagination when it comes to considering their impact on the health of gay neighborhoods. We have seen that dating and hook-up apps combine online queer encounters with offline physical space to synthesize a new hybrid terrain predicated on availability, connection, and erotic encounter. This is also a terrain that can sidestep established gay neighborhoods entirely. Consequently, the role that these neighborhoods have traditionally played in brokering social and sexual connection for sexual minorities is nullified. What then might this mean for gay neighborhoods and their value for same-sex encounter?

The first thing to consider is that cybersexual encounters are not always corporealized. Contact brokered online may stay online (Miles 2019), and there is no reason why these virtual connections cannot be richly fulfilling in and of themselves—emotionally, sexually, platonically, or politically. However, where cybersexual practices *are* converted to in-person meetings, whether pre-arranged or spontaneously,

app users are increasingly meeting in private spaces, usually the home (Giraud 2016; Koch and Miles 2020). In the process, they sidestep certain risks generated by same-sex public meeting: anything from being harassed by passersby on a date to being bothered by police or security staff when cruising in public. Apps also negate the historical necessity of visiting queer entertainment venues to find and network with potential partners. This spatial shift at the hands of locative technology plays into what Michael Warner (1999: 153) had previously warned was a wider tendency to a ‘politics of privatization’, whereby mainstream social norms operate to restrict queer publics, either via assimilation to the norm or by pushing these publics out of sight altogether: in other words, play it ‘straight’ and keep your kinky business at home. Unfortunately, the role of location-based media in compounding this kind of spatial privatization seems to suggest a capitulation to the heteronormative status quo rather than a generative queering of existing exclusionary spaces.

What this sidestepping of gay neighborhoods in turn means for the home is also worth considering. Private space provides a freedom that is often not tenable in public, and this is thrown into yet sharper relief in the context of a global health crisis. The staggering impact of the 2020-21 coronavirus pandemic has hugely restricted physical interpersonal interactions (Fig. 9.4), but where encounters have happened, they invariably occur in the private space of home and conversely less than ever in public commercial venues, which in many countries were shut down as a result of the virus’ spread—in some cases indefinitely. Even physical cruising is reconfigured,



Fig. 9.4 UK Government electric billboard campaign, London. Coronavirus: Stay home for your family (2020) (Source Image by author)

shifting from meetings in known physical areas to online introductions and meetings in the home. The results are mixed: cruising through location-based apps sidesteps potentially embarrassing false starts with non-queer subjects, but it also reduces serendipity (Miles 2018). By making physical meet-ups premeditated, with partner characteristics a known (and filtered) quantity, the chance of chance meeting on the street is drastically reduced. This process engineers out the unpredictability and *diversity* of potential street-level encounters in an embodied context. Indeed, while the domestication of formerly public encounters invites new forms of queer intimacy in the home, it extirpates the more positive elements of a gay neighborhood—a sense of community, a sense of collective safety, and for some, even a way of life.

Clearly, the ongoing diffusion of queer individuals from distinct 'gay villages' to more scattered residential zones, and correlative decreases in LGBTQ commercial and community venues in cities of the global north (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014; Kanai and Kenttamaa-Squires 2015; Mattson 2019; Podmore 2021; Whittemore and Smart 2016), may be attributable at least in part to location-based media (Collins and Drinkwater 2016; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2016; Roth 2016). The ability of digital technology to facilitate cybersexual encounter, hook-ups, and longer-term relationships online *ab initio* certainly seems to contribute to wider processes of change—whether displacement, movement, or deconcentration—of queer physical meeting-places in many cities of the global North. This is not to say that gay neighborhoods exist only to service partner-seeking, given that they perform a wide range of holistic and community roles. However, it *is* to say that partner-seeking is a not-insignificant part of the offering. Collins and Drinkwater (2016: 2) are unequivocal in their assessment that the 'ubiquity of friend and partner search apps on smartphones have reduced the demand for, and thus rendered seemingly redundant, most smaller gay districts'. Nevertheless, they rightly caution against jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about the extent to which these apps are responsible for queer deconcentration. A more balanced (or ambiguous, depending on one's ideological position) interpretation is that gay neighborhoods are not declining so much as shifting and changing, reflecting the organic (and often contested) status of these spaces more generally (Hess and Bitterman 2021; Doan and Atalay 2021; Ghaziani 2015; Hess 2019; Miles 2017; Renninger 2018). Perhaps spatial diffusions of queer culture away from gayborhoods 'does not signal a destructive de-spatialization but rather a more dynamic series of ongoing re-spatializations across a multitude of spaces' (Bitterman 2020: 99). Further, while online sex and dating technologies may impact queer commercial venues, wider economic forces are more likely to have driven these urban changes (see Campkin and Marshall 2017; Lewis 2016; Mattson 2019, among others). Nevertheless, location-based technology has undoubtedly had an impact. As Hubbard et al. (2016: 568) argue:

While the significance of new technologies and the profusion of sexual content online can easily be overstated, there has clearly been something important happening here, with some of the traditional boundaries between private and public, intimate and shared, suburban and urban being inverted.

Because location-based media allow almost any space to constitute a queer space via their ‘plugged-in’ hybrid qualities, the primacy of existing urban venues such as gay bars for queer encounter is reduced. The question then becomes whether the attraction of the aforementioned commercial venues, along with community venues, queer residential clusters, and gayborhoods more widely is reduced. If technology users stop occupying these spaces (as restrictive or ‘homonormative’⁶ as such spaces may be) in favor of online or private physical spaces, these queer spaces may diminish. For gay neighborhoods already undergoing deconcentration, the combination of neoliberal gentrification, acute economic shocks, location-based technology—and now the coronavirus pandemic—may foment a perfect storm for unmitigated decline. With it may well come the loss of more-than-concrete queer publics.

9.5 Conclusion: Space for Co-Existence?

The exploration of contemporary digital media in this chapter is undertaken in the hope of providing more widely transferable ideas about spaces, communities, and technologies, and how these interact when it comes to gay neighborhoods in the near and more distant future. By better understanding the impact of location-based media on space and embodiment, we can make valuable inferences about a range of sexualities, practices, and urban environments. This chapter has explored how location-based technologies specifically impact queer male social and sexual encounters and queer physical spaces. It has argued that rather than displacing physical gay neighborhoods in a straightforward way, digital technologies hybridize online and offline encounters, imbuing any given physical locale with a potential queer connection while at the same time decentralizing the primacy of older, established gay neighborhoods. In this process, questions that arise about the centrality and durability of gay neighborhoods are valuable and deserve consideration. It may be true that for George Michael and others, it was the broadly defined ‘outside’—of the house, of the workplace, even of ‘the closet’—that offered the best freedom for gay expression (and indeed gay sex), but many decades of community building, queer commerce, and in some cities even urban planning have helped to develop physically defined gay neighborhoods with a wealth of attractions and minority protections. The loss of these hard-fought for, hard-won places and spaces seem inconceivable.

Yet looking forward, might there be space for partner-seeking apps *and* traditional gay neighborhoods? If so, success seems based on a conceptual shift from physical space as the *de rigueur* site for sexual encounter to something more of a holistic environment of safety and community. Certainly, case studies in a range of different cities suggest that gay neighborhoods are in flux, but that the outcomes need not be negatively assumed (Eeckhout et al. 2021; Ghaziani 2021; Coffin 2021; Podmore 2021). If today represents a ‘transitional stage toward a post-gay, post-binary-identity era’

⁶‘Homonormativity’ Duggan (2003) describes a depoliticized gay culture that valorizes domesticity and consumption, in the process sustaining heterosexual dominance in society.

(Hess 2019: 230), that is not to say that gayborhoods, however they are manifested, will not retain relevance as sites for community and safety for years to come—just that how they are manifested remains up for debate.

Relatedly, in the same way that paying greater attention to the formation of inner-city neighborhoods *beyond* the gay village which are increasingly associated with LGBTQ populations proves generative (Podmore 2021), appreciating and exploring the hybrid bricolage of online and offline queer life separate to its potential negative impact on bricks and mortar is also generative. For example, London's Soho, with its long history of vice and permissiveness (Andersson 2009) historically functioned as the UK's pre-eminent gay district, as a place in which gay identities are narrated and performed. Yet its booming tourism and rapidly rising property costs as a consequence of lucrative real-estate investment have diluted its queer presence in recent decades. Interviews with app users in Soho find that the cultural capital of a historically queer urban environment like Soho is conceptualized as a symbolic space of the past rather than a lived reality for many app users choosing to meet partners in local venues, 'straight' venues, or in their own homes (Miles 2017). This shift is reflected stateside, by Jen Jack Giesecking's study of lesbian and queer New York City (2020) and by Amy Stone's (2020) case study of the heterosexualization of Baton Rouge's Spanishtown, where consumption of historically gay culture by heterosexual parade participants generates an ambivalence about the space for LGBTQ citizens even as they participate in its festivities. In London's Soho, app users' emotional (and erotic) attachment to gay neighborhoods has not necessarily diminished so much as shifted into a space of queer social opportunities, and more ambivalently received international tourism (Miles 2017); yet in the faltering economic and touristic recovery wrought by the 2020–21 coronavirus pandemic, this shift may not be a bad thing. Meanwhile, Renninger (2018: 1737) finds that while app users seem cognizant of space and place in their app-facilitated encounters, 'the use of these apps creates an attitude toward space that does not unblinkingly equate Grindr's purpose with those of gay bars (and gayborhoods)'. Such a position suggests that apps such as Grindr overlap in purpose with these physical spaces, but not overwhelmingly so. There may therefore be space for both to exist in combination. Finally, Collins and Drinkwater (2016: 11) predict that 'sexual and social community will, in effect, primarily reside in the online world but physically occupy mainstream social spaces whenever required', but that occupation of mainstream social spaces may itself be imbued with a welcome queerness. These scenarios demonstrate hybrid potentialities for gay neighborhoods that may look and feel different to what has come before, yet have much to offer queer technology users and non-users alike.

There may be also room for a reconceptualization of what constitutes public space for app users. A conceptual shift seems to be occurring that moves gay and bisexual public spaces to domestic spaces of home, ostensibly at the hands of popular location-based apps that expedite and privatize the social or sexual encounter (Koch and Miles 2020). But perhaps we can rethink the encounters brokered by location-based media as not necessarily 'private' and not a wholesale rejection of 'public', but rather as a mixing of the two spheres. Public and private are not, after all, absolute categories (see Blunt and Sheringham 2019; Sheller and Urry 2003). In the same way

that Ghaziani (2021: 87) challenges claims that ‘gayborhoods as an urban form are outmoded or obsolete’, I would argue that by thinking more flexibly about how homes operate as spaces for queer encounter, hybridization can be conceptualized as a process that synthesizes not just digital and physical realms but also public and private spaces, recognizing in the process the increasingly blurred boundaries between these previously oppositional planes. Who is to say that the private home cannot constitute a gay neighborhood of sorts? It may be rather different from San Francisco’s Mission District or Madrid’s Chueca barrio, but that is not to say it cannot offer its own attractions.

Finally, we might think more flexibly about a post-gayborhood world. In a global context in which whole societies are still reeling from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the idea of gay neighborhoods as ‘post-places’ (Coffin 2021) feels positively funereal, but as Coffin argues (Coffin 2021: 373), ‘individuals and collectives may still be inspired by the memories, representations, and imaginaries previously provided by these erstwhile places.’ We are still absorbing the full impact of coronavirus on queer communities and on commercial venues which depend on close contact, in-person interaction and intimate socializing, but it may well prove to be the case that the ‘scene’ in many cities remains either temporarily or permanently muted. In such a scenario, digital technologies will offer a much-needed resource for queer encounter, for a strikingly wide range of users and communities. It seems likely that we will be met with a whole range of different spatial and conceptual configurations: the fresh air and ‘Outside’ of the George Michael pop song, and the ‘inside’ indoor life of a coronavirus lockdown; the ‘online’ space of a dating app and the ‘offline’ life of a gay bar—or all of these together, remixed and reformulated.

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Chapter 10

A Gay Neighborhood or Merely a Temporary Cluster of “Strange” Bars? Gay Bar Culture in Antwerp



Bart Eeckhout, Rob Herreman, and Alexander Dhoest

Abstract This chapter investigates the historical permutations of those areas that come closest to qualifying as lesbian and gay neighborhoods in Antwerp, the largest city in Flanders (the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). Although Antwerp has come to be represented as the “gay capital” of Flanders, it never developed a full-fledged gay neighborhood in the Anglo-American tradition of the concept. The clustering of sexual minorities in the city has been limited largely to the economic, social, and cultural business of (nightlife) entertainment, with lesbian and gay meeting places historically concentrating in particular neighborhoods that, moreover, have shifted over time and dissipated again. The chapter’s fine-grained analysis intends to reveal geographic, social, and cultural specificities for which a more detailed understanding of both the Antwerp and the Belgian contexts is necessary. Its tripartite structure is shaped by the specific heuristic conditions set by it. Because the larger historical context for the investigated subject remains to be written, the chapter first undertakes a substantial and panoramic survey of the emergence of gay nightlife in Antwerp during the early half of the twentieth century. This provides the framework needed for a more detailed analysis in the second part, which zooms in on an area in the immediate vicinity of the Central Station and takes as its emblematic focus one sufficiently long-term and iconic gay bar, called Café Strange. Finally, the chapter zooms out again to sketch how even such a limited gay nightlife cluster in Antwerp has evaporated again in the course of the twenty-first century, leaving a landscape that is hard to map and largely virtual.

Keywords Antwerp · Belgium; gay bars · Flanders · Gay neighborhoods

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10.1 Introduction

This chapter proposes to investigate what historiographers would call the “long twentieth century” of lesbian and gay neighborhoods in the specific context of Antwerp, the largest city in Flanders (the northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium).¹ Although Antwerp has come to be represented as the “gay capital” of Flanders, we will show that it never developed a full-fledged gay neighborhood in the Anglo-American tradition of the concept—that is, a neighborhood characterized by the historical clustering of a wide range of urban functions for sexual minorities (social, cultural, residential, sexual, commercial, with service and hospitality industries as well as entertainment venues). As in several other Western European nations (and many non-Western countries besides), the clustering of sexual minorities in Antwerp has been limited largely to the economic, social, and cultural business of (nightlife) entertainment, with lesbian and gay meeting places historically concentrating in particular neighborhoods that, moreover, have shifted over time and dissipated again. This pattern is a familiar one from the history of modern sexual identity formation. As the identity of modern-day “homosexuals” came to be shaped and solidified (roughly as of the second half of the nineteenth century), people who identified increasingly as members of this demographic created private, semi-public, and public meeting spaces for themselves, starting in larger cities such as Berlin and New York (Beachy 2014; Chauncey 1995). Bars and clubs became the principal spaces for escaping from social norms and invisibility, as well as for exploring same-sex attraction and alternative gender expressions. While the emergence of the same kind of venues in Antwerp is thus characterized by social and material parameters that, at a sufficiently high level of abstraction, apply to many other cities in Western Europe (and, again, beyond), the more fine-grained analysis we intend to offer will inevitably reveal geographic, social, and cultural specificities for which a more detailed understanding of both the Antwerp and the Belgian contexts is necessary.

A few aspects of this culturally specific context may be worth highlighting in advance. Whereas in the following discussion we will automatically resort to the term “neighborhood” as an established concept in the field of urban studies that is crucial to a volume such as this, we will frequently alternate it with the less strongly connoted term “area.” This will be mainly to avoid habitual associations with the notion of a neighborhood simply being projected onto the terrain we are discussing. For various historical, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural reasons, the social and material granularity of Belgian cities is quite different from what is to be found in most North-American (and a lot of English-speaking Commonwealth) cities. Belgian urban neighborhoods tend to be more finely grained and mixed, more complex in their stratifications and less homogeneous, and as a result do not invite the same strong sense of individuality and identity as do many of the iconic neighborhoods in

¹Throughout this chapter, we will use the shorthand terms “lesbian and gay” or merely “gay” as they seem best suited to serve as historical umbrella terms for the core identity categories analyzed across the period under discussion, even if they are anachronistic when applied to the period before the 1970s and too limitative for the twenty-first century.

the English-speaking world, which are underwritten by a more outspoken logic of demarcation and differentiation. A basically historical, midsize city such as Antwerp, moreover, is defined by a relatively small core that allows for a close mixing of functions. This means, among other things, that different parts of the city are easy to reach, whether on foot, by bicycle, or through public or private transportation. A self-chosen, not-economically enforced residential clustering of one segment of the population in one specific area—lesbians and gays in our historical shorthand description—has thus never seemed as necessary or enticing as in much bigger cities abroad.

To this should be added a larger cultural context: Flanders as a whole is a densely populated region in which especially the triangle Antwerp-Ghent-Brussels has sometimes been described, in comparative international terms, as a single extended conurbation (GUST 1999: 32–38; Albrechts and Lievois 2004). For a complex combination of historical, sociopolitical, economic, and cultural reasons again, Flemings have tended to be less mobile in their residential careers than citizens in most other modern nations; to this day, they still frequently prefer to stick to the area where they were born. This cultural pattern is so deeply ingrained that it applies even to lesbians and gays in the days of massive anti-homosexual hostility in rural Flanders, when one would have expected a great many of them to engage in the same kind of “reverse diaspora” (Sinfield 1996: 281) to central cities that has been historically characteristic of sexual and gender minorities in other countries. Throughout the period under discussion, in fact, a large number of Flemish lesbians and gays continued to live in their immediate native areas and simply commuted into a city such as Antwerp for their nightlife entertainment (Vincke et al. 2006). Thus, as a rule, the users of the gay-specific facilities we will be describing were arriving from anywhere in the city or, as it turns out, beyond. They did not build most of their lives around a specific, recognizably gay neighborhood, but made occasional use of the clusters of bars that over time became available in Antwerp.

Before we are able to embark on the following narrative and analysis, it is also necessary to reflect methodologically on how our investigation is shaped (both enabled and restricted) by its heuristic conditions. Belgium is a small country fractured still further by the cultural divide between its two main linguistic communities (French- and Dutch-speaking). The scale limit has notable repercussions for the academic availability of empirical data. Among other things, the country has not developed a viable market for academic publications catering to the niche interest of sexual and gender minorities. Partly as a result, no truly encompassing history of such minorities has been published so far, whether for the country as a whole or for the region of Flanders, even though a number of attempts at presenting *capita selecta* from this history have recently been made (Borghs 2015; Dupont 2015; Dupont et al. 2017; Hellinck 2002). It should come as no surprise, then, that Antwerp’s lesbian and gay history remains to be written. Because none of the current chapter’s three authors, moreover, are themselves trained historians (they are, respectively, a literary scholar specializing in American literature, a musicologist, and a media scholar), what this case study is about to present constitutes a first gathering of available data that should ideally be followed up by more extensive historiographical research. Some of the

source materials for the following evocation will be, in fact, non-academic; they consist of archival findings by the second coauthor as part of his research project on musical cultures in Antwerp²; some of the informal interviews he conducted in this context; the cultural experience and knowledge of all three authors as participatory observers in Flemish/Antwerp society; and the authors' wider reading in various disciplinary fields and relevant publications.

The tripartite structure assumed by our case study is shaped by these conditions. Because the larger context for our subject remains to be written, it will be necessary, first, to undertake a relatively substantial and panoramic survey of the emergence of gay nightlife in Antwerp during the early half of the twentieth century. This will provide the framework needed for a more detailed analysis in the second part, which will zoom in on an area in the immediate vicinity of the Central Station and will take as its emblematic focus one sufficiently long-term and iconic gay bar, called *Café Strange*. Finally, we will zoom out again to sketch how even such a limited gay nightlife cluster in Antwerp has evaporated again in the course of the twenty-first century, leaving a landscape that is hard to map and largely virtual.

10.2 The Emergence of a Gay Bar Culture in Antwerp

While generally same-sex sexuality was severely punished from the Middle Ages until the French Revolution in the region currently known as Belgium (Dupont et al. 2017; Hofman 2017; Roelens 2018), in 1795 the same region became a part of France, where “sodomy” was subsequently removed from the penal code. Neither the French penal code of 1810 that was adopted in Belgium after the country's independence in 1830 nor the Belgian penal code of 1867 prohibited homosexual acts between consenting adults in private, although public displays of homosexual interest and desire could be prosecuted for “assaults on honor and public decency” (Vanhaelewyn 2008: 248). This implies that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Belgian homosexuals were not as strongly persecuted as in many other European countries, though the fact that they were not actively oppressed by the State may also have slowed down lesbian and gay identity formation and social activism, especially in the largely Dutch-speaking and devoutly Catholic Flanders, where a conservative social value system persisted well into the second half of the twentieth century (Dupont et al. 2017). Throughout this period, same-sex sexuality was not publicly acknowledged, let alone socially accepted. Partly as a result, gay life remained very much underground and has become hard to retrace from official sources frequently used by historiographers in other countries, such as police files (Dupont 2015).

Indeed, the most important source of information that we have about everyday lesbian and gay life in the early to mid-twentieth century consists of a number of

²Some 70 LGBT and feminist commercial and political magazines published in Flanders between 1960 and 2010 as well as a collection of ca. 1000 flyers of events in the city.

autobiographies and oral history interviews with lesbians and gays.³ These tell us that same-sex attraction and sexuality were nearly invisible within Belgian society at large and, as a result, barely existed as concepts or possible realities in the minds of most citizens. The topic was hardly ever brought up in families, schools, or the media, and received but little attention in medical and psychiatric circles. If Flemings ever heard allusions being made to homosexuality at all, it would have been in negative terms. For those experiencing same-sex desire, this meant that many could not name their feelings in the first place, felt abnormal, sinful, and/or perverse, and considered it much safer to remain silent about their sexual orientation. At most, they would look for answers in books, secretly visited a doctor, or searched around in anonymous urban environments until they found bars where it seemed possible to meet like-minded people. If they came to have sexual or romantic relations at all, it was behind closed doors or in transient urban spaces that made sexual cruising materially possible. With very few exceptions, they would refrain from disclosing their sexual orientation to family, friends, neighbors, and/or colleagues, nor did they assume a positive identity label for themselves; the coded language used by and for them would be characterized by a strategic vagueness and imprecision: they were “like that,” “for the women,” or “for the men,” or “belonged to the family.”

Although invisibility and silence thus reigned supreme in mainstream Flemish society, from the early twentieth century onwards some form of gay subculture did start to emerge tentatively in out-of-the-way pockets, and it was Antwerp, in particular, that began to develop something that might qualify as a gay nightlife (Hellinck 2002: 6). For those who could find their way to them, the semi-public spaces of a handful of bars came to offer a haven where patrons could be more at ease, meet other lesbians and gays, explore non-normative gender expressions, make friends, and find lovers. In Antwerp, the epicenter of this budding gay subculture was situated in the so-called Skippers Quarter (*Schipperskwartier*), which bordered on the harbor.⁴ The location is no coincidence: it was arguably the city’s least Flemish and most transient space characterized by constant transnational flows of goods and people. The natural geography of the river Scheldt, whose extended estuary connects Antwerp to the North Sea, had allowed the city to become for several centuries Europe’s prime inland port. From the moment the river’s quays were straightened in 1885, the Skippers Quarter became a defining neighborhood in the city (Lampo 2002). It acquired its distinct, bustling character from the fact that it was closest to where freighters docked and where, among other things, the Red Star Line transported hundreds of thousands of travelers to and from the US in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. A large number of businesses flourished in this quarter, including cafés and temporary lodgings for sailors and travelers, as well as venues

³This account is based on David and Meyntjens (2009), Kegels (2006, 2008), Van den Heuvel (2009) and Winters (2011).

⁴The name is translated differently in different sources, e.g., as Sailors’ Quarter in Loopmans and Van Den Broeck 2011. Since the antiquated Dutch word *schipper* does not quite overlap with the more recent term *sailor*, and since the English word *skipper* is precisely derived from the Dutch *schipper*, we have chosen to remain close to the Dutch original by translating the area as Skippers Quarter.

for prostitution (Lampo 2011). Loopmans and Van Den Broeck (2011) have in fact traced the roots for such typical harbor prostitution much further back in history, calling the area one of the oldest red-light districts in Europe, whose origins lie in the fifteenth century.

It is here, near the river and the harbor, that Antwerp's gay nightlife most probably first took shape. According to Armand Everaert, the owner of Café Strange (to which we will turn in a moment), at least the ill-reputed neighborhood of the Skippers Quarter, with its red-light district, guaranteed a modicum of anonymity (Hellinck 2015). Not only situated at the geographical margins of the city, the neighborhood also occupied a social position at the margins of respectable mainstream society. By the same token, it could offer a refuge and free port for non-normative forms of sexuality and gender expression. Yet, while we may be certain that same-sex sexual practices took place there, it is not so clear whether the area already witnessed a minimally organized form of homosexual subculture during the late nineteenth century, and if so, whether this was then integrated in the established business of heterosexual prostitution. In his semi-autobiographical novel of 1888, *La Nouvelle Carthage*, the Francophone Flemish writer Georges Eekhoud at one point describes a "crystal palace" (*palais de crystal*) in the red-light district of Antwerp. The interior, which is evoked as a cave full of mirrors, is described in detail, and the description suggests that the writer's inspiration was the renowned luxury brothel in the Skippers Quarter called Crystal Palace (Min 2011: 214–215). Eekhoud, who was a brave early voice in the literary description of same-sex desire, probably visited the place, and in his novel he suggests that "all stages of debauchery" took place there. Yet his description leaves unclear whether this also involved same-sex practices.

For the early half of the twentieth century, there is evidence, at least, that drag performances had begun to take place in the Skippers Quarter. Thus, a woman by the name of Bertha (born in 1916) remembers that a friend took her to a transvestite bar at the age of sixteen (David and Meyntjens 2009: 24). Perhaps they visited a "binge café," where the staff—mostly women and/or men in drag—tried to tempt the male clientele to drink as much as possible (De Graef 1973). One such place was Danny's Bar, a notorious sailors' bar mentioned in the anonymous folk poem "One Hell of a Pub Crawl!" as a venue where the "she" appears to be very much a man.⁵ Both the owner, going by the nickname of "den Daan" (Danny Boy), and his male staff were dressed as women, and they took it upon them to seduce the sailors into binging uncontrollably. When "Marie," one of Daan's male staff members, later took over the bar, he and his wife continued to work as transvestites (Kegels 2008).

On the online forum "YO! Liverpool," a former sailor by the name of Brian Daley reminisces about his own later, postwar experiences at Danny's Bar.⁶ At the recommendation of a few older sailors, Brian and two of his friends visited the bar to "lose their cherries." His testimony, dated March 2008, is worth quoting at some

⁵See <http://www.merchant-navy.net/forum/poetry-and-ballads/29047-hell-pub-crawl.html>, last accessed 18 June 2019.

⁶See <http://www.yoliverpool.com/forum/showthread.php?5415-Hullo-Old-Home&p=125649&highlight=Danny%27s+Bar#post125649>, last accessed 2 January 2020.

length (with corrected punctuation for the sake of readability) because it allows us to immerse ourselves in this bygone world:

There it was! Danny's Bar, the bright green neon lighting the way to heaven. It was only about 8.00 p.m. and the streets were not yet crowded; we entered the bar and were almost blinded by the lights and mirrors, chrome and dark mahogany and brass. The most beautiful women that I had seen this side of the silver screen sat at the tables around the bar. There were no men in there, just us three boys. There was a Lana Turner lookalike in an off-the-shoulder gown, her pale skin and generous bosom thrusting at the front of her dress; there was Jane Powell, and Rhonda Fleming too. The guys had been telling the truth; and they wanted to sit with us!! Oh heaven, this surely was Fiddlers Green. So there we were, a lady by each of our sides and they were buying our drinks. Somebody put a record on the jukebox and Lana took my hand and led me to the floor. She took a firm hold of me, pressing her body into mine; should I kiss her? Her perfume and the feel of her bosom thrusting into my chest had my hormones running wild. Her husky continental accent, sounding like Marlene Dietrich, had my trousers near at bursting point; she knew [this] and whispered into my ear. "You want to make love, Dollink?" she asked, rasping her five o'clock shadow against my virginal cheek. AAAARRGH!!!! Lana was a Laddie, not a lady. We three made our discovery almost simultaneously; as we shot to the door, we could hear Danny laughing his head off. "Good night, Darlings," he cried after us.

Brian's adventure was apparently part of a tradition built up over the years. By way of a joke, older sailors would recommend Danny's Bar to inexperienced newcomers; sometimes they would join them to watch the results. A few years after Brian's first experience, it was his turn to initiate two younger fellow-sailors, Eddy and Terry. In a follow-up recollection, posted in November 2008,⁷ Brian explains how this mission went awry when his drink was drugged and he woke up in bed with a "lady."

As these anecdotes illustrate, clients were frequently made to get drunk, sometimes drugged, in order to make them spend as much money as possible and even end up in bed with one of the "girls" (Kegels 2008). For sailors, a visit to Danny's Bar could be a hazing ritual, though in some cases it may have served as a site of sexual and gender exploration as well. Jack De Graef (1973: 104–105) describes the story of a man who spent the evening and night with a professional transvestite, and was brought home the next day by taxi—broke, tired, and with memory problems. While undressing him, his wife discovered he was wearing women's panties (Fig. 10.1).

The gay clientele of the Skippers Quarter steadily grew; on the eve of the Second World War, the neighborhood had apparently acquired a distinctly gay connotation to those in the know. By then, among other changes, the Crystal Palace brothel had been transformed into a gay bar (Kegels 2008; Min 2011). In the postwar years, however, the bars where lesbian and gay patrons could meet up started to spread beyond the Skippers Quarter. Though a few of these opened in the historical center, in the area around the Cathedral and City Hall, most of the new venues sprang up in the area close to the Central Station, the grandly sculpted railroad terminal for commuters to the east of the city center. These were in general small operations; the most famous among them were called Shakespeare (in the historical center) and Café Strange, Fortunia, Week-End, and La Ronde near the train station. Since most of such bars were a clear

⁷See <http://www.yoliverpool.com/forum/showthread.php?5415-Hullo-Old-Home&p=155101&highlight=Dannys#post155101>, last accessed 2 January 2020.



Fig. 10.1 The invisible gay history of the Skippers Quarter: where for most of the twentieth century Danny’s Bar used to be (until the mid-1990s), today a stretch of new-built residential houses and a brasserie are to be found (left), and in the historically narrow alley where the Crystal Palace used to be (until the building collapsed in the 1960s), bland architecture now reigns supreme (right) (*Source* Images by Bart Eeckhout, April 2020)

distance from the Skippers Quarter, they attracted a different clientele, though some sailors and sex workers would visit the nearest one, Shakespeare, until the 1960s (David and Meyntjens 2009: 143–144). There was a gender difference in patrons as well. Whereas Shakespeare had a female bartender, Jackie, and attracted a mostly female crowd, the bars near the train station had male bartenders and clientele: “Dikke Piet” (Fat Pete) was the gay bartender of Fortunia, “Miss Banaan” (Miss Banana) served at Week-End, and the drag queen “Eddy”/“Edith” at La Ronde (Winters 2011: 56–58; Kegels 2008: 37–38, 64, 89–90).

As of the 1950s, the names of such new bars more often contained coded references to homosexual culture. Older bars’ names in the Skippers Quarter that had already been in operation before they attracted a gay clientele would sometimes refer to the harbor location (De Lichttoren [The Lighthouse]), to a region (Café Normandie), the bar’s owner (Danny’s Bar), or the venue’s interior design (Crystal Palace). Of these, only Pigalle had a sexual connotation, because it conjured up the Parisian neighborhood around Place Pigalle in Montmartre, famous for its sexual and erotic nightlife (including the iconic Moulin Rouge cabaret). The newer bars springing up in other Antwerp neighborhoods occasionally sported more allusive if ambiguous names that carried various overtones for insiders. For instance, “Shakespeare” evoked both the world-famous playwright (whose love sonnets, some connoisseurs began

to realize, principally courted a mysterious young man) and a Dutch lesbian and gay organization by the same name. When one of the gay bars in the vicinity of the station, Week-End, changed owners in the late 1950s, it was renamed as *La Vie en Rose* (Pink Life), thereby alluding not only to the eponymous song by Edith Piaf, the French singer who was then becoming a cult diva among homosexuals, but also to the growing symbolism of the color pink, which, under the influence of American clothes manufacturers, had come to be reserved almost exclusively for young girls and thus carried a strong feminine connotation (Paoletti 2012). The bar's conspicuously gendered name, in combination with its location, signaled its status to a gay clientele.

Meanwhile, the older bars in the Skippers Quarter began to be closed, at first slowly in the 1960s, when the streets behind the City Hall were renovated, and more drastically in the mid-eighties, when much of the neighborhood was modernized by town planners, and its former occupants, particularly sex workers, were pushed to the north, away from the backstreets bordering on the historical center and toward the modern harbor and docks (Loopmans and Van Den Broeck 2011). It is there that a new generation of larger gay-friendly bars and clubs came to take root, such as *Hessenhuis* (opened in 1993) and *Red & Blue* (opened in 1998). As before, such slight geographic displacements were relevant only to the location of bars and clubs, because the local lesbian and gay population as a rule had not sought to move into any of these neighborhoods and had not set up a community life, service sector, or cultural industry in them (Fig. 10.2).

10.3 The Paradigmatic Case History of *Café Strange* in the Central Station Area

So far, we have limited ourselves largely to a bird's-eye view of the permutations of twentieth-century gay nightlife in Antwerp as it originated in the Skippers Quarter and, in the second half of the century, moved to additional neighborhoods. From its early roots in an environment of cultural marginality, clandestine behavior, drunken sailors, and ambiguously gendered sex workers, such nightlife was gradually transplanted to a somewhat less ill-reputed (if still predominantly working-class and transient) neighborhood near the city's Central Station. *Café Strange* offers a fine example to elaborate this move in some architectural and social detail. Because of the venue's longevity, moreover (it still survives), it presents a sufficiently extended case study that allows us to ponder the twenty-first-century decline of gay bar life in Antwerp as well.

In 1955, a gay-friendly bar in the *Dambruggestraat*, a street located near the popular neighborhood *Seefhoek*, was reopened by the gay couple Bruno and Julien (Kegels 2008: 112–113). The bar was renamed "*Café Strange*" (in English), clearly to act as a magnet on patrons who at the time were still often dismissed as "queer" in the anglophone world and did not yet have a language of collective pride as



Fig. 10.2 The Hessenhuis, built in 1564, belongs to Antwerp's historical patrimony. After renovation in 1975 it reopened as a temporary exhibition space. Since 1993 it has also been housing a gay(-friendly) café/club catering to a younger crowd (*Source* Image by Bart Eeckhout, April 2020)

a sexual minority. At the time, the epicenter of gay life was probably still in the Skippers Quarter, yet by then the Dambruggestraat also happened to host the gay bar Fortunia, and the street was conveniently within walking distance from the station, with its daily crowd of national commuters and international travelers, as well as one of the largest and most notorious public toilets (in front of the station), where men were known to hook up and/or have sex with other men (Kegels 2008: 75–79).

Like Shakespeare, Café Strange was one of the local pioneers when it came to alluding to the kind of patrons it targeted, and the nature of the bar, through its very name. In response to the wider Flemish culture of secrecy about homosexuality, however, the name was still vaguely suggestive rather than explicit. In addition to the bar's name and location, prospective patrons were actively canvassed in due course through advertisements in publicly little-known subcultural media, such as the member magazine of BVSR, the Belgian Association for Sexual Justice (*Belgische Vereniging voor Sexuele Rechtvaardigheid*), one of the first Belgian LGBT associations, founded in 1965. At the same time, the owners had to remain discrete and safeguard the privacy of their patrons. In accordance with customs at the time, curtains were used to prevent passersby from looking in through the windows, and patrons had to knock or ring a bell to get in, as the entrance door was frequently closed. Like many other such bars, Café Strange sported a separate porch at the

entrance, whose purpose was to avoid patrons making themselves too visible when they entered and exited. This architectural idiosyncrasy survives today, as the bar still has three entrance doors: one in the front, which is unlocked only when the owner arrives, and two in a porch providing access either to the bar or to the apartments above. According to the current proprietor, Armand, the first gay owners, Bruno and Julien, made a great effort to change the place when they bought it, and it is likely they replaced the main entrance to adapt the bar to the desires of patrons.

Café Strange first opened as “Brasserie Strange,” which in the Belgian context implies that both food and drinks were served. As it became increasingly popular over the years, the owners were forced to enlarge the main room. The interior was changed once more when additional gay bars and discos opened in the neighborhood. Bruno and Julien gave Café Strange a look that was similar to such competitors, both by adding a large buffet at the end of the room, close to the courtyard, and by moving seats against the wall to provide enough space for dancing. One visitor from those years recalls it as a nice place with friendly staff (Kegels 2008: 66, 112). Even so, by the end of the 1970s, Café Strange faced a series of difficulties. After Bruno had died, his partner Julien took over from 1977 to 1979, but he got himself involved in dubious relationships that ended dramatically by his getting killed (Daems 2010: 4). By then, the international gay travelers’ guide *Spartacus* was warning its readers about the presence of rent boys mixing among the mostly elderly gay men.⁸ In 1980, after undertaking some minor renovations, another gay couple took over, Armand and Roger. Their purpose was to carry on the tradition of Café Strange as a gay bar. They painted the building’s façade pink and added a drawing of a sexy sailor as a symbol, thereby referencing gay culture and erotica more openly. Inside, pictures of semi-naked and naked men were hung on the walls. The new owners moved the large buffet to the front and added two couches there. Several gay bars, again, had this kind of set-up. Among other things, it allowed the owner or bartender to open the door quickly when someone was waiting outside, or to keep an eye on patrons walking in when the door was open. At the same time, those who were sitting on the couches had a practical way of checking out whoever came in (Fig. 10.3).⁹

The new owners, who were experienced entrepreneurs, continued to promote the business as a bar as well as a discotheque with room to dance, but they were looking to attract more customers as well. Instead of sticking to the traditional jukebox, they acquired a professional DJ set with turntable, hired DJs to ensure that a continuous flow of music was being played during parties, bought new recordings on a regular basis, and advertised in both national and international LGBT media—for instance, in the much-read Dutch *Gay Krant* and international guides such as *Spartacus*. Furthermore, they produced a magazine called *Antwerp Gay Plan* with information about gay leisure in the city and personal stories, among other things.

Their approach was successful. The place developed the reputation of being at once modern, popular, and low-key (De Bie 2012; Everaert 2014). The atmosphere

⁸See, e.g., the 1979 edition of the *Spartacus International Gay Guide*, p. 53.

⁹This information is based on an interview with Armand, conducted by the second author on 27 January 2014.



Fig. 10.3 Café Strange in the Dambruggestraat. The salmon-colored façade has lost much of its former pink glamor. Note the old-fashioned device behind the window that lights up to signal that the bar is open (*Source* Image by Bart Eeckhout, April 2020)

seems to have been unpretentious and folksy, in accordance with the baseline of the ads the bar placed at the time: “casual, happily free, cosy” (“*losjes, vrij en blij, gezellig*”; *De Homokrant* 1982, ed. 9, p. 27). Armand and Roger frequently threw parties to celebrate special occasions and traditions, such as their birthdays, carnival, Saint Nicholas Day, New Year’s Eve, and Easter. These tended to follow lightly scripted formats that usually involved dressing up to a theme (e.g., prostitution, opera and operetta, the fifties), with the best-dressed visitors receiving at times remarkably expensive prizes. For instance, a flyer announcing the carnival ball for 1982 promises to winners a flight to Athens, a weekend to Amsterdam or Paris, or a dinner in an Antwerp restaurant, among other things. The announcement further mentions the owners’ wish that patrons participate in the occasion with no holds barred: “the crazier the better,” it says. Besides theme parties, there were more regular and ordinary events, such as “tea dances” (*thé dansants*) on Sundays, when, according to a 1985 ad in the Flemish gay newspaper *De Homokrant*, a DJ would play “golden hits, film music, and popcorn oldies” (ed. 2, p. 31). The majority of visitors to Café Strange appear to have been gay, lesbian, or bisexual, although national and international gay guides show that the demographic shifted over the years, from a relatively wider range in age and gender during the 1980s to a crowd of mostly gay men during the 1990s, and then morphing into a mix of gay and gay-friendly patrons a decade later.

The bar stayed financially quite profitable until the 1990s, when the number of patrons began to dwindle. While Café Strange is still open at the time of writing (in 2020), most other gay bars in the area (and a good many cafés in general across the city) have closed. In an interview he gave in 2010, Armand claims that the number of gay bars in the Van Schoonhovenstraat, the main artery in the neighborhood, had by then already declined from 23 to three or four (Daems 2010: 5).¹⁰ Once again, the sense of a “gay neighborhood” had always been limited to a cluster of bars, by and large, although for a while this area close to the train station did contain a few community-oriented gay venues, too. The most important of these was the GOC (*Gespreks- en Onthaalcentrum*), one of the first Flemish LGBT associations, founded in 1968 under a blandly incommunicative name (“Conversation and Reception Center”) borrowed from the earliest stages of the LGBT movement in the Netherlands.¹¹ The GOC had a bar of its own in the Dambruggestraat, and as Armand recalls, whenever the organization’s bar closed at 1 a.m., a good many of

¹⁰Archive research by the second author allows us to estimate the number of bars in the Van Schoonhovenstraat per decade. Although the last period, 2000–2010, suggests a thriving bar scene, these were mostly new bars which closed after a year or two.

Until 1960: 2.
 1960–1969: 5.
 1970–1979: 22.
 1980–1989: 35.
 1990–1999: 24.
 2000–2010: 23.

¹¹See <http://www.holebipioniers.be/geschiedenis/de-eerste-stappen-naar-buiten>, last accessed on 3 January 2020.

the patrons and staff tended to cross the street to extend the night at Café Strange (Daems 2010: 4).

10.4 The Decline of Gay Bar Life in Antwerp

There are many different reasons why commercial gay bar life in the area to the north of Antwerp's Central Station started to decline toward the end of the twentieth century until it has by now—two decades into the twenty-first century—all but disappeared. Some of these reasons are common to a logic that has characterized Western cities around the turn of the millennium in general; others are part of an even larger, global dynamic; only a handful seem to demand the same attention to specific and local players as we needed for painting the preceding portrait of twentieth-century bar life in the city.

We would nevertheless like to start this concluding section by taking the final category of reasons first, because we need it to understand the transition in sufficient detail. First of all, as the LGBTIQ movement in Flanders started to organize itself better (roughly as of the 1980s), it became effectively a growing competitor for the small commercial bars in central cities: a multiplying number of activist and community-building grassroots organizations, which also improved quickly at professionalizing their activities, depended heavily on the income they generated by organizing popular parties in bigger venues on a regular basis. For many young LGBTs interested in socializing on a larger scale and outside of commercial enterprises, these became the primary nightlife entertainment where they came together and built their networks of friends. As a result, the small bars in the station area were increasingly left behind with an aging clientele in the habit of hopping over to their favorite bars, whether during weekends or on ordinary weekdays. From the 1990s onwards, moreover, a second type of competitor appeared on the scene, this time commercial. A handful of gay-friendly mega clubs, commercial party formats, and mainstream mixed bars, such as Hessenhuis and Red & Blue (both located in the redeveloped part of town to the north of the Skippers Quarter), made sure to expand their business by seeking to seize a big part of the pie of LGBT leisure culture. Particularly the younger crowd came to expect more spectacle than the small bars were able to offer, a tendency Armand and Roger explicitly deployed in a published interview: "It used to be enough that you opened the door and people came flooding in, whereas nowadays they grow tired of everything so soon. Things have to get more and more extravagant" (see Hellinck 2015: 16). As the couple of aging bar owners observed, this has had an atrophying effect on the cross-class (and cross-age) tradition of the local gay bar culture: "Back in the old days everybody was sitting together, intellectuals or not. You found yourself sitting next to a doctor or a lawyer, no matter: you were gay and you were being regarded as gay. Whereas nowadays such mixing is frowned upon: 'Oh, but he's only a laborer in the harbor.' That's the mentality that dominates today, more and more so" (Hellinck 2015: 16). To these rising pressures from outside players should be added more internal pressures in the

form of the overall decline both of the area where the gay bars were clustered and of the quality of encounters inside the bars. National and international LGBT media had begun to report on a growing sense of unsafety and physical decay, especially in the main artery of the Van Schoonhovenstraat, which was said to be crime-ridden. “Rue de Vaseline” (Vaseline Street), as it was commonly nicknamed in gay circles, had gradually gained a sleazy reputation (Fig. 10.4).

With economic competition thus coming from two sides—one activist, one commercial—and the reputation of the area and its gay venues becoming ever more dubious, the bars in the station area came to seem old-fashioned, uneventful, sleazy, and unsafe, with dire consequences for their commercial viability. Nearly all of them went out of business as a result. This leaves us with a very different urban landscape today: the parties thrown by noncommercial players have in turn all but disappeared again (the mainstream Flemish LGBTIQ movement is now heavily subsidized and sports its own Rainbow House with a daily bar in a completely different part of the city, so that grassroots parties nowadays tend to be limited to the small, more radical, self-styled queer movement that has recently emerged), while the bigger commercial players are so few and intrinsically such self-sufficient institutions with their own



Fig. 10.4 The final stretch of the Van Schoonhovenstraat in the direction of Antwerp’s monumental Central Station. Several of the buildings on the left used to house the gay bars that gave the street its nickname of Vaseline Street and that have since gone out of business (*Source* Image by Bart Eeckhout, April 2020)

internal business logic that they cannot be said to build a recognizable spatial cluster in the city anymore.

An additional contextualizing paragraph on gentrification may be in order here as well, even if we include it so as to nuance its importance to our particular case study. Although Antwerp went through a process of modernist urban planning in the period after the Second World War, which also affected the Skippers Quarter (Loopmans and Van Den Broeck 2011), the streets harboring the gay bars near the train station remained largely untouched by it (Loopmans 2008). And while from 1983 onwards, after a decade of mostly economic crisis in the 1970s, urban planning in the city received a new impetus, again this focused on other areas of Antwerp, particularly those near the waterfront and the historical center. It was only by the 1990s, in fact, that a new phase of urban planning focused on the “livability” of poorer, inner-city neighborhoods. This slow and partial makeover gradually included the area to the north of the Central Station to which the cluster of gay bars belongs (Loopmans 2008). Yet even then, the actual material effects of such city-planned upgrading seem to postdate, by and large, the demise of the local world of gay bars, which was more driven by the logic described in the previous paragraphs than by any form of city planning or gentrification pushing the bars out of business.

All of these micro-changes on the ground within the city of Antwerp should obviously be framed again in a larger cultural context—that of the relatively quick shift in attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities within Western European societies overall, a shift that has arguably been even faster in Belgium (and especially Flanders) than in most of its neighboring countries. From being a deeply conservative, largely Catholic country, Belgium has leaped to the forefront of LGBTIQ rights in Europe in just a few decades’ time, currently outranking all of its neighbors.¹² This evolution has been most outspoken in Flanders, where the extent of secularization has made for the starkest historical contrast and the LGBTIQ movement has been particularly successful at organizing itself and exerting political influence. Especially as of the 1990s, sexual and gender minorities have become much more visible in the Flemish media and public life, thereby both stimulating and reflecting increasing social acceptance by the wider population. In these quickly transforming circumstances, the relatively exclusive, niche-specific, semi-public spaces of lesbian and gay bars that promised a safe haven in a largely hostile environment lost their *raison d’être* faster than anyone would have expected a few decades ago. In recent years, even center-right political coalitions that have seized power in Antwerp have embraced their LGBTIQ population and gone out of their way to market the entire city, rather than any particular part of it, as a gay-friendly tourist destination. Even ordinary zebra crossings have now been painted in rainbow colors.

Finally, at the global level, LGBTIQ life has been transformed by the virtualization of sexual networks in urban space as a result of new technologies. Digital, mobile, and social media allow for instantaneous contact across the globe, allowing LGBTIQs to

¹²See Borghs and Eeckhout (2010), Eeckhout and Paternotte (2011); and the annual Rainbow Map of Europe drawn up by ILGA-Europe, where for nearly a decade now Belgium has ranked around second place in all of Europe (<https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>).

connect across geographical boundaries beyond their immediate (urban) dwelling. At the same time, location-based services, in particular dating apps such as Grindr, allow LGBTIQs to identify and connect with other LGBTIQs within their urban or even rural contexts. Both tendencies, combined, have further eroded the need for separate LGBTIQ spaces as a way to get in touch with other LGBTIQ people and the appeal of a city like Antwerp as a magnet for LGBTIQ people.

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Chapter 11

Recovering the Gay Village: A Comparative Historical Geography of Urban Change and Planning in Toronto and Sydney



Andrew Gorman-Murray and Catherine J. Nash

Abstract This chapter argues that the historical geographies of Toronto’s Church and Wellesley Street district and Sydney’s Oxford Street gay villages are important in understanding ongoing contemporary transformations in both locations. LGBT and queer communities as well as mainstream interests argue that these gay villages are in some form of “decline” for various social, political, and economic reasons. Given their similar histories and geographies, our analysis considers how these historical geographies have both enabled and constrained how the respective gay villages respond to these challenges, opening up and closing down particular possibilities for alternative (and relational) geographies. While there are a number of ways to consider these historical geographies, we focus on three factors for analysis: post-World War II planning policies, the emergence of “city of neighborhoods” discourses, and the positioning of gay villages within neoliberal processes of commodification and consumerism. We conclude that these distinctive historical geographies offer a cogent set of understandings by providing suggestive explanations for how Toronto’s and Sydney’s gendered and sexual landscapes are being reorganized in distinctive ways, and offer some wider implications for urban planning and policy.

Keywords Toronto, Canada · Sydney, Australia · Neighborhood · Gayborhood · Urban Change · Urban Planning

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we examine the historical geographies of the now iconic gay villages in Toronto’s Church and Wellesley Street district and Sydney’s Oxford Street. We argue that a comparative historical geography approach provides insights into complex

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and multidimensional processes fomenting an ongoing and distinctive reordering of gendered and sexual landscapes occurring in both Toronto and Sydney. In doing so, we contribute to the ongoing debates about the nature, characteristics, and implications of the shifting fortunes of some traditional gay villages in the Global North.

We begin by discussing geographical scholarship on the emergence of gay villages in the Global North with an emphasis on contemporary literature detailing the perceived “decline” of some longstanding gay villages, including those in Toronto and Sydney. We also explain why a comparative historical geography of Toronto and Sydney is insightful. We then present the distinctive historical geographies underpinning the emergence of each city’s gay neighborhoods in the post-World War II period, discussing convergences and divergences. The concluding discussion underscores the differences and draws on our historical geographical analysis to pose questions about their future. Throughout, the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) refers to identities grouped together to reflect collective interests and community as gendered and sexual minorities, while queer denotes a contemporary moment when some individuals reject a gendered and sexual specificity but still position themselves within non-normative gender and sexual understandings—a positioning reflected in recent urban changes.

11.2 Historical Geographies of Gay Villages: Segregation and Integration

A substantial body of scholarship examines the emergence and development of gay villages in the Global North in the period following World War II. This research highlights the dominant role that gay men (mainly white and middle-class) played in the development and growth of gay villages, initially through their appropriation of places for safety and support to their use of these neighborhoods for political, social, and economic security and activism (Castells 1983; Chauncey 1994; Doan and Higgins 2011; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Knopp 1990; Lewis 2012; Nash 2006). Simultaneously, lesbians and queer women also inhabited urban locations and neighborhoods and utilized gay village spaces, albeit in distinctive and less visible ways (Adler and Brenner 1992; Nast 2002; Podmore 2001, 2013; Rothenberg 1995; Valentine 1993, 1996). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these districts increasingly engaged in local politics, consolidating their presence and creating community through economic development, the provision of services, and political activism around rights protections. The HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s helped cement villages as hubs of LGBT life, and in places such as Toronto and Sydney they provided core services including hospice care, outreach, health education, and counseling services (Kinsman 1996; Warner 2002; Willett 2000a; Wotherspoon 1991).

In the 1980s, gay villages were increasingly caught up in broader urban social and economic processes that saw them incorporated, through the neoliberal policy

initiatives of the entrepreneurial city, into increasingly commodified and consumable urban landscapes (Bell and Binnie 2002; Binnie 2000; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Visser 2008). Currently, both Toronto and Sydney represent their respective villages as examples of their tolerance and openness to diversity. This incorporation into mainstream urban life has prompted some scholars to argue that the assimilation of some LGBT people into mainstream life both reflects and reinforces LGBT “neoliberal sexual politics” that privilege those gendered and sexual minorities who are willing to participate in normative, middle-class, consumer society within monogamous married coupledness (Brown 2008; Duggan 2003; Richardson 2005). This framing of a “homonormative politic” has prompted some to argue that we cannot understand this to be a universal or monolithic result and that we need to attend to the “difference, unevenness and geographical specificity” of gendered and sexual relations in the gay village and beyond (Brown 2009: 1498).

As recent scholarship suggests, contemporary gay villages, including those in Toronto and Sydney, are experiencing forms of “degaying” within broader political, social, and economic processes at work in many Global North cities (Collins 2004; Ruting 2008; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Nash 2013a; Visser 2013). Part of this process is the commodification of gay villages as tourist venues, as well as shopping and entertainment districts, which has attracted a wide variety of consumers and businesses not necessarily identifying as LGBT. Many LGBT venues are now popular with heterosexuals while other social spaces such as bars and restaurants are becoming more mixed or have lost their queer sensibility entirely. In both Canada and Australia, legislative and social recognition of LGBT people has resulted in their increasing visibility in a broad range of locations beyond the gay village in places understood to be “gay friendly.” While many argue this new visibility is only available to certain normatively gendered and sexualized gays and lesbians, others suggest these spatial changes reflect greater acceptance of sexual and gendered difference, as well as a growing social cohesion across a wide variety of neighborhoods (Ghaziani 2021; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Nash 2013a; Visser 2013). Nevertheless, as scholars argue, while some gays and lesbians are able to fully integrate into the mainstream, others continue to be marginalized as “queer,” that is, as those living outside of the homonormative lifestyles supported by legislative and social change (Binnie 2004; Ghaziani 2011; see also Duggan 2003; Richardson 2005).

The literature also suggests that gay villages are in decline because of increased internet and social media use (Miles 2021), allowing LGBT and queer individuals to find other like-minded individuals without the need for expressly LGBT and queer spaces such as gay villages (Miles 2021; Mowlabocus 2010; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2019a; Usher and Morrison 2010). Some LGBT and queer people, particularly youth, perceive the gay village as reflective of older generations’ histories, sensibilities, and lifestyles (Nash 2013a; Sullivan 2005). These locations are arguably of little interest to newer generations, who are able to experience a wider variety of locations, identities, and subjectivities, and who are less interested, perhaps, in subscribing to essentialized gay and lesbian identities associated with gay villages.

Both Toronto and Sydney include well-established gay villages, which over the last thirty years have been fully integrated into the fabric of each city’s downtown core. Toronto’s gay village emerged in the late 1970s and is presently centered on the intersection of Church and Wellesley Streets, one block east of Yonge Street (Fig. 11.1), Toronto’s main downtown thoroughfare (Kinsman 1996; Warner 2002; Nash 2006). Today, the village remains the hub of gay social, economic, and political life with its collection of iconic bars (Fig. 11.2), restaurants, bathhouses, convenience

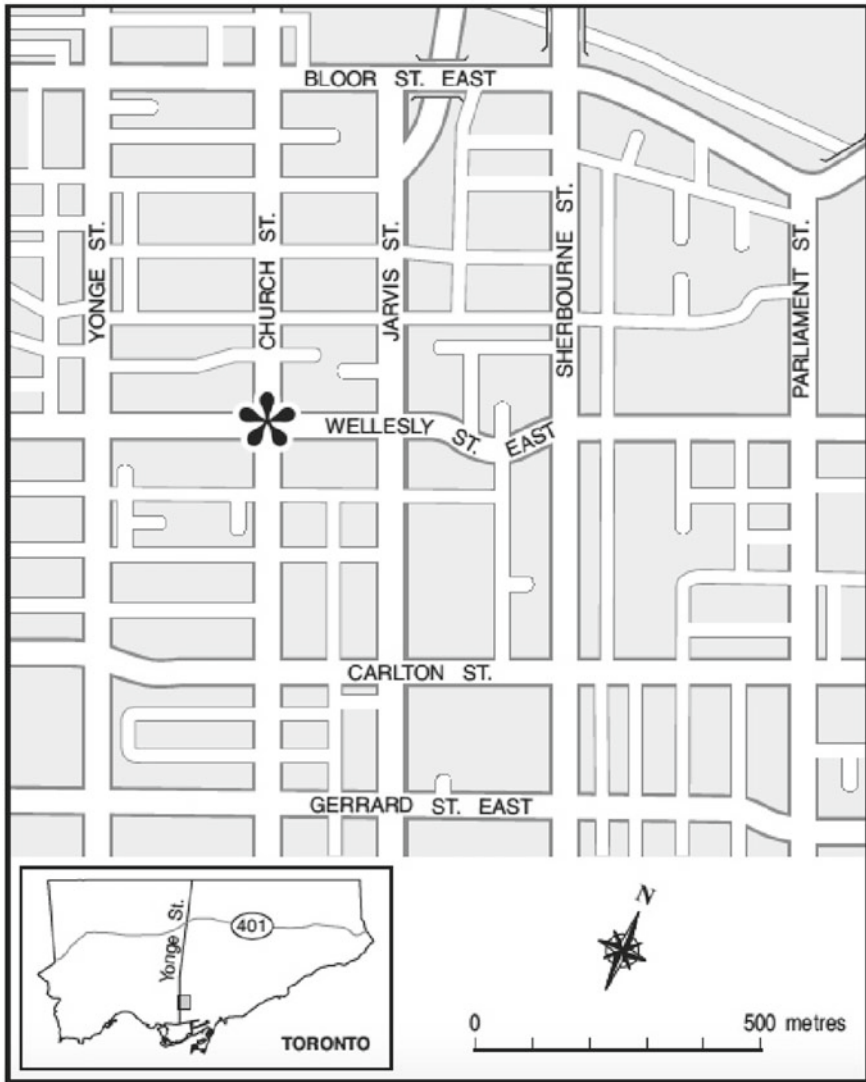


Fig. 11.1 Map of Church-Wellesley Village, Toronto (Source Map by Authors)



Fig. 11.2 Church Street, Toronto (Source “Toronto Church St” by ed and eddie is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0)

stores, restaurants, and boutique shops, serving a substantial LGBT population in the surrounding residential neighborhood (Fig. 11.3). Sydney’s gay village, popularly called Oxford Street, is adjacent to the Central Business District (CBD) in the inner east (Fig. 11.4). Nightlife, leisure, and commercial activities are focused along Oxford Street between College Street and Taylor Square (presently), comprising bars, clubs, cafes, sex shops, and other retailers, while there is a congregation of LGBT venues, community facilities (social and health services), and residents in the surrounding suburbs of Darlington, Surry Hills, Paddington, and Potts Point.

At the present time, both Oxford Street and the Church and Wellesley villages are undergoing some form of metamorphosis. In both cities there is considerable debate over the exact nature and underlying causes of these changes, whether they can be understood as positive or negative, and whether LGBT and queer political organizations should be actively engaged in guiding or directing these transformations. Given that both villages and related events, such as Pride and Mardi Gras, are used to demonstrate their city’s cosmopolitanism and competitiveness, mainstream interests, including local municipal councils and LGBT organizations, are concerned about the potential fate of their gay neighborhoods. To understand the nature and framing of these debates, we argue that it is important to understand each of these village’s historical geographies.

Historical geographies offer insights into current processes, providing insights into the “how” and the “why” of current developments. Referring to the development of gay commercial districts, Camilla Bassi (2006: 215) argues, “each locale possesses its own peculiar historical and social processes, the outcome of which is by no means



Fig. 11.3 519 Church Street Community Centre, Toronto (Source 519 Church Street Community Centre Toronto by Neal Jennings is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0)

certain.” Both Toronto and Sydney are world cities and major gateways for immigration and settlement (Bunting and Filion 2000; Desfor et al. 2006; Filion 1996; Sewell 1993). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to lay out in detail the similarities between Toronto’s and Sydney’s gay village development, we would argue that our own work documents the notably similar political, economic, and social histories of the ongoing development of gay villages in Toronto and Sydney (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014, 2017; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014; Nash 2006, 2013a). LGBT and queer political and social activism within discrete national contexts has been markedly similar but with varying and distinctive differences (Tremblay, Paternotte and Johnson 2011).

In the following sections, we consider their respective historical geographies through three specific themes—post World War II planning policies, the emergence of “city of neighborhoods” discourses, and the positioning of gay villages within neoliberal processes of commodification and consumerism.

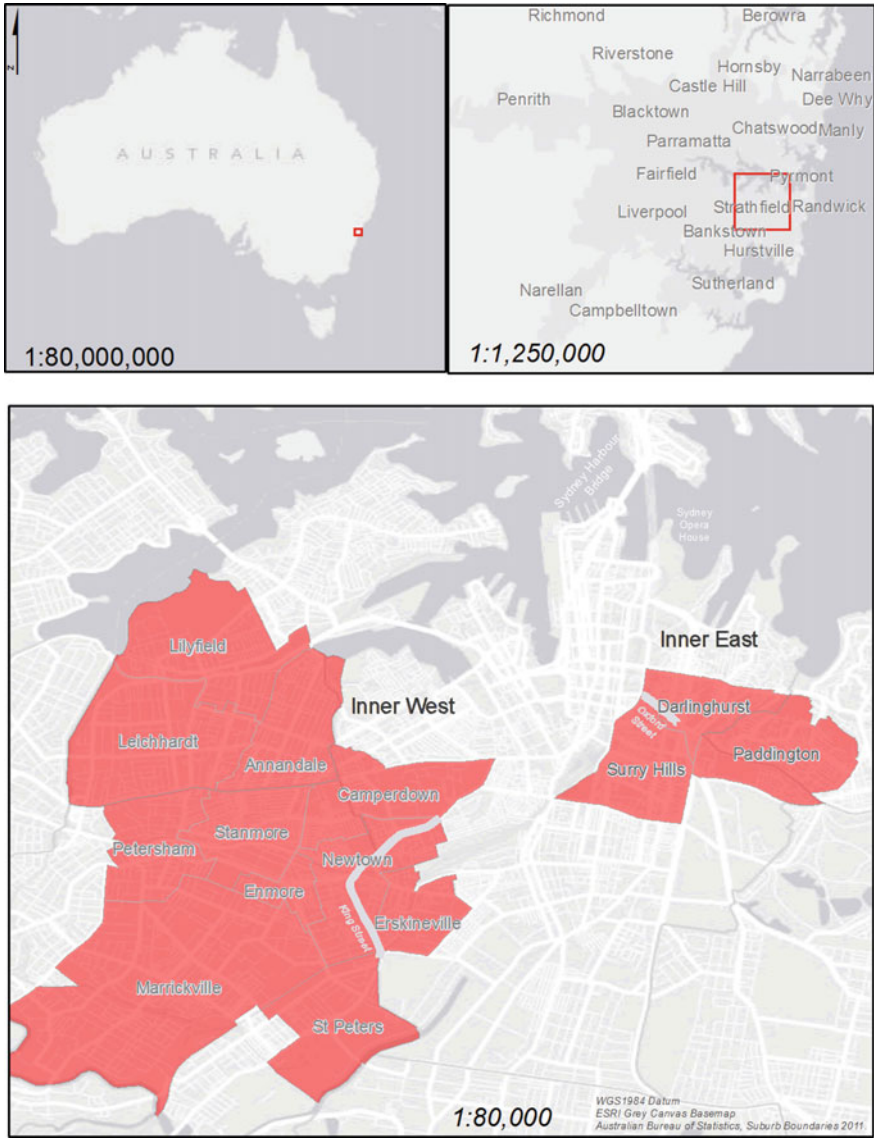


Fig. 11.4 Map of Sydney’s LGBT neighborhoods: the Inner East, centred on Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, and the Inner West, centred on King Street, Newtown (*Source* Maps by Authors)

11.3 Historical Geographies of Sexuality in Toronto

This section examines the intertwined histories of Toronto's shifting urban planning policies and the changing fortunes of what has become Toronto's "traditional" gay village. As one of Canada's major cities, Toronto's population increased substantially in the late 1930s as the country geared up for war, and then again during the war efforts in the 1940s (Sewell 1993). Toronto's downtown core, centered around Yonge Street from south of Bloor Street to Front Street, gained considerable notoriety, dotted with massage parlors, strip joints, discount stores, and an assortment of bars and restaurants, populated with those considered to have unsavory reputations and appetites. In keeping with the histories of other North American LGBT neighborhoods, Toronto's post-war homosexual population clustered in and around these less desirable areas, able to live relatively open lives among other marginalized groups in the Bloor and Church Street district (Egan 1998).

In the post-World War II period, City of Toronto planning policies were directed largely toward the inner suburbs surrounding the city of Toronto. Such efforts were driven by a deep desire to return to pre-war norms about the heterosexual family and children. Developers and planners stressed the notion that raising a family required single family homeownership, with greater indoor and outdoor space (Bunting, Filion and Walker 2010; Hernandez, Robinson and Larson 2010). Governments directly intervened to encourage such developments through the provision of subsidized schools, hospitals, housing, and the construction of roads and major arterial highways (Bunting, Filion and Walker 2010).

In Toronto, the boom in the suburban developments undermined inner-city neighborhoods as the middle and upper classes moved to the suburbs, encouraging the construction of major roadways through older downtown neighborhoods. Inner-city housing stock declined as larger homes were converted to multiple-unit rentals, alongside its physical deterioration, which supported planning initiatives for urban renewal and the demolition of older housing stock for public housing (Miron 1993). Toronto's gays and lesbians were unlikely to live in the newly developing suburbs, thereby encouraging many to live and work in the downtown core where their proclivities were more likely to be tolerated. Canadian cities (including Toronto) also experienced substantial immigration in the 1950s and 1960s, which supported the refurbishment of inner-city housing stock as ethnic minorities began to concentrate in recognizable districts or territories.

By the early 1970s, Toronto experienced local social movements pushing back against the state and promoting vibrant low-rise, eclectic inner-city neighborhoods (Searle and Filion 2010; Sewell 1993; Walks 2008). As the city embraced these ideas, the downtown experienced "a wave of heritage protection and the beginnings of inner-city gentrification in the early 1970s" (Lynch and Ley 2010: 330). Neighborhood preservationist movements were particularly successful in pushing back against development, prompting a shift in Canadian planning perspectives to one that increasingly regarded the downtown core as an important hub for regional

economic health, the provision of goods and services, and a center for social and cultural life (Hernandez, Robinson and Larson 2010).

11.3.1 A Nascent Gay Village: Toronto in the 1970s

The partial decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 opened up possibilities for more public activism. LGBT political and social organizations were founded in downtown Toronto in the early 1970s. The Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) established a community center, cafe, and library in the Church Street area. CHAT believed such spaces would bring together and politicize local gays and lesbians by providing alternative spaces alongside the bars and bathhouses (Nash 2006). Clashes with anti-gay activists, including Anita Bryant and local pastor Ken Campbell, as well as organizing against police harassment of bathhouses, fostered further political activism geared toward defending homosexual commercial establishments. By the end of the 1970s, gay and lesbian activists fully recognized the Church and Wellesley Street area as a gay neighborhood and called for its defense, not only by gays and lesbians but also by the local municipal council. In 1980, George Hislop ran as the first openly gay candidate for City Council.

In the background, the election of a City of Toronto “reform” council in 1969 prompted calls to end major urban renewal projects and to protect and preserve inner-city neighborhoods. As a result of postmodern strategies of place-making (Lynch and Ley 2010: 311), ethnocultural neighborhoods were no longer perceived as temporary locations from which to aspire to assimilation but as stable and supportive communities contributing to the vibrancy of city life. Taken together, the new urban social movements, the development of stable ethnic enclaves, and the growing gay and lesbian rights movement encouraged an understanding of the Church and Wellesley Street neighborhood as one worth protecting as a legitimate political and social territory for gays and lesbians to participate in city life (Nash 2006).

Simultaneously, a wider shift in perceptions about urban life saw growing numbers of single women, single men, and childless couples enjoyed downtown residential lifestyles, fueling incipient gentrification (Bitterman 2021). Scholars have documented the important role that gay men and lesbians played as early gentrifiers in marginal locations in Toronto, including the impact of gay men in the Cabbagetown neighborhood adjacent to the nascent gay village in the early 1970s (Bouthillette 1994).

11.3.2 Neoliberalism and Toronto’s Gay Village

In the 1990s, Canadian cities, including Toronto, experienced increasing financial strain as the Ontario provincial and federal governments began shifting the costs of welfare and social programs, and infrastructure repair and management, to local

municipalities. In response, cities increasingly employed more entrepreneurial, self-promotional approaches to attract new economic development. Neoliberal ideologies underpinned cities' endeavors to market themselves through the creation of place identities, edgy architecture, urban design, and cultural spectacle (Lynch and Ley 2010). City authorities understood the importance of "place-making" in creating a positive city image, making them magnets for employment, industry, and tourism.

By the early 2000s, Toronto's gay village (as with other gay villages in North America, Europe and Australia) was fully incorporated into the fabric of the post-industrial entrepreneurial city that knitted together commodified, consumer-based neighborhoods with downtown urban lifestyles (Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Nash 2013a, b). In a manner similar to other locations in the Global North, the gay village's incorporation into commodified urban landscapes is a reflection in part of the aspirations of some gay men and lesbians for inclusion in a neoliberal politics that results in the privileging of some gay men and lesbians who desire to live within middle class, gender-normative, monogamous coupledness—a form of homonormalization (Duggan 2003).

11.3.3 Toronto's Village Today

Today, Toronto's village is unequivocally included as one of the distinctive inner-city neighborhoods in the city's marketing and tourism activities. But recently, anxiety about its possible decline has grown, particularly with the loss of several iconic businesses, rising rents, and an influx of heterosexuals into the condominium market and entertainment venues. There are also claims that younger queers view the gay village as a relic of the past or a location that was never particularly welcoming of certain groups (Nash 2013b). Simultaneously, legislative and social advances, including human rights protections and same-sex marriage, mean that LGBT people are increasingly visible across a variety of locations. Other Torontonians neighborhoods supporting queer communities include Parkdale ("Queer West"), Brockton Village, Roncesvalles, and Leslieville. Our research suggests that rather than understanding changing gendered and sexual landscapes as manifestations of decline, it is more suitable to understand them as shifting relational geographies between neighborhoods, manifesting broader queer visibility and greater social cohesion (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014).

Recently, the village has been presented with an opportunity for self-reflection in the wake of Toronto's successful bids for World Pride, held Spring 2014, and the Pan-American Games, held Summer 2015. Preparing for these events provided the local LGBT business community with an opportunity to undertake more long-range planning around the future of the gay village and its role in LGBT and queer life.

The Church and Wellesley Village Business Improvement Association (BIA) was created in 2002. BIAs pool funds from local businesses to undertake projects designed to "improve, beautify and maintain public lands in the BIA and promote the area for business and shopping" (Government of Ontario 2001: 204). The BIA formed a close

association with the LGBT community, and following the successful World Pride and PanAm bids, the BIA and LGBT activists, with the support of Councilor Kristyn Wong-Tam, launched a planning study to determine the future direction of the gay village. Partly as a result of the planning study, the BIA undertook several initiatives to preserve the long-term economic viability of the village as a tourist attraction, including renovating Cawartha Park, commissioning a mural representing LGBT life, and opening “temporary parklets” along Church Street (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2019b).

Although the process is ongoing, it is possible to see the institution of particular narratives about the centrality and importance of the village for LGBT and queer people. This means, in part, a re-visioning of the village as a “place of arrival and return,” as a place for people to come out, and as a place for LGBT and queer people to gather for political and social protest.

11.4 Historical Geographies of Sexuality in Sydney

We now discuss historical geographies of sexuality in Sydney, with attention to the emergence, development, and decline of the gay village around Oxford Street. This discussion picks up the three foundational themes—planning, neighborhood, and neoliberalism—and elicits Sydney’s similarities and differences in comparison with Toronto, suggesting how and why these villages are developing in distinctive ways. Sydney is the oldest city in modern Australia, founded in 1788 when the colony (later state) of New South Wales (NSW) was established, and is Australia’s primary global city. The immediate post-World War II era was a period of sustained population and economic growth. As part of the post-war rebuilding, federal and state governments’ plans for economic and social development relied on policies encouraging population growth through natural increase and state-sponsored immigration. These policies were implicitly heteronormative, encouraging sexual and social reproduction through nuclear family units, realized in a “baby boom.”

Such heteronormative policy was explicit in urban planning processes and practices in Sydney (Gorman-Murray 2011; Prior 2008). Increased population meant a need for increased housing, and state and private housing organizations, financial institutions, and land developers geared new suburban estates and “home packages” toward heterosexual nuclear families (Game and Pringle 1979; Johnson 2000). While the expanding Sydney suburbs were planned as sites of heteronormative family life, the inner city was seen as undesirable for residential development and more suited to industrial and commercial activities. In contrast with “familial” suburbia, nighttime inner-city Sydney was imagined as a site of vice and immorality, best seen in the clubs, prostitution, and crime associated with the red-light district in the inner east suburb of King’s Cross (Johnson 2000; Dunn 2011).

It was in such liminal inner-city spaces that Sydney’s gay and lesbian subcultures emerged, which historians suggest were more concentrated and visible than in other Australian cities (Wotherspoon 1991). However, the *sites* of that subculture—clubs,

bars, cafes, baths—were transient, underground venues that shifted across Sydney’s inner city, from the CBD to East Sydney, King’s Cross, and Paddington, liable to social retribution and police raids (Wotherspoon 1991). However, the late 1960s brought public homosexual rights claims and murmurings of social acceptance in some liberal quarters, enabling enhanced visibility in the name of social and legal change (Willett 2000b). In the late 1960s a cluster of more visible gay clubs (e.g., Ivy’s Birdcage, Capriccio’s) settled on Oxford Street, and “from the early 1970s it was the Oxford Street area that became the focus for gay venues” (Wotherspoon 1991: 19). Amidst the mobile, relational geographies of the post-war period, the confluence of rights, politics, incremental social change, and an incipient geographical anchor provided the material foundation for a gay village in Sydney, centered on Oxford Street, eventually known by that same moniker (Fig. 11.5).



Fig. 11.5 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, Sydney, 2019 (Source Image by Andrew Gorman-Murray)

11.4.1 Consolidation of a Gay Neighborhood: Sydney in the 1970s to the 1990s

The consolidation of Oxford Street as a gay area occurred quickly, with fractions of the gay community inspired by gay neighborhoods emerging in San Francisco's Castro and Los Angeles's West Hollywood (Wotherspoon 1991). Building on the foundation of the successful late 1960s bars, there was a rapid emergence of venues around Oxford Street, which became a locus for clubs, bars, baths, sex-on-premises venues, and bookshops. The clustering generated a "gravitational effect," drawing a gay residential population to the surrounding suburbs Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, Paddington, and Potts Point (Fig. 11.4). Of course, gay men and lesbians had lived in the inner city earlier, given the relatively cheap cost of accommodation in these undesirable areas, but the late 1960s saw the beginning of inner-city housing gentrification. Within a short period, a discrete geographical area had emerged as a site of "gay identity" in both commercial and residential terms (Knopp 1998). As Wotherspoon (1991: 193) argues, "there was now a definite area where the new 'gay' man could feel at home, in territory that was clearly stamped in his image." The village consolidated further across the 1970s and 1980s. During these decades, gay press offices proliferated; gay rights groups relocated to the neighborhood; health services aimed at gay clientele moved in (GPs, dentists, counselors, and HIV/AIDS services); and services for gay youth (Twenty10) or religious gays (Metropolitan Community Church) were established (Ruting 2008).

Oxford Street's development has entailed successes and failures. One of the failings of its ad hoc consolidation was the attention of services to gay men and the displacement of lesbian services and residents. With gentrification, lesbians, often with less financial means than gay men, were priced out of the housing market, while services aimed at lesbians and other queer women were similarly affected by increasing commercial rents. This contributed to the development of a discrete lesbian residential and service neighborhood during the 1980s in the inner west suburb Leichhardt (Murphy and Watson 1997; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2015). Women's health services, lesbian counseling services, women's refuges, women's and lesbians' social and business clubs, and lesbian residents began to congregate in the suburb, earning it the moniker "Dykehardt." However, this was also a loss to Oxford Street and its local sexual and gender diversity, which remains largely associated with gay men.

The consolidation of Oxford Street as "gay territory" also yielded distinct benefits. The spatial concentration of gay commerce, organizations, and residents provided political strength for securing rights claims—a "concentrated voice" that impelled NSW anti-discrimination laws (1982) and the decriminalization of homosexuality (1984). Parallel with such changes in NSW parliament, a geographical hub for LGBT community organizations and leadership (and commercial and sex venues, and residents) allowed for a coordinated, joint response from the state and the gay community to HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s, generating one of the most effective responses globally, targeting safer sex messages at the gay community, keeping infection rates

relatively low (c. 14/100,000 people cf. 167/100,000 in the United States) (Willett 2011). The local government (City of Sydney Council) and representatives for the NSW electorate have consistently championed LGBT causes.

The neighborhood has been an economic success too, highlighted by the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, a month-long LGBT festival incorporating a famous parade along Oxford Street, dance parties, a film festival, and cultural and sporting events. The parade has been held annually since 1978, initiated as a local response supporting Stonewall Day. Since then, the Mardi Gras Festival has become an international tourist event supported by the NSW government and the City of Sydney Council, earning up to A\$90 million per annum (Waitt and Markwell 2006).

11.4.2 An End to Village Life in Sydney?

Yet the early twenty-first century has witnessed stories of the Oxford Street's decline in the LGBT and mainstream press, the closure of iconic venues and the movement of many LGBT organizations elsewhere in the inner city, alongside the notable increase in "straight" nightclubs (Gorman-Murray 2006; Ruting 2008; Reynolds 2007, 2009). Researchers suggest several reasons for this decline as a gay locale, including increasing straight residents (and venues) due to the "cultural cache" of the gay village; rising rents pricing out gay residents and businesses; and online networks, reducing the need for a spatial concentration of social venues. The commercial strip has shifted toward a nightlife focus, with a preponderance of nightclubs and a diminishing number of cafes, restaurants, and retail outlets.

This decline has been challenged for diverse political and economic reasons. Middle-aged and older men, and generations of activists, remember Oxford Street as a site of political developments, coming out and social life, and seek to hold onto this well-known territory for themselves and future generations. The City of Sydney Council seeks to sustain the political and economic success of Oxford Street, incorporating it into its neoliberal "city-marketing" strategy—the "City of Villages"—as an internationally renowned "gay village." To this end, the City of Sydney Council has instituted a series of strategies and plans aimed at reducing the problems facing the gay village and recuperating its perceived gay character (Reynolds 2009). These include the establishment of "safe space" along the street and initiatives to re-occupy the street with "daytime" creative enterprises by offering low-rent or rent-free shop fronts to artists and pop-up stores. These neoliberal strategies attempt to rebuild a broader local commercial base, enticing citizen-consumers back.

The perceived decline in Oxford Street since the early 2000s has been matched by the development of another LGBT neighborhood in Sydney's inner west, centered on King Street, Newtown (Fig. 11.6), with a residential spread into the surrounding suburbs of Camperdown, Erskineville, Enmore, St. Peters, and Marrickville (Fig. 11.4), which has been proffered by the LGBT media and local residents as a new LGBT heartland of Sydney (Gorman-Murray 2006; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009). There are increasing LGBT and LGBT-friendly venues



Fig. 11.6 King Street, Newtown, Sydney, 2020, with The Bank Hotel flying LGBT flags (right hand side of the street) (Source Image by Andrew Gorman-Murray)

(e.g., The Imperial, Newtown, and Bank Hotels), while several LGBT organizations have moved in (e.g., Twenty10, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, a Metropolitan Community Church congregation, and the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service). Significantly, there are venues and organizations that cater for the LBT in LGBT. The area is home to The Gender Centre, the key NSW advocacy service for trans and genderqueer rights. Much of Sydney's lesbian social scene can be found in local venues (e.g., The Imperial, Bank, and Sly Fox hotels).

While Oxford Street is typically understood as a gay male space, Newtown and the inner west are seen to provide a home for a broader sexual and gender demographic, including lesbians, queer women, and trans people. The Australian Census 2011 found that the ten suburbs with the highest concentration of male and female same-sex couples were in inner-city Sydney, but while male couples are most concentrated in Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, and Potts Point in the inner east, female couples

are concentrated in Newtown, St. Peters, Enmore, Erskineville, and Marrickville in the inner west, alongside still significant concentrations of male couples. The combination of residential concentrations of female and male couples, as well as a congregation of LGBT commercial venues and organizational services since 2000, indicates the presence of a LGBT neighborhood in Sydney's inner west. While some suggest that this challenges the continuance of Oxford Street, others contend that the inner west caters to a different LGBT demographic—one perhaps more inclusive of sexual and gender diversity than the “traditional” gay (male) ghetto.

11.5 Thoughts on Historical Legacies and the Future of the Gay Village

We argue that the distinct historical geographies of the Church-Wellesley and Oxford Street gay villages help to position each differently within the urban fabric of, respectively, Toronto and Sydney. These different historical geographies and urban legacies enable (perhaps) divergent futures. Toronto's Church-Wellesley village now finds itself in a more hopeful set of circumstances in terms of determining its future vis-à-vis Sydney's Oxford Street. The use of the “ethnic” model of territorial identity in Church-Wellesley village arguably benefitted from an earlier recognition and incorporation of “other” ethnic differences in processes of political inclusion, cultural heritage, and urban planning than in Sydney. The village's location, initially marginal, benefitted from being close to Yonge Street when the city began rejecting urban renewal planning and instead embraced inner-city preservation.

The drive to preserve heritage, difference, and unique neighborhoods emerged much later in Sydney, not taking hold until the 1990s. Since then, in Sydney as well as Toronto, the local city councils have incorporated their “gay villages” into “city of neighborhoods” discourses, aimed at boosting initiatives around creative industries, marketing, and tourism by commodifying the diversity, cosmopolitanism, and lifestyle of the inner city. But there has been a difference here between Toronto and Sydney, arguably resulting from the earlier recognition of Church-Wellesley as a unique neighborhood. Even as the City of Sydney Council rolled out its “City of Villages” campaign in the early 2000s, Oxford Street was not identified as the only gay village in Sydney. Already by the early 2000s, the City of Sydney was identifying Newtown and Erskineville, which lie within its jurisdictional boundaries, as other gay spaces in the inner city alongside Oxford Street. Since that time, Oxford Street has continued to decline materially and imaginatively as *the* gay village within Sydney, while Newtown and the inner west have continued to solidify as queer neighborhoods (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2014, 2017; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009).

As a result of the different political and territorial legacies of Church-Wellesley and Oxford Street, it seems that late 2000s discourses about the deterioration of gay villages arguably promoted debates about the preservation and future of Church-Wellesley before it reached the state of decline being experienced by Oxford Street.

Indeed, the village evinces a strong institutional base in the form of 519 Church, the BIA, and a lesbian-identified city councilor dedicated to the economic and social health of the area. These institutions are taking advantage of high-profile events such as World Pride and the PanAm Games for self-reflection and to “rebuild” the territory and identity of the village as central in the lives of new generations of LGBT and queer people. This is not to say that such attempts have not been made around Oxford Street. However, we have suggested, the particular historical geography of Oxford Street has yielded specific pressures and fewer opportunities to stabilize its territory and identity.

For instance, there are some quite geographical issues concerning the location and physical affordance of Oxford Street and its connection with Sydney’s downtown core. The Church-Wellesley Village is located downtown, and has benefitted from being in Toronto’s core, near the Eaton Centre, iconic Maple Leaf Gardens, refurbished Dundas Square, and Ryerson University, a location central to urban regeneration schemes. Oxford Street, however, is one suburb east of Sydney’s CBD and separated by parkland, a seemingly minor difference but consequential for its integration in urban change. The significant regeneration of Sydney’s CBD that has taken place since the 1980s has focused on the northern (Circular Quay, The Rocks) and western sides (Darling Harbour, Barangaroo) of the city core, with the east (Hyde Park, East Sydney, and Oxford Street) receiving less attention. Oxford Street itself is not a place for sightseeing and daytime leisure vis-à-vis refurbished Circular Quay, Darling Harbour, Barangaroo, and The Rocks.

The changes in Oxford Street’s business profile, its disconnection from the CBD, and the movement of the city’s core toward the west, while not “causing” the development of Newtown as a queer neighborhood, have arguably helped facilitate changing LGBT spaces and networks. In Toronto, however, given its specific historical geographies and affordances, the Church-Wellesley village seems to be regrouping and rebranding with some success, partly due to current opportunities with local businesses and politicians who are committed to the village and taking advantage of upcoming hallmark events. The Church-Wellesley village arrives at this point in time with similar pressures as Oxford Street in terms of rising rents, changing demographics, and the use of social media apps leading to a downturn in clientele (Miles 2021). Yet it is also quite differently incorporated into the urban fabric—both the downtown core and other neighborhoods—enabling opportunities to proactively write a narrative in response to changes and draw on resources to stabilize itself. While there are alternative neighborhoods emerging, such as Queer West and Leslieville, they are not materialized in the relational geographies of LGBT landscapes in the way Newtown has become embedded as a queer neighborhood in Sydney, with a distinct profile connected with but contesting Oxford Street.

11.6 Concluding Remarks: Wider Implications for Urban Planning and Policy

What implications might these historical geographies have for urban planners and local governments? On the one hand, the mutable geographies of LGBT and queer spaces might prompt a call for “remembering” and “fixing” certain sites (venues, neighborhoods) “identified” as LGBT or queer. On the other hand, this same mutability should also alert planners and policy-makers to the reality that LGBT and queer lives and spaces cannot be readily “fixed” in place. Arguably, part of the geographical heritage of these communities is their mobility—even if this is, at the same time, the result of physical constraints on social marginality. This means that planners and policy-makers must be aware of at least two important realizations. First, LGBT and queer communities are diverse, not singular, encompassing differences of gender, ethnicity, generation, class, etc., all of which need to be attended to in planning and policy to meet the wide needs and aspirations of these communities. Second, it is not only “identified” LGBT and queer places that must accommodate sexual and gender diversity: all spaces need to be inclusive of LGBT and queer lives.

We see these two dimensions of planning—acknowledging specific geographical heritage and building broad spatial inclusion—as complementary. Remembering (possibly reclaiming) significant LGBT and queer urban spaces provides important moorings for these communities in the face of mutable geographies. But it is equally important to be cognizant of how urban spaces are constantly reconfigured and utilized in different ways in response to shifting gender and sexual subjectivities. This behooves planners and policy-makers to develop sensitivity to the changing spatial imperatives of LGBT and queer people, and to accommodate these mobile lives in planning to ensure the ongoing strength and sustainability of these communities.

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Chapter 12

After the Life of LGBTQ Spaces: Learning from Atlanta and Istanbul



Petra L. Doan and Ozlem Atalay

Abstract Many gay villages (or “gayborhoods”) arose in the wake of the gay liberation movement attracted a good deal of academic research within the last 40 years. Unfortunately, this hyper focus on certain spaces often populated by white gay men has frequently eclipsed research on other types of LGBTQ areas as well as other geographies beyond the global north. This chapter aims to address this gap, taking an ordinary cities perspective (Robinson, 2006) and asking how we can develop models that are conceptually useful for understanding the life of a more diverse array of LGBTQ spaces across the globe. To answer this question we avoid linear models of change by developing a new model based on a conceptual framework derived from physics: centripetal and centrifugal forces. The advantage of this model is its explicit recognition of the ways that social, economic, and political forces and their manifestations influence queer spaces. We use two cases from relatively understudied regions; Atlanta and Istanbul to illustrate the utility of this framework. The “in-betweenness” of these cities, linking south and north as well as west and east, makes them a haven for queers and others fleeing the conservative surroundings in the search for more attractive and welcoming places for marginalized LGBTQ individuals. This chapter draws on the authors’ lived experiences, prior research, and additional interviews to conduct a relational reading of queer spaces with emphasis on the ways that LGBTQ people circulate and congregate in a wider range of urban areas. This comparative strategy and relational reading of queer spaces expands the narrow focus from normalized narratives of gayborhoods to a broader “analysis of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities” (Roy 2009, p. 821) of queer spaces.

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The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Resurgence and Renaissance

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12.1 Introduction

The most iconic gay villages (or “gayborhoods”) that arose in the wake of the gay liberation movement have attracted the lion’s share of academic research; other (see for example the introduction to this volume that cites Greenwich Village, NY, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, South Beach in Miami, Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, and the Castro in San Francisco as well as Oxford Street in London, Church and Wellesley in Toronto, le Marais in Paris, and the Schöneberg District in Berlin). Other LGBTQ neighborhoods in smaller cities both in the West as well as most cities in the Global South have received much less attention. Furthermore, lesbians have not received equal attention (cf. Valentine 1993; Podmore 2006), and transgender individuals even less (cf. Namaste 2000; Doan 2007; Nash 2010). In addition, the overwhelming whiteness of these large metropolitan neighborhoods has been noted widely (Nero 2005; Greene 2014). In order to study the life and afterlife of a more diverse array of LGBTQ spaces, in this chapter we take an “ordinary cities” perspective as suggested by Robinson (2006), by adopting an explicitly post-colonial approach and arguing “that there is potential for learning from the experiences and accounts of urban life in even quite different cities” (Robinson 2006: 41).

We have selected two cities, Atlanta and Istanbul, from relatively under-studied regions that provide us with opportunities to explore differences in the ways LGBTQ people find safety in urban areas, one city with a clearly defined gay neighborhood and the other without. One city happens to be located in the American South and the other forms a physical bridge between Europe and Asia. Both cities are surrounded by wide areas that are not at all welcoming of LGBTQ people and have served as hubs that attract a variety of LGBTQ individuals from across their respective regions. In this chapter we use evidence from these two cities derived from the authors’ lived experiences, prior research, and additional interviews to develop a more generalizable approach that incorporates the range of forces that influence the rise and decline (Life and afterlife) of LGBTQ spaces, including gay villages. We utilize a framework derived from basic physics concepts, centripetal and centrifugal forces, following a long tradition in social sciences of “borrowing” from other disciplines that has yielded key urban theory concepts such as the gravity model and the friction of distance.

Both of our chosen cities, Atlanta and Istanbul, share a cosmopolitan urban imaginary rooted in their intersectional geographies. Atlanta is an historically “southern” city, sometimes called the epitome of the New South. Its modern growth has been fueled by many northern transplants, making it a complex city blending elements of both the American North and South. Istanbul is physically located on the Bosphorus Strait that separates Europe from Asia, providing a setting that merges Europe (the West) with the Middle East and Asia (the East or the Orient). The “in-betweenness”

of these cities linking south and north as well as west and east makes them a haven for queers and others fleeing the conservative surroundings in the search for more attractive and welcoming places for marginalized LGBTQ individuals. In addition, these cities share a multicultural and ethnically diverse population base. As such, this “northern-southern” city and this “western-eastern” city provide a useful relational reading of queer spaces with emphasis on the ways that LGBTQ people circulate and congregate in a wider range of urban areas. This comparative strategy utilized in a relational reading of queer spaces expands the narrow focus from normalized narratives of gayborhoods to a broader “analysis of the heterogeneity and multiplicity of metropolitan modernities” (Roy 2009: 821) of queer spaces.

12.2 Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Case-based economic descriptions of gayborhoods in large metropolitan areas have been used to elaborate linear “models” that suggest gay villages progress from marginal areas to emergent neighborhoods, which then expand and diversify, and finally are re-integrated into society (Collins 2004). However, other scholars have suggested that the integration stage marking the decline of traditional gayborhoods might be linked to a “post gay” (Ghaziani 2014) or “post mo” (Nash 2013) identity that has shifted the fundamental chemistry of queer spaces. Other scholars have suggested that the symbolic value of queer spaces remains extremely salient. For example, Lewis (2015) described the ways that many gay men can no longer afford to live in Dupont Circle, the traditional gay area of Washington DC, but still return to the bars and shops of the area to find community. Similarly, Greene (2014) used the concept of “vicarious citizenship” to explain how certain LGBT populations continue to find gay neighborhoods symbolically essential to their sense of identity and community despite evidence signaling the decline of these spaces (Greene 2014: 103). More recently, Ghaziani proposed a more expansive notion of cultural archipelagos (2019), incorporating a spatial plurality that better reflects a broader range of queer spaces. In a similar vein, Doan (2019) argued that a planetary systems model might capture the ways in which gay villages serve as “mini suns” around which LGBTQ individuals orbit.

This chapter builds on this prior work by emphasizing the way the LGBTQ people are both drawn to and pushed away from queer urban spaces. We propose a conceptual framework that identifies both centering (centripetal) and decentering (centrifugal) forces that operate at a variety of scales from the individual to the neighborhood, city and national levels. It is the interplay between these broader socio-political influences that creates a unique signature for each LGBTQ space analyzed, providing for a more generalizable approach that might apply across different sizes of cities, various cultural and ethnic areas, and a wider array of geographies.

In general, centripetal forces (see Fig. 12.1) exert inward pressure to a central point or area. In the case of gayborhoods, these “forces” attract LGBTQ people and businesses toward the center. These “forces” might include a more progressive and

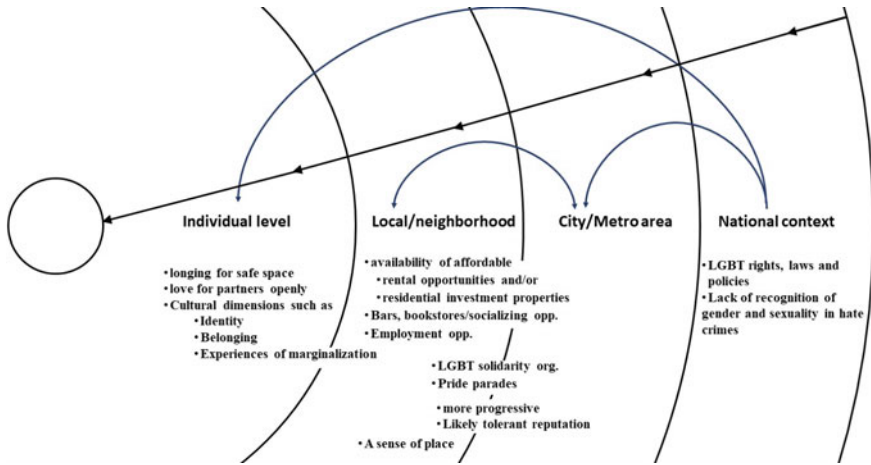


Fig. 12.1 Centripetal forces (Source Diagram by authors)

tolerant reputation of a city drawing LGBTQ individuals from a wider regional area that is less accepting, i.e., Kath Weston’s (1995) “Get thee to a big city” concept or pulling people to a particular neighborhood that is more welcoming than other parts of a city or wider region. The longing for safe space where queer people can express their identities and love for their partners openly is also a very powerful draw. In addition, there are cultural dimensions that influence the ways that individuals conceptualize themselves in terms of identity, belonging, experiences of marginalization, and religion that may influence their ability to express agency in the face of these forces (Butcher and Maclean 2018).

The availability of affordable rental opportunities and/or residential investment properties also invites new residents to move in, contributing to a critical mass of queer people. Bars, bookstores, and other opportunities for socializing also pull queer folks toward the center. Finally, a sense of “place” and an interesting built environment also can serve as attractors.

However, to fully understand the life and afterlife of gayborhoods, we must also consider those centrifugal forces (see Fig. 12.2) that cause LGBTQ people to move away from the center. The rising cost of housing makes it harder (if not impossible) for new queer residents to settle in established gayborhoods. In addition, in the aftermath of the dissolution of same sex marriages/partnerships either through divorce or through the death of one partner (especially relevant in the aftermath of HIV), more expensive housing can make it impossible for one or both partners to financially remain in the existing queer space. Changes in the overall atmosphere of the built environment due to large-scale redevelopment can alter the urban fabric in ways that increase isolation, reduce the sense of safety, and the feeling of belonging in the neighborhood. A component of this change is the increasing presence of non-queer folks and families who may not understand or approve of some of the more overtly

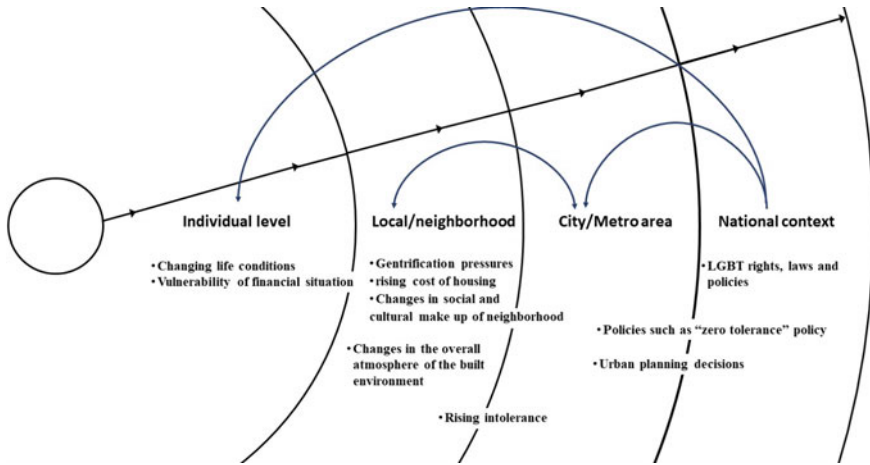


Fig. 12.2 Centrifugal forces (Source Diagram by authors)

queer aspects of life in the gayborhood (Pride parades, late nights at gay bars, public displays of affection, etc.).

We use two disparate cases to illustrate the utility of this framework. The case of Atlanta in the American Southeast represents a more typical story of gayborhood development in its Midtown neighborhood. We supplement this experience with the less well-studied case of Istanbul, representing a different geographic, social, and political context.

12.3 Midtown, Atlanta

The city of Atlanta provides a set of fascinating contrasts as the birthplace of both Margaret Mitchell and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Mitchell’s 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* depicts the complex lives of white society during and after the Civil War and is still revered by some people who mourn the loss of a southern identity idealizing Scarlett O’Hara and her not so idyllic life on Tara Plantation. At the same time King’s gravesite and the adjacent Ebenezer Baptist Church where he preached are now a powerful museum that memorializes his life and the struggles of other black Atlantans in the civil rights movement. Atlanta has evolved into a city of contrasts where “two largely separate cities: a mostly white north side of town, where economic activity is vigorous and expanding, and a mostly black south side” that is divided between the very poor and a thriving black middle class (Keating 2001: 8) (Fig. 12.3).

Midtown is located just north of downtown at the southern edge of the mostly white northern parts of Atlanta. Although Midtown attracted gay men as early as the late 1950s for cruising at the public library and in nearby Piedmont Park (Howard 1997), it wasn’t until white elites abandoned this neighborhood in favor of more

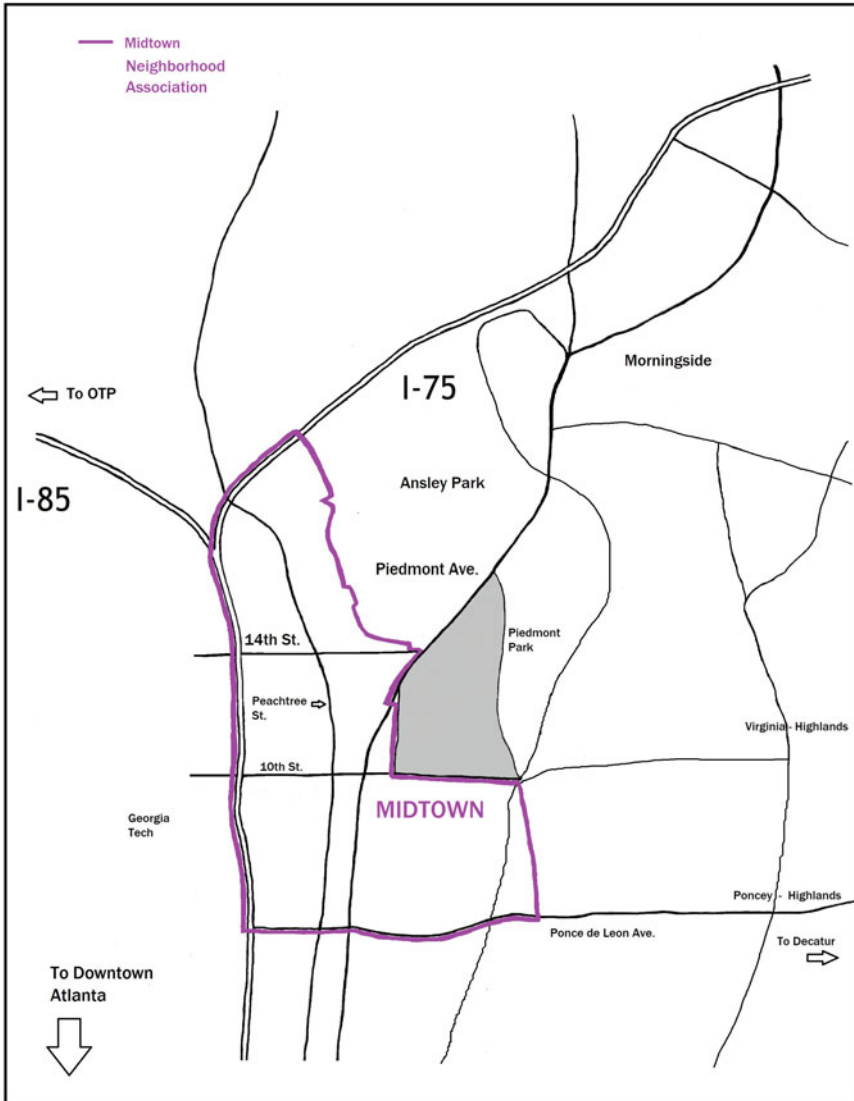


Fig. 12.3 Sketch map of Midtown, Atlanta (Source Map by authors)

modern suburbs (Kruse 2005), that gay men began moving into what had become a very sketchy area. The neighborhood was “largely restored by gays” who moved in and began fixing up some of the area’s Craftsman Style homes (Pendered 2003). A gay bookstore, Outwrite Books, and a number of gay bars opened in the vicinity and helped to create a burgeoning gay community. By the 1990s Midtown was widely recognized as the center of gay life in Atlanta and nearby Piedmont Park was the



Fig. 12.4 Typical craftsman bungalow in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source* Image by authors)

location for gay Pride events, becoming a focal point that attracted LGBTQ people from across the Deep South (Fig. 12.4).

12.3.1 Centripetal Forces in the Atlanta Case

Atlanta is located in the middle of the region called the Bible Belt known for its conservative family values and high levels of intolerance for LGBTQ individuals. Charley Brown, the hostess of a fabulous drag show at the now shuttered Backstreet nightclub in Atlanta, used to divide the south into two zones, inside the Atlanta beltway (I-285) and outside the perimeter (OTP). The OTP region was often the butt of her jokes as the home of tractor pulls and rural intolerance. This harsh attitude encouraged many queer folks from across the southeast to leave home and seek the anonymity of the big city in Atlanta where they discovered one of the most progressive locations in a region stretching from New Orleans to Miami Beach (Lewis 2006). This powerful inward migration was part of the regional centripetal force that spurred the development of Atlanta's Midtown.

[T]he strong presence of evangelicals appears to create a climate in which Southerners oppose lesbian and gay rights more strongly than demographically, religiously, and politically comparable Americans in the rest of the country. (Lewis and Galope 2014: 293) (Fig. 12.5)



Fig. 12.5 Backstreet Nightclub in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source Image by authors*)

Yet Atlanta also attracted some transplants from the North, although some of these migrants struggled to understand its complexity. In one interview a lesbian couple noted that stereotypes of the South as a home to rednecks must be carefully tempered by Atlanta's unique atmosphere.

..... when we first moved here, there were people who would come in from rural Georgia, to come into the big city to do errands that they needed to do... let's put it this way. I grew up in Connecticut. Whatever anybody tells you, we got rednecks. They are a whole lot more threatening, and not nearly as polite as the rednecks in Georgia. (interview with a lesbian, Nancy)

Yeah, rednecks may beat you up here, but they'll be polite with you until they do? I think it's...I think it's a Southern thing,... And the longer I live in the South, the more realize

I don't understand the South, not having grown up here. (interview with Nancy's partner Evelyn)

Furthermore, the relatively tolerant attitude of city officials to the gay bar scene enabled an attractive cluster of gay bars and clubs to emerge, creating a centripetal force that drew LGBTQ people to the neighborhood and city. In 1966 Atlanta had 6 gay bars (Lewis 2006: 6), but over the next three decades many other venues opened (notable gay attractants were Backstreet, the Armory, WETBar, Burkhart's, Blake's on the Park, Bulldogs, and the Metro video bar). Lesbian bars also were located in the Midtown area, first the Other Side and subsequently My Sister's Room. Other gay bathhouses and gay-oriented businesses located in the Midtown and the adjacent Cheshire Bridge area also appealed to both new residents and visitors from the wider region (Fig. 12.6).

12.3.2 *Centrifugal Forces in the Atlanta Case*

In recent years rising rents and pressure from city government to rein in the exuberant late-night life of the area caused many gay clubs to close, paving the way for the redevelopment of the Peachtree Street corridor (Doan and Higgins 2011). For example, during the 1990s as many as 17 establishments were located in Midtown, but by 2011 there were only four LGBT businesses remaining (Adriaenssens 2011). These prominent bar closures contributed to the centrifugal forces that shifted gay residential areas away from Midtown into more peripheral areas, such as East Atlanta, Decatur, and East Point.

In 2012 the *Outwrite Bookstore and Coffeeshop* located at 10th and Piedmont was sold by its owner. This iconic queer bookstore was a visible symbol of the queer community in Atlanta, and the owner of the store is clear that his decision to close the bookstore was closely tied to the closing of the key gay bars.

As the clubs closed, there were less people out on the street at night, making it, in some ways, feel less safe. At the Outwrite, we could see a sharp decline in LGBT tourists who would come to Atlanta on the weekend. Where the nightlife had been a major attraction to visitors, it now became less appealing and many of those tourists stopped visiting or shortened their trips.

(Interview with Philip Rafshoon, March 2013, cited in Doan 2014) (Fig. 12.7)

As Midtown redeveloped and more heterosexual neighbors began moving in, there was significant resistance to the crowds and noise associated with gay bars, as well as the very presence of their same sex patrons. Some of the social and cultural changes brought by development included: new attitudes toward LGBTQ venues and less tolerance for same sex partners. For instance, a member of the *Midtown Ponce Security Alliance* (MPSA) indicated to a news reporter in 2004 that he would "do what he can to ensure *Backstreet* remains closed" (Henry 2004).



Fig. 12.6 Bulldogs in Midtown, Atlanta (*Source* Image by authors)

Finally, rapid increases in population in Midtown created an excess of demand for housing over its supply. While new housing investment is continuing, much of the new housing is in modern apartments and condominiums that are not nearly as affordable as the older housing stock, especially for younger, more visibly queer, and ethnically diverse LGBTQ people.



Fig. 12.7 Outwrite Bookstore in Midtown, Atlanta (Source Image by authors)

When I moved in.... prices on my street were between, I'd say for a single family house, a low of 130 and a high of 200 and now on the same street, you have a low of 450 thousand and a high of 1.2 million. So that completely changes the type of person who can afford to buy in the neighborhood. It takes it from being just your average middle-class person, to being a partner in a law firm, a partner in an accounting firm, which.... (Interview with Roger, gay resident of Midtown)

One effect of this intensification of gentrification has been that many of those who can't afford Midtown have begun seeking community in other areas. The following quote from one lesbian interviewee, Nancy, reflects the difficulties of finding housing.

We ended up in Poncey Highlands, and then moved away for two years, and then moved back, and lived in Decatur.... there weren't simple apartments that we could afford, so we started looking...broadening our scope a little.... when we lived in Poncey Highlands, it was a fairly transitional neighborhood at the time. And by the time we got back, I don't know that we could have afforded anything in that area... So then we moved further out, to Decatur. (Interview with Nancy)

Another lesbian couple Tamara and Katrina also had difficulty finding housing in their price range, finally considered the suburbs outside the perimeter (OTP). Karen shared that "we have been experimenting with a little farther out, but I don't want to get too far out. We looked at, what was it, Vernon, Marietta.... Roswell" (Interview with Karen).

The current situation in Midtown reflects this mixture of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Although the residential character of Midtown has changed, with housing prices making it difficult for younger and poorer LGBT people to live there, several iconic bars remain in Midtown and there is still a distinct gay vibe in a number of restaurants. Midtown's 10th and Piedmont intersection remains the virtual heart of the LGBT community in Atlanta, a place where a more dispersed LGBTQ community gathers to mourn or celebrate events in the wider political and social arena (Doan 2019).

12.4 Beyoglu, Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul's status as the place where East meets West has contributed to its predominant position within Turkey's urban hierarchy. Its cosmopolitan character along with its respected education and abundant employment opportunities have always attracted people from outer provinces. Beyoglu's location at the center of Istanbul has made it an attractive neighborhood with a welcoming orientation toward many cultures including LGBTQ individuals from across Turkey. Over the last 40 years two sub-districts of Beyoglu, Cihangir and Tarlabasi, were especially notable for their affordable housing, diverse employment options, and multiple entertainment venues that attracted many people considered *outcasts* (Adaman and Keyder 2005; Selek 2001; Zengin 2014). The relatively permissive spaces of Beyoglu enabled LGBTQ individuals to carve out a space within which to live and work within the

broader context of a patriarchal and conservative society (Arat and Nunez 2017; Engin and Pals 2018; Ozbay 2015; Selen 2012). The neighborhood's narrow back streets, parks, inexpensive bars, always popular hammams (bathhouses) as well as numerous movie theaters provided many opportunities for interaction for queer and gender nonconforming populations. In addition, homes owned or rented by queer individuals provided venues for all-night parties as well as solidarity meetings (Atalay and Doan 2019a) (Fig. 12.8).

The unique character of Beyoglu makes it difficult to compare to typical gayborhoods such as the Castro or Greenwich Village, since Beyoglu is not dominated by gay men. More precisely, Beyoglu presents a thought provoking case of an inclusive and ephemeral queer space whose fluidity makes it less visible to outsiders (Erol 2018; Gocer 2011). Yet, the queer spaces in the district have been challenged by changes in the socio-economic conditions and the built environment over the past

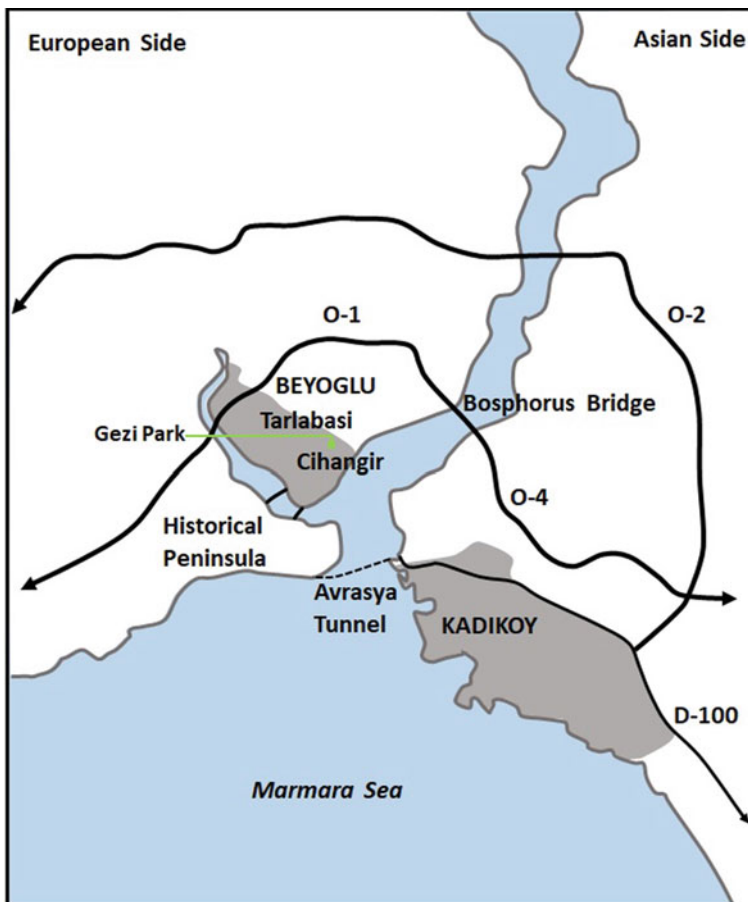


Fig. 12.8 Sketch map of Beyoglu and Kadikoy, Istanbul (Source Image by authors)

30 years. To understand the particularities of these changes, we analyze the influence of “centripetal and centrifugal forces” as they shape the lives of the queer community (Figs. 12.9 and 10.10).



Fig. 12.9 Back streets of Beyoğlu (Source Image by authors)



Fig. 12.10 Stairs to Cihangir, Beyoglu (*Source* Image by authors)

12.4.1 *Centripetal Forces in the Istanbul Case*

Although Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution promotes the idea of equality, sexual orientation and gender identity are not explicitly listed as protected classes (Engin 2015; Muedini 2018). Not surprisingly, the lack of legal protection means the human rights of LGBTQ individuals are often violated, especially in the areas of freedom of association, employment, and housing (Muedini 2018). In addition, the religious and conservative identity of the nation is aligned with heteronormative values, thereby marginalizing same sex sexualities and gender nonconforming identities. The depth of the resistance to same sex sexuality is illustrated by the Turkish responses to two worldwide surveys. In 2012 the World Values Survey Association found that 85.4% of the Turkish participants said they would not want homosexuals as neighbors (World Values Survey 2012). Another study by the Pew Research Center (2013) found that 78% of Turkish respondents felt that homosexuality should not be accepted by society. The widespread nature of these attitudes creates a hostile environment at the national level that drives LGBTQ individuals to search for welcoming spaces, though some settle for spaces which are at least “tolerant.” Given this atmosphere, the cosmopolitan identity of Istanbul provides a more welcoming approach compared to other areas in Turkey (Atalay and Doan 2019a, 2019b).

Istanbul’s diversity and the anonymity that comes with its large size attracts not only LGBTQ individuals from across the country, but also from other nearby countries. War, civil unrest, harsh discrimination as well as the death penalty for homosexuality in other Middle Eastern and African countries push LGBTQ individuals to seek sanctuary in Turkey (ERA-LGBTI, Turkey 2017).¹ However, even in Istanbul not all neighborhoods are welcoming, creating pressures for LGBTQ individuals to cluster. For example, in some traditional neighborhoods the high levels of mutual surveillance where everybody knows everyone else’s business through the practice of “neighboring” (*komsuluk*) (Mills 2007) makes life difficult for anyone who disrupts expected gender behaviors. These broader factors increase the importance of spaces found in Beyoglu, Istanbul that are more welcoming of LGBTQ people. Istanbul’s Beyoglu district provides a variety of opportunities for the LGBTQ community to settle down, socialize, and/or work in the district (Atalay and Doan 2019a; Gocer 2011; Selek 2001). Furthermore, Pride Parades held on Istiklal Street in the heart of the area also attract LGBTQ individuals from across the country. Several interviewees described this process as follows:

I have always lived in Istanbul. I did not move from another city or anything. But, I knew I had to move from where I was living. I knew the neighborhood I was living in [in Istanbul] would not bear with me; with my appearance. I would not be able to be myself...Even just my presence...So, of course it was Beyoglu where I found myself next.

¹Istanbul is one of the very first stops for refugees from elsewhere in the Middle East, but is usually only a temporary one because Turkey does not provide asylum status to non-European refugees who must be resettled in a third country. Until these refugees are resettled permanently, they are supposed to stay in smaller urban areas designated as satellite cities in central Anatolia where they often experience harassment and violence from relatively conservative local communities (UNHCR (nd), Practice of Satellite Cities).



Fig. 12.11 A home with a rainbow umbrella in Cihangir, Beyoglu (*Source* Image by authors)

(From interview with Semra)

Our associations were there. Beyoglu did not belong to anybody, any group or any nation. Nobody, no nation, not even Turks could dominate the area. It had so many immigrants, ethnic groups, a mix of people from different backgrounds. Not having an identity was a way of having identity for Beyoglu. So, it was an area for us where we as LGBTQs, queers, lubunyas, lesbians, gays, trans could breathe relatively comfortably compared to the other places. This is it.

(From interview with Ayse cited in Atalay & Doan, 2019a) (Fig. 12.11)

Beyoglu is a place where othered people can live. It has been the place of artists and all othered people from the beginning. Cihangir and Tarlabasi embraced the TTs (*transvestites and transsexuals*)² 30 years ago just like they do today.

(From interview with Demet by Turan 2011)

²TTs is short for “*transvestites and transsexuals*” as used by interviewees.

And yet even in Beyoglu there is a constant struggle for survival. The LGBTQ friendly restaurants, bars, and night clubs that attract LGBTQ people are often transient, such as Club 14 (closed down), Club 20 (closed down), Prive (name and the management changed), 5. Kat (still operating), China Club (closed down) in 1990s; and Bigudi, Sahika, Gizli Bahce, Mentha, Anahit Sahne in 2000s. The struggle to claim space by these bars and clubs is mirrored by similar efforts by human rights, LGBTQ, and feminist organizations such as LambdaIstanbul (relocated from the district), the Human Rights Association (IHD), SPOD, and Amargi. Even residents attracted by the affordable housing, tolerant neighbors, and multicultural nature struggled with visibility.

...while looking for a home and negotiating with real estate agencies or homeowners, you would not want, for sure, your sexual orientation to be known by them. I would not reveal my sexual orientation to be known by my neighbor, my grocery store...So, we were not living openly as lesbian individuals. I never kissed on the street, never held the hand of my girlfriend. I was constantly keeping myself under my own surveillance and control.

(From interview with Emel cited in Atalay and Doan 2019a)

12.4.2 *Centrifugal Forces in the Istanbul Case*

The imposition of renewed police enforcement empowered by ultra-nationalist and conservative groups in the 1990s in Cihangir (Selek 2001; Zengin 2014) is a clear example of centrifugal forces operating on the queer spaces of Beyoglu. Prior to this period many transgendered individuals had found safety in a cluster of group residences where they supported themselves through sex work activities (Selek 2001). However, in the 1990s their homes were raided by the police who succeeded in dispersing this marginalized community. The very centripetal forces which drove transgender individuals together, later operated as centrifugal forces and scattered the community across the city into more dangerous waters. This dispersal was part of a broader “cleansing” process by the “Cihangir Neighborhood Beautification Association” that aimed to make the neighborhood more attractive for middle class and upper-class gentrification (Atalay and Doan 2019b; Zengin 2014) by pushing the transgendered community out of Cihangir.

Purtelas, Sormagir (now Basbug Street) and Ulker Street were our hangouts. The fascist attitudes of the Beyoglu Beautification Association and the Cihangir Beautification Association towards us should not be overlooked when life in these streets is discussed. They were the ones who brought Suleyman the Hose (Suleyman Ulusoy aka Hortum Suleyman, dubbed the Hose because he used hoses to beat trans people), they all collaborated with the state back then.

(From interview with Sevvay by Turan 2011)

The residential space opened by the displacement of the trans community enabled further real estate speculations and the renovation of existing residential and commercial units in a traditional gentrification process. Nevertheless, the district retains some of its “tolerant” residents, queer friendly but not overtly visible bars and cafes,

enabling the neighborhood to continue to play a central role for the LGBTQ community. Middle and upper middle-class individuals can still reside in the district, but other less fortunate and poorer LGBTQ people must play the role of “vicarious citizens” (Greene 2014), visiting the neighborhood to socialize at its relatively tolerant venues.

More recently, the inflammatory rhetoric adopted by President Erdogan and the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP hereafter) reinforced more conservative values across Turkey (Cindoglu and Unal 2017; Yasar 2019). This change in mindset is highlighted by the change in responses over time to one of the questions of Pew Research Survey about “whether homosexuality should be accepted by society.” In 2002, 22% were in favor of acceptance, but this declined to 14% in 2007 and 9% in 2013, reflecting a more oppressive and intolerant society, exacerbating the centrifugal forces on the queer community.

Another manifestation of this government attitude is its influence on urban planning decisions to encourage dramatic changes in the built environment, altering the character of Beyoglu. In particular, the government’s 2005 release of its “Law for the Protection of Deteriorated Historic and Cultural Heritage through Renewal and Re-use” (Law 5366, hereafter the Renewal Law) stimulated a wave of redevelopment in this area (Islam and Sakizlioglu 2015). The effect of the Renewal Law as a centrifugal force on both queer establishments and the wider community can be clearly identified in Tarlabasi another sub-district of Beyoglu. This neighborhood’s long-standing importance for the LGBTQ community has been undermined by a bitter state-led gentrification process, resulting in the displacement of low-income groups including minorities and marginalized groups such as the Kurds, African immigrants, and trans individuals. Properties in the district deteriorated for many years until *the rent gap* potential of the area reached its maximum and a redevelopment process was initiated at the prompting of government officials. Using the Renewal Law, Tarlabasi and six other sub-districts of Beyoglu were declared urban renewal areas in 2006 (Tarlabasi Renewal Project, n.d.). As a result of the public–private partnership project developed in the area, many local residents were displaced in favor of new developments targeting upper-class luxury condo and office clients. Today, Tarlabasi is on the verge of losing its critical role particularly for the transgendered community.

A brand-new Tarlabasi

At the heart of Istanbul and its storied past

A glittering lifestyle awaits, exclusively for you

Modern streets, fashionable cafes, and restaurants

Concept streets and world-famous brands

(From the website of Tarlabasi Renewal Project, Taksim360). (Fig 12.12)

The neoliberal restructuring of Beyoglu under the governance of AKP is a part of the government’s attempt to change the social and cultural make-up of the area through “social engineering” (Yasar 2019). The centrifugal impacts of these changes made the district more appealing to conservative and international tourists and distinctly less appealing to LGBTQ people. The intensity of these redevelopment initiatives also



Fig. 12.12 Tarlabasi Renewal Project, Beyoğlu (*Source Image by authors*)

reduced the multicultural welcome to anybody who wished to enjoy the nightlife of the district, sit on its sidewalks until the early morning, or who chose the area as their communal living place. One Turkish urban planning scholar, Murat Cemal Yalcintan described the *real* intent behind the urban renewal programs as a desire “to suppress dissident cultures that had been flourishing in and around Beyoğlu’s various streets and local establishments...” (Yalcintan 2012 cited in Yasar 2019: 52).

The demolition of a movie theatre (in Beyoğlu) was required and legitimized with the fact that it was one of the scenes of homosexuality and public sex.

(From the interview with Mucella Yapici³ conducted by KAOS GL⁴ in Gocer 2011, no page number cited in Atalay and Doan 2019b: 116).

Another example of the government’s effort to suppress the dissident cultures and voices in Beyoğlu is the planned change to turn the existing Gezi Park in Beyoğlu, a well-known cruising ground adjacent to Taksim Square and one of the few remaining open spaces in Istanbul, into a shopping mall based on a replica of Ottoman Barracks (Erol 2018). The Gezi Protests started as a demonstration to protest this decision and soon turned into a wider resistance against the ongoing authoritarian regime. During the Gezi Protests in 2013 and the following year, Pride parades witnessed

³Mucella Yapici is the secretary general of Environmental Impact Assessment Department of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects.

⁴One of the LGBTQ organizations in Turkey.

record attendances due to a solidarity synergy, acting as a renewed centripetal force. However the visibility of this movement also caught the attention of the government and the resulting overt suppression became a centrifugal force.

Although the multicultural diversity of Beyoglu was targeted by government and real estate developers for a neoliberal restructuring process, the area still preserves its critical role for the LGBTQ community. Pride parades (although officially banned since 2015) are still held on Istiklal Street which remains the heart of the district. A number of queer friendly bars and cafes at a variety of affordability options provide the opportunity for the LGBTQ community to socialize. While there is not a complete cultural or political displacement yet (Hyra 2015), the changing character of the district continues to act as a centrifugal force pushing the LGBTQ community to search for other “friendly” places where they can carve out their spaces such as Besiktas and Kadikoy.⁵

12.5 Discussion

To better understand the queer afterlife of gayborhoods, we need to expand our understanding of the ways in which gayborhoods (and other queer spaces) form and reform. The linear model suggested by Collins (2004) uses a narrowly economic model to describe a possible end point of a gayborhood as it is integrated into heteronormative society; perhaps this imagined afterlife of a gayborhood occasionally happens, but this is clearly not the case in all gayborhoods and especially not true in a global sense. Our model of centripetal and centrifugal forces aims to improve our understanding of the ways that LGBTQ spaces evolve and change in a more dynamic context, suggesting a different understanding of the “afterlife” of gayborhoods. In place of the linearity of gay village growth this chapter has emphasized that LGBTQ people create spaces with varying degrees of openness or visibility depending on the influence of the centripetal and centrifugal forces. This focus on the complex interplay of forces that influence queer decision-making can be applied to a wider variety of “ordinary” cities that reflect an array of political and cultural contexts at different scales. This approach urges us to look at the diverse ways that communities are formed and may be reformed in the future at different visibility levels. In effect we are arguing for a queering of the unilinear model that seeks to “transform the material relations of oppression...[and] harness the productive power of representation and discourse to produce social space through performance and parody that explode the restrictive, oppressive grammar of binaries” (Foucault 1977 as cited in Derickson 2009: 4).

⁵Kadikoy is a municipality on the Asian side of Istanbul where queer spaces have started to emerge day by day. It appears that the emergence of these alternate queer spaces is a result of the centrifugal forces gaining power in Beyoglu and pushing the LGBTQ community to seek for alternatives. LGBTQ individuals living or socializing in Kadikoy also show tremendous efforts to be included in the city and planning decisions. Kadikoy municipality also acts toward building a gender and LGBTQ inclusive planning process.

In the Atlanta case understanding the forces driving young queer people away from Midtown might prompt different policy measures to reinvigorate Midtown as a neighborhood welcoming a diverse and often queer population. For example, the lack of affordable housing as well as behavior by recent Midtown residents sends messages to visibly queer individuals and especially those of color that they are not welcome (Doan 2014) and may be driving away the very people that will ensure that Midtown continues to be vibrant. Rainbow crosswalks are unlikely to be sufficient to arrest this trend. Efforts to ensure that a diverse housing stock is maintained (rather than redeveloped into expensive condos) and investments in community building efforts to address lingering homophobia may be more effective.

Applying this framework to Beyoglu yields other insights. If we looked for the afterlife of a gay village in Turkey, we would be trying to find something that never actually existed (gayborhood). Yet, in Turkey and many other locales, queer spaces often occur in ways that may be visible only to the queer community itself. While some others may be aware of such spaces, they may not be noticed by the intolerant representatives of authority. And yet these places are also influenced by the centrifugal forces such as rapidly rising rents that may make it harder to queer welcoming establishments to thrive as well as help queer people to find housing. This framework emphasizes a focus not on the birth and death of spaces, but rather differing degrees of existence. Our duty as scholars is to recognize and differentiate these types of spaces in order to identify the complex mixture of forces that helped to create and sustain them.

Understanding these underlying conditions and the role they are playing in shaping queer spaces in different contexts may enable interventions to transcend the hegemonic constructs of heterosexist urban planning with its focus on the use of order and efficiency as tools of oppression by the state (Yiftachel 1998; Foucault 1980), resulting in the exclusion of marginalized communities (Doan 2011, 2015; Frisch 2002; Yiftachel 1998). Instead of planning models that celebrate and fixate on the “city beautiful,” it is important to broaden our vision and recognize that what is a centripetal force to “heteronormativity” can be a centrifugal force to queer individuals who may thrive in the anonymous interstices of urban life. Similarly, an LGBTQ inclusive planning process should support the forces that act as centripetal for the community and not undermine them with needless beautification projects. This kind of recognition may open new possibilities for broader empowerment of the full range of the LGBTQ community and the spaces they crave.

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Part V
Signifying Meaning and Memory Across
Generations

Chapter 13

Far Beyond the Gay Village: LGBTQ Urbanism and Generation in Montréal's Mile End



Julie A. Podmore

Abstract Research on LGBTQ neighbourhood formation in the urban West suggests that new patterns of community and identity are reshaping the queer inner-city and its geographies. As gay village districts “decline” or are “de-gayed” and new generations “dis-identify” with the urban ideals that once informed their production, LGBTQ subcultures are producing varied alternatives in other inner-city neighbourhoods. Beyond the contours of ethno-racialization and social class, generational interpretations of LGBTQ urbanism—subcultural ideals regarding the relationship between sexual and gender identity and its expression in urban space—are central to the production of such new inner-city LGBTQ subcultural sites. This chapter provides a qualitative case study Montréal's of Mile End, an inner-city neighbourhood that, by the early 2010s, was touted as the centre of the city's emerging queer subculture. Drawing on a sample of young-adult (22 to 30 years) LGBTQ-identified Mile Enders ($n = 40$), it examines generational shifts in perceptions of sexual and gender identity, queer community and neighbourhoods. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of queer Mile End for theorizing the contemporary queer inner-city.

Keywords Montréal · Quebec · Canada · Generations · Generational change · LGBTQ identity · Gay neighborhoods

13.1 Introduction

In 2011, the Montréal mainstream media began announcing changes to local LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer) geographies. One headline read, “The gay and lesbian community is no longer confined to the gay village” (Bélisle 2011) (author's translation). According to the article, Montréal was exhibiting “a new openness” to LGBTQ visibility, proof of which was an increase in small rainbow flags appearing in the windows of businesses throughout the metropolitan area. Signs of an LGBTQ

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presence were especially notable in Mile End, an inner-city neighbourhood undergoing culture-led development, gentrification and increased “place-making” by a new generation of queer-identified young adults (Fig. 13.1). “Queer Mile End” began to receive media coverage and was promoted as the city’s new queer neighbourhood. The national LGBTQ publication *Xtra!* titled an article on Mile End “Out of the Montréal Village and into the world” (McCarthy 2011) suggesting that it represented the liberation of LGBTQ populations from the sexual “ghetto” of the city’s gay village [the Village]. But the press also implied that there was an important difference between the queer Mile End subculture and the more mainstream LGBTQ space of the Village. The lesbian publication *Entre elles* pronounced “The Mile End, the heart of queer life” (Giraud 2011) (author’s translation). The press further linked Mile



Fig. 13.1 Map of Mile-End and other eastern inner-city Montreal neighbourhoods (Source Map by Author)

End's young queer subculture to its well-established reputation for hipsters, foodie restaurants and the city's alternative music scene. *Xtra!*, for example, proclaimed that Mile End distinctively combined "a dash of gay and hip" (Wallberg 2012).

The emergence of new and alternate LGBTQ inner-city neighbourhoods that queer Mile End represents is not unique. From Paris to Sydney, research over the past decades shows a decline, de-gaying, displacement and disidentification with gay villages throughout the urban West (Brown 2014; Collins 2004; Collins and Drinkwater 2017; Doan and Higgins 2011; Ghaziani 2014; Giraud 2014; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2017; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014; Ruting 2008). A corresponding decentralization of same-sex households to other inner-city and towards suburban areas is increasingly demonstrated by macro-scale studies (Compton and Baumle 2012; Goldie 2018; Forrest et al. 2019; Hayslett and Kane 2011; Smart and Whittemore 2017; Spring 2013). As Ghaziani (2019: 7) proposes, today's LGBTQ urban geographies form "cultural archipelagos," interconnected "clusters for specific subgroups" in more peripheral inner-city and inner-suburban areas. Qualitative case studies detail the varied places in the LGBTQ urban archipelago through the place-based specificities of outer boroughs such as New York City's Queens or Brooklyn (Gieseeking 2016; Martinez 2015), Sydney, Australia's New Town inner suburb (Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009) and alternative inner-city areas such as London, England's "cosmopolitan post-gay Spitalfields" (Brown 2006), or in Toronto, Canada's Parkdale neighbourhood (Nash 2013a, b). Gorman-Murray and Waitt (2009) characterize such alternatives to the gay village as "queer-friendly" neighbourhoods, areas where a queer presence, while not dominant, is apparent and welcome. Akin to Brown-Saracino's (2011: 361) "ambient community," such neighbourhoods provide a sense of "belonging and connection" shaped through interactions "among heterogeneous proximate individuals" that share similar dispositions, tastes and activities across sexual differences.

This chapter extends this literature through a case study of Montréal's queer Mile End from the perspective of the LGBTQ young adults that shaped and participated in its subculture in the 2010s. Drawing on interviews with young LGBTQ-identified adults (under 30 years of age) ($n = 40$) who lived in Mile End and adjacent neighbourhoods in 2013, it examines the building of a distinctively queer generational *habitus* within Montréal's inner-city. It is argued that queer subcultural districts such as Mile End represent a spatial shift far beyond the gay village: less a diffuse dispersal of LGBTQ residents from gay villages, they are formed through a generational rejection of established versions of LGBTQ urbanism—subcultural ideals regarding the relationship between sexual and gender identity and its expression in urban space. These generational shifts in understandings of LGBTQ identity, community and neighbourhood potentially offer insight into the greying of gay villages (Bitterman and Hess 2016) as some young adult subcultures "disidentify" with gay village spaces and explicitly create and promote alternatives (Nash 2013a, b). Mile End's young, queer-identified subculture reproduces a distinct queer *habitus*, a set of class-based dispositions that shape aesthetic ideals and afford cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991). Applied to urbanism, this *habitus* rejects the rainbow flag commercial visibility and

gender binary definitions of sexuality in the gay village while promoting a subterranean queer ideal that values anti-normative gender and sexual identities, community inclusion and urban diversity. The chapter's conclusion reflects on the specificities of queer Mile End's class, age and linguistic formulation, and considers the insights that this LGBTQ cluster offers to the study of queer-friendly neighbourhoods.

13.2 Methodology

The research profiled in this chapter is drawn from a larger project on Queer Mile End that used snowball sampling and in-depth qualitative interviewing to access and understand the subculture's perceptions and experiences (Atkinson and Flint 2001). The interviews were conducted by a team of four LGBTQ-identified graduate students (two trans-men, one queer woman and one gay man) who developed the sample through their personal networks. The interviews were conducted in 2013 when the student researchers were between 23 and 32 years of age and either living in or frequenting the queer spaces in Mile End. Due to their involvement with the queer Mile End subculture, they were enlisted to define the neighbourhood and develop the questionnaire. Forty qualitative interviews of approximately one hour in length were conducted and transcribed. Participants also completed a socio-demographic profile self-identifying their sexual, gender, ethnic, racial, linguistic and social-class affiliations as well as their regional and national origins. The interviews addressed their identities, migration trajectories and neighbourhood histories; perceptions of other LGBTQ generations, Montréal LGBTQ scenes and neighbourhoods; and experiences of the gay village and Mile End neighbourhoods. Participants were asked to describe Mile End, its queer scene and spaces, and to discuss its queer-friendly characteristics.

Snowball sampling mitigated problems of recruiting a younger "hidden" subculture for the primary researcher (aged 47 years in 2013) (Browne 2005), but the "double insider status" of the field researchers produced a remarkably homogeneous sample (Adriansen and Madsen 2009) in terms of social class, language, "race", occupation and nationality. The age range of the sample was between 22 and 30 years with an average of 26.2 years. Most participants identified as white (70.0%), raised in middle/upper-middle-class households (57.5%) elsewhere within Canada (60.0%), speaking English as their primary language (90.0%) and attending university or having recently completed a university degree (90.0%). The sample was more heterogeneous in its sexual and gender identities, ethnicities and geographical origins. Only 22.5% were raised in Montréal, the majority having migrated from cities and towns across Canada (50.0%). Within the parameters of contemporary queer subcultures, their definitions of gender and sexual identity were wide-ranging. The next two sections analyze queer identity and urbanism from the perspective of young Mile Enders beginning with an exploration of their sexual and gender identities followed by perceptions of Montréal's gay village and Mile End neighbourhoods.

13.3 Generation Queer

Queer cultural and LGBTQ youth studies note generational shifts in LGBTQ identity and youthful innovation and fluidity regarding gender and sexual identities (Driver 2008; Halberstam 2003; Plummer 2010). Regardless of how they personally identified, Queer Mile Enders were aware of queer politics which had reemerged in Montréal in the early 2000s (Hogan 2005) and was linguistically imported into French around 2010 (Laprade 2014). The profile data revealed the participants' distinct patterns of the gender and sexual identities (Table 13.1). In terms of gender, the largest group identified as “women” or “female” (47.5%) followed by “men” or “male” (37.5%), “genderqueer” (androgynous, genderqueer, neutral or non-binary) (12.5%) and trans (trans, transgender and transsexual) (2.5%). In terms of sexuality, the majority identified as queer (57.5%) while the rest were divided between those who exclusively identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (22.5%) and those who identified as “queer” and lesbian, gay or bisexual (17.5%). When cross tabulated, these statistics revealed that those who identified as “women”, “genderqueer” or “trans” were the most likely to identify sexually as “queer”; those identifying as men were less likely to identify with queer (53.3% did not) primarily choosing a gender binary sexual identities such as gay, MSM (men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay) or bisexual.

This gender difference in sexual identity was also reflected in the qualitative interviews. Few participants who identified as gay men also identified as queer (33.3%) while a majority of those who identified as women, described their sexuality as “queer” (73.9%). However, as this quote from Ève reveals, the links between gender and sexuality for women-identified participants were complex:

Table 13.1 Self-identified categories of sexual orientation and gender identity

	Woman, Female, Feminine	Man, Male, Masculine	Trans, Transgender, Transsexual	Androgynous, Genderqueer, Neutral	Total
Exclusively <i>queer</i>	17 89.5% 73.9%	1 6.7% 4.3%	1 100.0% 4.3%	4 80.0% 17.4%	23 (57.5%) 100.0%
Exclusively lesbian, gay or bisexual	1 5.2% 11.1%	8 53.3% 88.9%	0 0.0% 0.0%	0 0.0% 0.0%	9 (22.5%) 100.0%
<i>Queer and</i> lesbian, gay or bisexual	1 5.2% 14.2%	5 33.3% 71.4%	0 0.0% 0.0%	1 20.0% 14.3%	7 (17.5%) 100.0%
Questioning	0 0.0% 0.0%	1 6.7% 100.0%	0 0.0% 0.0%	0 0.0% 0.0%	1 (2.5%) 100.0%
Total	19 (47.5%) 100.0%	15 (37.5%) 100.0%	1 (2.5%) 100.0%	5 (12.5%) 100.0%	40 (100.0%)

Well, a woman because it is my sex and that is completely fine with me. A lesbian. I would say queer, but right now, I don't feel like I'm part of the queer community in Montréal because the queer community around me is more Anglophone and sometimes I feel like I don't really connect with queer Anglophones. I sometimes feel like I'm not included like I do with other lesbians that I know who are Francophones. They might say that they are queer too, but I feel more like a lesbian, but not like the lesbians in the Village who like to play hockey. I don't feel like I connect with them either. I would say I am between queer and lesbian. (Ève, Francophone, woman, queer/lesbian, 26 years)

As this quotation illustrates, the idea of “queer” identity is strongly associated by Francophones (78.4% of the Montréal population in 2016) with Anglo-American LGBTQ culture. Moreover, Ève describes a binary between sexual identity, language and urban space where the Mile End is the domain of young queer Anglophones and the Village is the territory of older Francophone gays and lesbians.

Since queer was such an important form of identification, participants were asked what it means to them. Many said that they identified with its power to contest heteropatriarchal norms. For Rudy, queer permits the integration of diverse sexual practices (including polyamory and pansexuality) with gender diversity (such as genderqueer or non-binary), but its power also lies in its opposition to norms: “Well, I feel like my sexuality can generally be described in opposition to hetero-dominant norms” (Rudy, Anglophone, genderqueer, queer, 30 years). Savannah made a similar argument regarding why she identifies as queer:

Queer signifies for me my own relationship with my gender identity which is more fluid than those I know who aren't queer. So, I think that my identity as queer is in some ways a form of alterity. (Savannah, Anglophone/Francophone, woman, queer, 22 years)

A desire for a term representing a more fluid sexual identity was another reason given for identifying with queer rather than lesbian or gay. This was particularly the case for those who also identified as women. The power of queer's fluidity was evident in Jo's reflections on her public identity presentation:

I say I am a lesbian to people because that's what they know of sexuality. Either you are a straight or a gay. So, to them, I'm gay, but I don't identify as gay. I identify as queer, where my sexuality is constantly in rethink. (Jo, Francophone, woman, queer, 30 years)

The second major reason for choosing queer was its inclusivity of varied gender identities. Mer said: “... for the last 13/12 years of my life I identified as a lesbian/gay, but for the last couple of years... I'd love to say I am a queer because I feel it's a more inclusive term” (Mer, Francophone, woman, queer/lesbian, 30 years). In contrast, the category lesbian was especially unpopular (only chosen by 10.4%) because it was perceived as creating essentialist boundaries of gender around sexuality, producing exclusions for trans people, but also for those who practiced polyamory, or who identified as genderqueer or pansexual.

Many participants distinguished between queer and gay and lesbian identities in intergenerational terms. When asked how their generation differs from previous ones, many said that older generations do not understand nor identify with the word queer:

Older people don't even know the word queer. Well, they know what queer means, but they don't know. They'd rather call themselves gay, you know, bisexual, lesbian... Some of them do have a lot of queer politics, but don't have the words for it. (Rue, Anglophone, man, queer, 25 years)

Older LGBTQs were depicted not only as being more comfortable with binary configurations of gender, but also as being more invested in these categories to define themselves (i.e. as gays and lesbians or as trans-men and -women). Horatio echoed this sentiment regarding older trans women:

There's a lot of older trans women I know ..., they have different idea of gender than I do and it's kind of a clash ... they're very into like if you're a boy or girl and for them being a woman is really important and good for them. But for me I don't really identify that way. (Horatio, Anglophone, transfeminine, queer, 28 years)

Alexandra represented these differences regarding gender identity as a specific change initiated by her generation and even associates them with progress:

The main thing for me seems to be, just that we're advancing more on gender stuff. So, it's both being more committed to being inclusive on trans issues and like, people who aren't trans being aware of the issues or trying to be allies and stuff. And also, femme visibility is coming up too. So, that's again around gender presentation. Yeah, just like less binary, I think it's getting less binary all the time. That's really nice. (Alexandra, Anglophone, woman, queer, 25 years)

13.4 Divergent LGBTQ Urbanisms

The queer Mile End subculture defines itself through several interpretations of gender and sexual identity including anti-normativity, sexual fluidity and non-binary gender. It is also produced through generational contrasts with its predecessors. This section compares queer Mile Enders' perceptions of the gay village and Mile End to further understand how this generational subculture is constructed relationally in urban space by opposing two types of LGBTQ urbanism: (1) the fixed, gender-bound and visible identities in the Village; and (2) the fluid and secondary sexual and gender identities that are celebrated within the framework of neighbourhood diversity in Mile End. While the questionnaire had many lines of inquiry regarding each neighbourhood, the focus here is on responses regarding the identities associated with each neighbourhood and the comparison of their meanings for LGBTQ identity, community and spaces in Montréal.

13.4.1 *The Gay Village*

Montréal's gay village lies on the eastern edge of Montréal's downtown core. It began to develop as both a gayborhood in the early 1980s and, by the mid-1990s, was promoted as such by various levels of government and the media (Hinrichs

2011). Its business improvement association has also played an important role in promoting and branding the area with decorations such as the pink balls that hang over its pedestrianized main street every summer (Podmore 2015) (Fig. 13.2). The most “visible” LGBTQ space in the city, the Village was a common point of reference for all participants whether they were describing their own residential histories or intergenerational differences in the meaning of queer. However, the questionnaire did have specific questions about perceptions and experiences of the Village. These questions included how often, when and why participants frequented it, what they liked and did not like about it, and who it was for. It is worth noting that most participants reported that they “rarely” frequented the Village. Many also saw it as a space from their past, a place they frequented when they were young or had first arrived in Montréal. It was also associated with “coming-out” and early quests for LGBTQ community.

Important themes emerged in response to the question “who is the gay village for?” First, the participants unanimously identified it as a place for gay men. As Alexandra observed: “Well, the Village seems to me to be pretty obviously centred around gay cis-men... there are just a lot of stores and a lot of the bars and everything. It’s very obviously catered to that market” (Alexandra, Anglophone, woman, queer, 25 years). Second, participants associated the village with older generations. Kyle said: “I think it is for the older generation, I think that’s who keeps it going. Older generations, 40s and 50s, that’s the backbone of the Village, not the young generation” (Kyle, Anglophone, man, gay, 29 years). Third, most said that the Village was for gender binary people. As Marie-Claire observed, the Village belongs to “... people



Fig. 13.2 Festivalization and pedestrianization of Montreal’s gay village (*Source* Image by Author)

who identify as gay, female or male, people who identify as being ‘born this way’” (Marie-Claire, Francophone, woman, queer/lesbian, 30 years). Rue also made the distinction between queers and gays and lesbians in the Village: “... the Village is not for queer people. The Village is for gays and lesbians” (Rue, Anglophone, man, queer, 25 years).

The Village was primarily seen as a site of homonormativity due to its whiteness, police surveillance, commercialism and tourism. Homonormativity refers to the assimilation of LGBTQ people into mainstream heterosexual society and the promotion of a depoliticized LGBTQ culture that is anchored in consumption (Duggan 2002). The following comments from three of the participants represent this interpretation of the Village:

It just seems like it’s just a very different scene. I just have this image of being sort of like either lesbians or gay men which is neither of the things that I identify as. It seems really more commercialized... It seems sort of like the epitome of what white gay capitalist culture is. (Tabatha, allophone, woman, queer, 28 years)

I mean, I guess there’s kind of like a dominant gay male culture that dominates that space. That’s kind of my sense of it. It’s like a mainstream gay culture that is kind of ubiquitous in at least Canada and the States and various other places. It’s just it’s a certain kind of mainstream. It’s like if gay culture could be mainstream. It’s like this particular brand of gay male culture that I find very normative in many ways. (Theo, Anglophone, man, queer/gay, 23 years)

I feel like the Village is friendly to a specific type of queer. Not only to a specific type of queer, but a person who wouldn’t be as active or supportive of the queer movement. The most predominant or visible members, or successful members of joining the hetero majority, of being accepted by the hetero majority, is the Village. (Zachary, Anglophone, man, gay, 25 years)

Village homonormativity did not simply lead to disidentification but was further underscored by a sense of exclusion. Indeed, the Village was often described as an unwelcoming place for those that queer cultures perceive themselves as working to include such as trans and genderqueer people, young queers and queers of colour. For Rue, it was not only that the Village was primarily made in the image of gay men, but also that “... for female-identified people, like bars, I don’t know, it’s just not very welcoming, you know? Like, definitely not very welcoming for trans people, definitely not very welcoming for people who just like don’t fit in any sort of gender box” (Rue, Anglophone, man, queer, 25 years). Confirming earlier work by Doan (2007), trans participants voiced mixed feelings about the Village. Although it houses many trans community support and activist groups, participants expressed a sense of exclusion and even feelings of hatred from gay men in the Village. For example, Robin described it as a transphobic space:

As a trans-woman, I don’t like the Village that much... the only people who actually would call me tranny or would feel like totally fine doing that would be like gay men in the Village, and they would like shout it, you know? Whereas, ... even for like transphobic dudes on the streets, they wouldn’t think to call me that necessarily. (Robin, Anglophone, woman, queer, 28 years)

A sense of exclusion also stemmed from its commercialism and the ways that the police survey its public spaces. Young, queer and alternative in appearance, queer

Mile Enders are not a key clientele targeted by gay village entrepreneurs. Jean said: “I’m just not welcomed there as someone who’s not a tourist and as someone who looks probably more like the homeless kids than like the rich suits who want to like go to the bathhouses, you know?” (Jean, Anglophone, genderqueer, queer, 26 years). Queer women, on the other hand, were ambivalent about the Village’s commercialism. They often said that there was nothing there to attract them because the target market was gay men. While many went there occasionally, they noted that the Village’s social order, revolving around hook ups and saunas, excluded anyone who was not a cis-gendered gay man.

As Village outsiders, participants also saw this area as lacking a sense of community and being rather too commercial and tourist oriented. Village commodification of LGBTQ identities contrasted with the queer urban ideals that oppose commercialism and value community-based productions of space. Thus, the Village was contrasted with the more communal productions of queer spaces in Mile End. For example, Rue said that the Village is “... kind of focused around money and less so on community”. Comparing it to Mile End, he said that he would be surprised if there was a pay-as-you-can or fundraiser event in the Village and drew the following conclusion:

That area’s not about community and that’s like what I would definitely associate as a big component of what queerness, in its political aspect, means to me is community, and that’s why I never go down there because to me it’s like, you know, exactly what I said, it’s like a bunch of ignorant straight cis people that just happen to have gay sex. (Rue, Anglophone, man, queer, 25 years)

The tourist orientation of the Village was also repelled queer Mile Enders. “Tourists”—LGBTQ tourists from elsewhere and non-LGBTQ consumers both local and visiting—were considered integral to the Village’s commodification of LGBTQ identities. Savannah even said that Village tourism transformed LGBTQ people into a consumer spectacle:

I’d say the Village attracts LGBTQ tourists and also non-LGBTQ tourists. I feel like it’s one of those things that’s still in tourism books and whatever as, like, “this is where the gays are. You can come see the gays in their natural habitat.” (Savannah, Anglophone/Francophone, woman, queer, 22 years)

Its commodification and tourist promotion also rendered the Village “too accessible”, suggesting that there was a lack of cultural capital associated with frequenting this designated LGBTQ area. Auguste, for example, implied that the Village is “... basically more men-oriented and old people go there or people from outside of Montréal who don’t know the community. Well, they do know it, but it’s more touristic”. When asked to clarify, she said: “It’s more advertised... You go a little bit further into the Mile End and Pop Montréal with all the artistic stuff ... there’s another community, it’s more underground” (August, Allophone, woman, lesbian, 22 years).

13.4.2 *Queer Mile End*

Mile End is located two kilometers directly to the North of the Village. It was a twentieth-century immigrant “gateway” community and is today celebrated for the “cosmopolitanism” of its public spaces and as a centre of cultural production (Bedford 2015; Germain and Radice 2006; Rantisi and Leslie 2010). One of a few districts with a historic concentration of lesbian households, it has housed the city’s few queer commercial spaces (Royal Phoenix Bar and Le Cagibi Café) and been the centre for ephemeral queer events. Thus, an LGBTQ presence in its main commercial streetscapes has never been highly visible (Fig. 13.3). About 40% of the sample lived within Mile End while another 50% lived in the two neighbourhoods on its northern boundaries (Rosemont-Petite-Patrie and Parc-Extension) or to the East and West of the area (Le Plateau Mont-Royal and Outremont). Another 10% lived further north in the Villeray District. While those who lived within Mile End’s boundaries detailed their daily lives in the neighbourhood, all participants were asked about their perceptions and experiences of the area as well as its queer-friendly attributes. For those who lived slightly outside of its boundaries, it was the centre of their queer subcultural lives, a zone that they frequented often and where they had dense social networks.

To define the queer Mile End subculture more clearly, participants were asked to describe who was involved in its production. Their responses were extremely similar.



Fig. 13.3 Mile End commercial streetscape (Source Image by Author)

First, queer Mile End was composed of young, white queers who were primarily Anglophone and middle-to-upper-middle-class. As Ève described it:

I would say that it is basically Anglophone and young. It includes a lot of trans people... It's very artsy, like students and young professionals but not entrepreneurs... So, I wouldn't say it's like high class, or rich kids, but their parents are rich, and they became queer or whatever... (Ève, Francophone, woman, queer/lesbian, 26 years) (author's translation)

Jake also said that the queer scene in Mile End is "... very Anglo. I mean I know like a lot of Anglo quote-unquote radical queers that live in this neighbourhood" (Jake, Anglophone, transmasculine, bisexual, 26 years). He also observed that there are "... a lot of like hipster music scene queers and art queers and whatever. Like, just a very hip, Anglo, queer scene" (Jake, Anglophone, transmasculine, bisexual, 26 years). Second, like Jake, participants often spoke of the blurring of the boundaries between queer and hipster. Ashley's comments provide an example: "It's sort of like the hipster queer. It's the cool queer. I don't know. It's trendy to be queer in the Mile End" (Ashley, Allophone, woman, queer, 28 years). Thirdly, in contrast with the gay men who predominate in the Village, they said that the queer Mile End community was based in a community of queer women who were trans-inclusive. For Mer, queer Mile End is "... mostly girls, females who have a non-normative sexuality. I'm not going to call them lesbians because they wouldn't identify necessarily as that, just as queer" (Mer, Francophone, woman, queer/lesbian, 30 years). David made similar observations:

I would say that there are more queer women and I would say trans people who identify as genderqueer or as like non-gender binary in the Mile End than in the Village. There are definitely a lot of trans people in the Village, but usually people who identify differently and have access to different types of analyses about trans-ness. (David, Anglophone/Francophone, man, gay/queer, 23 years)

In summary, queer Mile End was defined as the opposite of the Village: it is young and cool, one part queer and one part hipster; it is based in a community of queer women who embrace trans-inclusion; it is predominantly Anglophone; and, according to queer Mile Enders themselves, it is populated primarily by those with high levels of education which brings elevated levels of social and cultural capital.

When asked if the Mile End is queer, most said yes, but with the caveat that it is not exclusively queer because many populations make a place for themselves in this neighbourhood. Those who replied affirmatively gave the following explanations: (1) many young queers live in Mile End; (2) it is the primary location for queer subcultural events (fundraiser parties and dances); and (3) it houses the city's only "queer" businesses (Cagibi Café and Phoenix Bar). Thus, Léo said:

I think in a general way yes, it is, because most of the queer events that I went to were located in the Mile End. And I think that those people do a lot of things in that space. There are a lot of queer-friendly spaces in the Mile End. So, I do believe in a general way that we could say that. (Léo, Allophone, man, gay, 26 years)

Sukie was more hesitant, refusing to state that the neighbourhood itself is queer. She stated, "I guess so? A lot of queer people live there. I guess it is queerish, where

the most queer people live, ish. But, is it itself queer? I don't think so" (Sukie, Francophone, woman, gay/queer, 23 years). Many participants subscribed to this interpretation of Mile End as a shared neighbourhood that is diverse and inclusive. According to Marc:

I'd say that it's a queerer neighbourhood, but it's so much more than a queer neighbourhood. I think there's a big element of that, but I'd say it's artistic, it's inclusive, it's ethnically diverse as well more than queer, but it's queerer for sure. (Samuel, Francophone, man, gay, 26 years)

Diversity and respect for diversity—often represented by the presence of the Hasidic Jewish community that occupies the streets in the western portion of Mile End—was a neighbourhood characteristic valued by the participants. As the urban studies literature on gentrification suggests, Queer Mile Enders share this urban ideal with other members of the new urban middle-class in inner-city areas of the urban West (e.g. Brown-Saracino 2009; De Oliver 2016; Tissot 2014; Zukin 2008).

While ethno-cultural, socio-economic and sexual diversity signaled "inclusion" in Mile End, the presence of other overlapping alternative youth cultures was also definitive of its queer potential. Participants often pointed out that they were not the neighborhood's only youth subculture and that the boundaries between queer, hipster and creative youth subcultures was not always clear. As Dvora pointed out, the queer aesthetic has been "... adopted by non-queer people... so you can't always tell. So, like the line between queerness and hipness is like blurry..." (Dvora, Anglophone, genderqueer, queer, 23 years). Many others noted that the boundaries between hipsters and queers were blurred rendering all young people in Mile End as queer. As Nancy remarked:

I think everyone in the Mile End gets read as queer. I think it's interesting, but I also think it's a bit much. Because, you know, the hipster aesthetic, the queer aesthetic, one can always get them confused you know. So, I think people get read as queer, but maybe you don't identify that way. So, I think there's a hypervisibility that's not real. (Nancy, Allophone, woman, queer, 26 years)

Nancy described this hypervisibility as an illusion that perhaps made the Mile End appear more queer-friendly than its reality. But many participants ascribed advantages to inhabiting spaces where the boundaries between queer and non-queer young adults were fluid. Some noted that because the sexual identity of hipster men was ambiguous, their presence could evacuate the area of the hegemonic norms of masculinity that might exist elsewhere. Moreover, young hipster men, even if heterosexual, were interpreted as being always-already progressive because of their youth. According to Adrienne: "You know, I feel like people who seek the Mile End are people who want to belong to this scene that is progressive and not the old way". According to her, one aspect of this progressivism was that in the beginning "... hipster men ... they like probably looked gay" (Adrienne, Anglophone, woman, queer, 23 years). Therefore, the disruptions in mainstream masculinity signaled by the male hipster aesthetic marked Mile End as a non-heteronormative area. Participants also perceived that sexual diversity was not an issue for other people of their generation. Therefore, sharing the neighbourhood with other "progressive" young

adults further rendered Mile End more welcoming for young queers. As an example, Archibald said that he liked it "... because Mile End is not like a defined gay neighbourhood at all, in the way that the Gay Village is a gay neighbourhood ... but there's a lot of young gay people, and just kind of very young accepting people, who aren't gay of course there" (Archibald, Anglophone, man, gay, 25 years).

At the heart of this argument is the idea that sharing space with hipsters serves to disrupt heterosexual norms and to recode the area's spaces as progressive, creative and open. This blurring of the embodied aesthetics of young populations was accompanied by a sexual indeterminacy surrounding the neighborhood's public and semi-public spaces. Jake found it difficult to distinguish between queer and hipster spaces: "It's like a bit of a hipster neighbourhood. Whether it's queer...? I think there's a lot of queer events that happen there, but I think there's like a lot of venues generally there, but whether they're like queer or not, you know?" (Jake, Anglophone, transmasculine, bisexual, 26 years). Violet said, "... what's unique about Mile End is that there's a bunch of places that are not explicitly queer but have a ton of queer staff working there that queer people feel comfortable going" (Violet, Anglophone, woman, queer, 28 years). These included bars, restaurants and cafés that were owned by queers or places she described as being, "... maybe not queer-owned, but queer-populated". In its less visible and subtle queer presence and its patterns of integration across sexual differences, Mile End is represented as an archetypal queer-friendly neighbourhood (Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009). Its version of LGBTQ urbanism is also distinct from that of the Village. Jaimie, for example, described her understanding of this version of urbanism: "I think that the idea of space in the Mile End for queers is more like inhabiting and not needing to necessarily identity-label yourself or like only be associating with gays or lesbians or whatever" (Jaimie, Anglophone, woman, queer, 29 years). For her, queer urbanism in Mile End was "Less rainbow flags kind of style and like being able to live more of an integrated daily life" (Jaimie, Anglophone, woman, queer, 29 years).

13.5 Conclusion

This chapter extends the portrait of LGBTQ neighbourhoods forming outside of gay villages and underscores the specific generational shifts that Montréal's queer Mile End represented in the early 2010s. Since that time, the neighbourhood has been evacuated of its queer subcultures and businesses as gentrification has driven them northwards into adjacent neighbourhoods. However, for a time, another form of LGBTQ urbanism emerged here that was distinctly queer within Montréal and contrasted with the territorial ideal and gender binary identities of Montréal's gay village. Primarily inhabited by Anglo young adults from middle and upper-middle-class families, the version of LGBTQ urbanism that Mile End represents is based in ideals of inclusion regarding sexual identity and more complex understandings of gender beyond sex binaries. These ideals of community and identity translate into a form of urbanism that celebrates non-commercial understandings of LGBTQ

community, exceeding gender and sexual identity, and an overlapping with other youth subcultures laid upon the backdrop of Mile End's ethno-cultural diversity. This form of LGBTQ urbanism is distinct from with the late-twentieth century ethnic enclave as a model that territorializes LGBTQ identities and practices in gay villages (Nash 2006; Ghaziani 2019).

While unique within Montréal, queer Mile End's urbanism parallels many of the observations in the urban studies literature on the changing geographies of the queer city, but it also challenges them. Confirming Ghaziani's (2019: 12) argument that the city's many LGBTQ cultural archipelagos "exist in a productive tension with gay spaces like the gayborhood", queer Mile End is not unrelated to Montréal's gay village. Rather, distinction among queer Mile Enders is acquired through a "with-in group", class-based, generational contrast with the city's more touristic, commercial, accessible and mainstream LGBTQ space. But the example of queer Mile End also indicates that the boundaries between the two are harder than the more fluid vision Ghaziani (2019) has for the islands of the archipelago. This aspect of the production of queer identities in Mile End suggests that much more attention should be paid to the boundaries surrounding "queer-friendly" neighbourhoods. As Giraud (2012) argues, queer Mile End is much less accessible than Montréal's gay village for young people of other social classes. Social class and other factors (in this case language) create an "ambient community" signaling shared values from which to build cross-subcultural and generational commonalities beyond gender and sexuality. Queer Mile Enders ultimately felt greater affinity for other Mile End youth subcultures than they did for LGBTQ subcultures elsewhere. Following their class-based *habitus*, they embraced many of the principles of "hipster urbanism" (rejecting mainstream consumption, celebrating neighbourhood authenticity and cosmopolitanism, and surrounding themselves by cultural production) (Cowen 2006; Le Grand 2018; Hubbard 2016) rather than the sexual identitarianism and communitarianism that once made the gay village. While not conclusive, these findings suggest that much greater attention to alternate neighbourhood formation processes is needed to capture the contemporary reshaping of the queer city after the gay village.

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Chapter 14

Understanding Generation Gaps in LGBTQ+ Communities: Perspectives About Gay Neighborhoods Among Heteronormative and Homonormative Generational Cohorts



Alex Bitterman  and Daniel Baldwin Hess

Abstract Using Strauss-Howe generational theory as a guiding structure, this chapter examines differences between generational identity for LGBTQ+ individuals compared to heteronormative generational identity. We theorize that LGBTQ+ individuals may identify with two generational cohorts—one defined by birth year and a second related to “coming of age” as a sexual minority. A case study examining the lifespan of four LGBTQ+ celebrity personalities demonstrates the concept of generational layering. We argue “generational layering” affects various aspects of LGBTQ+ life, including connection to place as reflected in attitudes of LGBTQ+ people regarding gay neighborhoods. The chapter concludes with five takeaway messages that clarify the relationship between LGBTQ+ people, the generational cohorts to which they belong and with which they identify, and the attitudes of various LGBTQ+ generational cohorts toward gay neighborhoods.

Keywords Gay neighborhoods · Gay studies · Gayborhoods · Generations · Generational theory · Greatest Generation · Baby boomers · Generation X · Millennials · Generation Z · LGBTQ+

14.1 Introduction

Generations give structure to society. Through engagement with our beliefs, behaviors, and values, we understand the world around us—and other people—based on our experience through a generational cohort with which we identify. As societies and cultures progress through time, generations are one metric by which humans organize shared experiences throughout history.

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LGBTQ+ people have been impacted by generational values and expectations and more recently have begun to engage generational identity differently than heterosexual peers. LGBTQ+ individuals do not always “fit” into the paradigm of their birth generation in the same way that heterosexual individuals do. As societies advance from one generation to the next, one measure of progress made toward equal civil rights can be seen in the changes in the attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ+ people. Typically, behaviors and values of each successive heteronormative generation reflect broadly-held opinions and behaviors of that generational birth cohort, including attitudes and views regarding LGBTQ+ people and lifestyle. These prevailing opinions undoubtedly influence LGBTQ+ people. We argue in this chapter, however, that LGBTQ+ generations do not operate solely in concert with their “birth” generation. Instead, LGBTQ+ individuals are dually influenced both by the heteronormative birth generation in which they are born and by the LGBTQ+ generation during which they “come of age,” which is related to “coming out” and forming a personal identity as an LGBTQ+ sexual minority. This “layering” or “dual-lens” through which people prescribe a generational label recognizes the multivariate attributes that shape generational behaviors and beliefs and overall worldview for LGBTQ+ individuals.

In this chapter, we examine the generational saeculum of the past century and the relationship of each successive generation to the birth cohorts of the entire century. Just as the behaviors, attitudes, and values of each heteronormative generation are clearly defined, we argue that similar—but different—parallels can be claimed for LGBTQ+ generational cohorts. Throughout, we develop a broad overview of birth generations and LGBTQ+ generations as a model for how generational theory might be applied specifically for LGBTQ+ individuals and LGBTQ+ generational cohorts, in that the experience for LGBTQ+ is arguably different and shaped by “coming of age” more so than for heterosexual people. Our aim is not to oversimplify or stereotype, but to construct a general guide to frame one potential perspective to better understand the homonormative experience in a heteronormative world. Through this refreshed understanding, we examine comparative cases that describe the biographies, general behaviors, and generational locus of four well-known gay men as a means to explore how individuals born in a particular birth generation may experience vastly different experiences in life due to the LGBTQ+ generation with which they identify. This comparison provides a basis for better understanding broader societal forces that shape the evolution of gay neighborhoods throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century along with observations about the perceived decline or plateau of gay neighborhoods.

14.2 A Brief Overview of Generational Cohorts

A generation encompasses a cohort of people born over a defined two-decade span. Strauss and Howe (1991, 1998) describe a social generation as the aggregate of all people born over—approximately—a span of twenty years. Generations are identified (from first birth year to last) by grouping cohorts of this length that share specific

criteria. Therefore, an individual’s birth generation is typically defined by the year of birth, and members of a birth generation share an “age location in history.” That is, members of the generation encounter key historical events and social trends occupying the same life phase. In this way, members of a generation are shaped in lasting ways by the significant world events they encounter as children and young adults. They share certain common beliefs and behaviors. Aware of the experiences and traits shared with their peers, members of a generation also share a sense of common perceived membership in that generation (Strauss and Howe 1991).

Generations are often influenced by formative events—war, famine, natural disaster, pandemic, economic upheaval, political unrest, etc.—that shape the behaviors of the individuals within that generation. Put another way; people become products of their time. For example, those born in the twenty years following the conclusion of World War II belong to the “Baby Boom” Generation and their lives were shaped by the end of the war, reconstruction efforts, and a shifting economic and geopolitical landscape. This generational worldview is a perspective through which life is framed over the lifespan. Just as people age independently, generations age in kind. Events throughout a generational lifecycle are signaled by benchmark years that correspond to the individual lifecycles of generational members. For example, the year the first of the cohort turns 18 years old, and the year the last of the cohort turns 18 years old, as shown in Fig. 14.1, signals the beginning of “adulthood” for that generation. This sliding scale of significant benchmarks frames the coming of age for a particular generation, which can intersect with significant world events that shape the values and impact the long-term outlook for that generation, as shown in Fig. 14.2. These events are important in that they influence not only human behaviors but also individual outlook and expectations throughout a lifespan.

A particular generation of people (born over a 20-year span) does not exist in isolation; each generation has interactions with the preceding and subsequent generations.

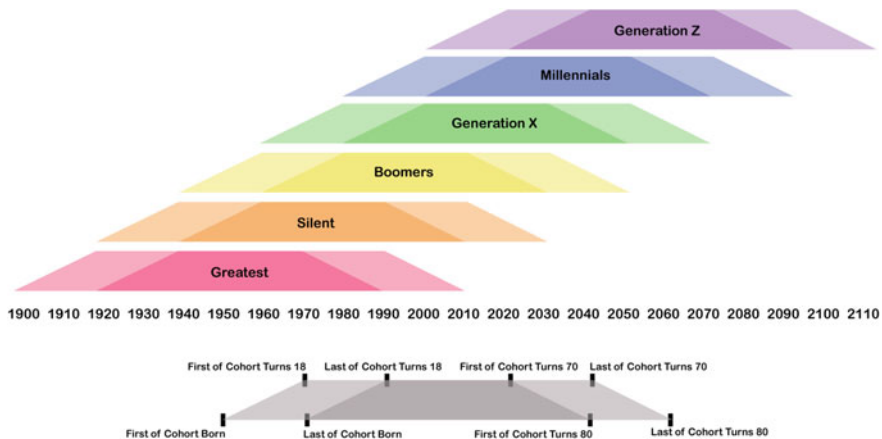


Fig. 14.1 Generational cohorts between 1900–2100 (Source Graphic by authors)

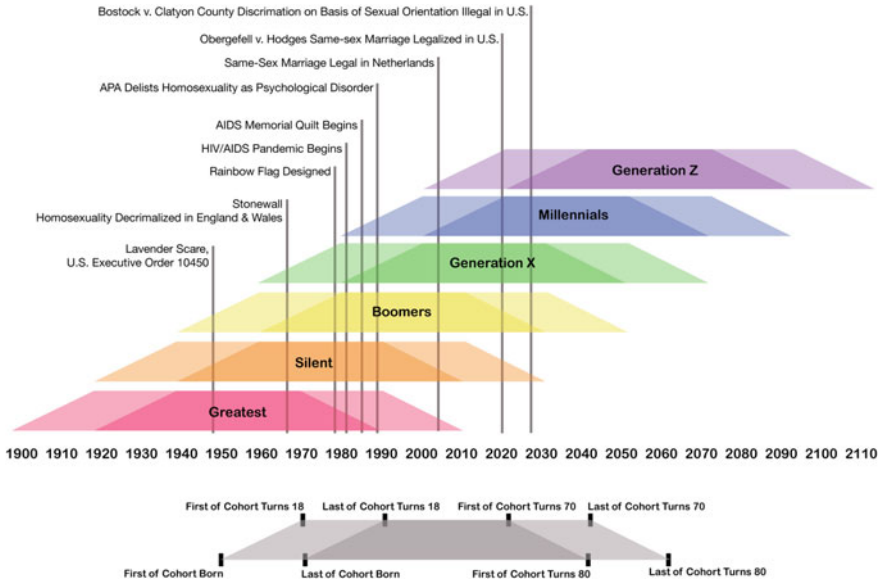


Fig. 14.2 Generational cohorts and significant events for the LGBTQ+ community (Source Graphic by authors)

Generations are organized in a series of four consecutive generations to comprise a “saeculum” which spans approximately 80 years, or roughly the duration of an average human lifespan, encompassing: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and old age as shown in Fig. 14.1 (Strauss and Howe 1991). Strauss and Howe (1998) note that broad generational patterns—archetypes among the saeculum—and historical events curiously appear to repeat in a relatively regular fashion over a lifespan and bear influence on the course of human history.

Like all human beings, LGBTQ+ individuals belong to a generational cohort according to their birth year. However, we argue that some LGBTQ+ individuals also identify with a *second* generational cohort, corresponding to the time of their coming of age. Whereas a birth year assignment to a generation assumes heteronormative behaviors across a person’s lifespan, coming of age (which can occur at any point over the lifespan) has sometimes greater importance than birth on how an LGBTQ+ individual expresses sexual orientation and identity, given the social influences and societal norms of that specific point in time. Therefore, LGBTQ+ individuals belong to a birth generation and may also belong to a separate parallel LGBTQ+ generation based on the year the LGBTQ+ individual began to identify as a sexual minority. However, we argue LGBTQ+ generations can also be delimited, distinct from broader heteronormative generational birth cohorts. As shown in Fig. 14.3, the homonormative experience is shaped as a summation of the values, experiences, and events that shape a birth generation plus the values, experiences, and events that impact that person relative to their coming of age as an LGBTQ+

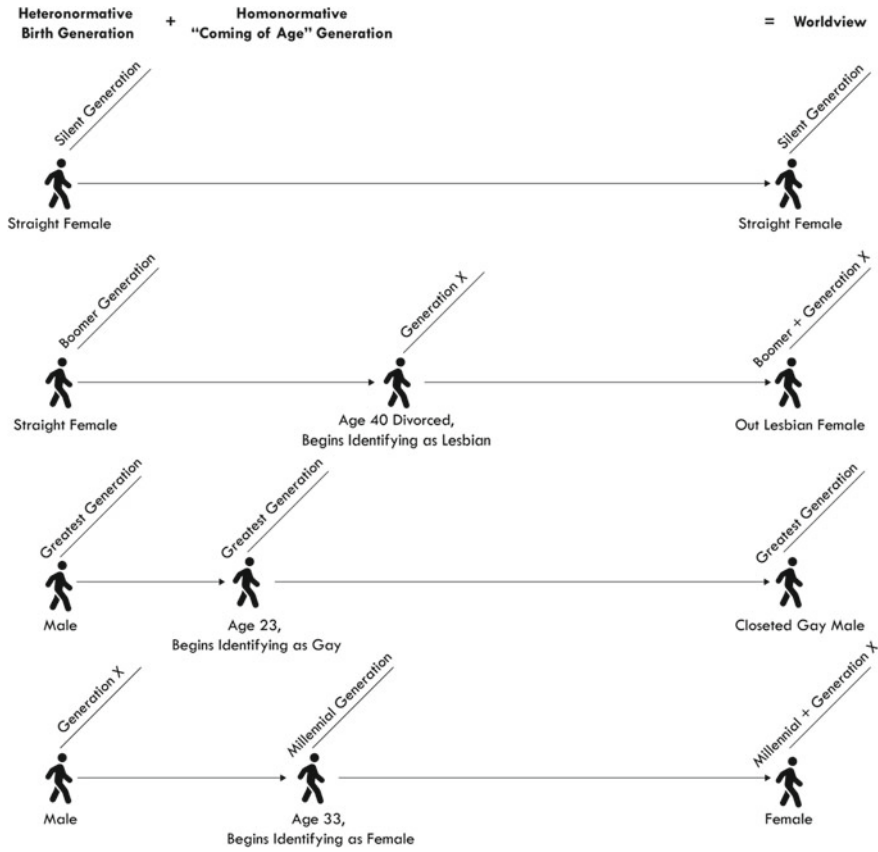


Fig. 14.3 LGBTQ+ individuals often identify with two generations: one defined by birth year and a second related to “coming of age” as a sexual minority. The birth generation worldview is overlain by an additional LGBTQ+ generational worldview (Source Graphic by authors)

individual. Because the coming of age or “coming out” moment may occur at any point along the continuum of the lifespan (as demonstrated by the Warhol, Hudson, Capote, Vidal case study below), the corresponding generational worldview for most LGBTQ+ people is better defined by their coming of age than only by their birth.

14.3 The Contemporary Heteronormative Saeculum and Events that Shaped the World

The analysis contained within this chapter encompasses six generations that span the end of one saeculum, the entirety of another saeculum, and the advent of a third. This period stretches across a four-century span from the very late 1890s to the 2100s.

These six generations correspond with the time in which gay neighborhoods emerged, formed, matured, and plateaued (Hess and Bitterman 2021) and also encompass a future unknown at present.

Heteronormative birth generations are relevant to gay neighborhoods but in a broader, more encompassing manner than homonormative LGBTQ+ generations. General observations about the relationship of birth generations in relation to gay neighborhoods include:

- *The Greatest Generation* comprises individuals born between 1901 and about 1927, and many in this generation experienced World War I as children. Members of this generation experienced the Great Depression as early adults, and many participated in World War II. Freedom of gender expression or sexual orientation outside of the defined societal norm was highly unusual, and most LGBTQ+ individuals were closeted during this period (Chauncey 1995).
- *The Silent Generation* includes those born between the late 1920s and the mid 1940s and is the last generation of the Great Power Saeculum (the span of generations from 1860 to 1945) (Strauss and Howe 1998). Many in this generation experienced World War II or the immediate effects of the war as children. Little freedom or tolerance to express gender or sexual orientation outside of the defined societal norm defined this period (Chauncey 1995). However, the emergence of a secretive gay “code”—language, slang, and styles of dress—for identifying other LGBTQ+ individuals began to emerge as a discernible subculture, especially in theatrical and circus professions (Baker 2020).
- *The Baby Boom Generation* comprises people born after World War II, from approximately 1945 to 1960, and is the first generation of the Millennial Saeculum, which spans from 1945 to the present. Many in this generation experienced the rise of the Atomic Age, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Vietnam War. They participated in the social revolution of the 1960s that gave rise to broader rights for women (Gencarelli 2014) and steadily increasing tolerance for LGBTQ+ individuals, at least across Europe and North America. The sexual revolution and liberation of the 1960s loosened the social constraint on the expression of sexual orientation and gender identity, especially for LGBTQ+ individuals (Drasin et al. 2008). Though it was tolerated, homosexuality remained illegal in most jurisdictions through this period, and gay neighborhoods began to form in large cities as escapes from persecution and harassment (Lewis 2012).
- *Generation X* is composed of people born between the early 1960s and the early 1980s. Most in this generation experienced the Cold War, the birth of home computing, and the increasing digitalization of media. Some people in this generation were on the front lines of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the early 1980s, while others watched as the HIV/AIDS pandemic devastated the LGBTQ+ population (Rosenfeld et al. 2012). During this time, LGBTQ+ characters began to appear on mainstream television, and laws prohibiting homosexuality in most Western societies were repealed or abolished. Gay neighborhoods became sites of organizing and activism for dignity and equality and against the systemic

discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

- *The Millennial Generation* includes those born between the mid 1980s and the early 2000s. Unlike previous generations, the social structure of the millennial generation focuses on flexibility, digital connection, and less association with institutions (Drake 2014). Millennials also witnessed as children the terror attacks of September 11, 2011, and throughout this period mass violence and terror attacks—including the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, the Paris terror attacks in 2015, the Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995, and the London Westminster terror attack in 2018—became more prevalent and many among this consequently generation experienced anxiety and fears regarding personal safety (Alexander Agati 2012). “Helicopter Parenting,” a byproduct of the anxiety caused by a rise in perceived threats surrounding Millennials, increased the likelihood of overprotective parents and decreased the ability for children and young people to play outdoors unsupervised (Woolley and Griffin 2015). Millennials were also the first generation to begin to disregard notions of binary gender and destigmatize same-sex relationships (Jones et al. 2014); this was an essential step in increasing civil rights and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. The resultant plateau in gay neighborhoods may partly be attributed to the arrested development of this generation in which young adults live with parents longer (Tomaszczyk and Worth 2020; Bleemer et al. 2014) and an increased generational propensity to speak with parents about sexuality and sexual identity (Drumm et al. 2020).
- *Generation Z* includes individuals born from approximately 2005 to the present. Generation Z will be the last generation of the Millennial Saeculum. During this period, civil rights and legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and same-sex marriage became increasingly prevalent (Jones et al. 2014) in Europe, Australia, North America, and parts of South America. However, homosexuality during this period remains illegal across much of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and civil rights and protections for LGBTQ+ individuals are few. Violence against LGBTQ+ individuals has reemerged in countries like Chechnya and Russia and renewed discrimination against LGBTQ+ people has resurfaced in countries like Poland. The relationship of gay neighborhoods to Generation Z remains unclear, as the oldest members of the generation are still too young to be living independently. Nevertheless, if trends with Millennials are an indication, then movement among younger people, in general, may begin to steadily decrease, which could impact the longer-term sustainability of gay neighborhoods.

14.4 Exploring LGBTQ+ Generations: Through the Eyes of Warhol, Vidal, Capote & Hudson

Examining the lives of celebrities and well-known LGBTQ+ individuals offers a lens to summarize and illustrate typical behaviors and attitudes that have been formative in

shaping gay culture and the LGBTQ+ collective identity. Here we examine four well-known twentieth-century American personalities as a means to better understand the differences between LGBTQ+ individuals within the same generational cohort. By examining the events in the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals, we can better understand the formative factors that helped to support and shape gay neighborhoods.

Andy Warhol, Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, and Rock Hudson (see Figs. 14.4, 14.5, 14.6 and 14.7) were born during a four-year period, and all were members of the same birth generation. Despite the close proximity of their birth years, these men—and especially their LGBTQ+ identities—were, in effect, generations apart. As noted, the social values and mores of a LGBTQ+ generation are not necessarily in alignment with the societal values and mores of a corresponding birth generation. In this case, the discontinuity between the birth generation to which each man belonged and the period during which their coming of age with regard to their LGBTQ+ identity occurred was shaped not only by the values, behaviors, and mores of their birth generation but also overlaid by the generation to which they “came of age” as a gay man and a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Exploring the lives of these four men helps illustrate the differences between LGBTQ+ generational behaviors and the dissonance between what we term LGBTQ+ generational cohorts in contrast to birth generational cohorts (Figs. 14.4, 14.5, 14.6 and 14.7).

Gore Vidal (1999, 2012) and Rock Hudson (Oppenheimer and Vitek 1987) were both born in 1925, and Truman Capote was born in 1924 (Long 2008; Dunphy 1987). All were members of the “Greatest Generation” of individuals born between 1901 and 1927. Each of the men is now known to have been gay. However, each came of age at different times, and they chose to publicly assert their homosexuality at a different time, influencing the manner by which they engaged their sexual orientation and expression. Capote was openly homosexual and had same-sex lovers from an early age (Long 2008). His dress and behavior—partly what underpinned his unique brand of celebrity (Long 2008; Dunphy 1987)—was less stereotypically masculine than either Hudson or Vidal. Capote was atypical of his heteronormative birth generation. His coming of age occurred early in life, which places his behavior, the outward expression of gender identity, and sexual orientation in a much more contemporary timeframe closer in behavior to a member of Generation X (people born about fifty years after Capote).

In contrast, Vidal did not publicly acknowledge his sexual orientation or gender expression, and much later in life vaguely identified first as bisexual (1999), and later as homosexual (Kaplan 2013). Though born of the same generation as Capote, Vidal’s behaviors were quiet (2012), his gender expression was comparatively cis, and he stayed consistent in behavior and presentation throughout his early life. However, he became slightly less guarded about his sexual orientation and more “out” as he grew older. Vidal was a typical member of his birth generation. Still, over time, his behaviors and attitudes became more distinctive and in line with an LGBTQ+ member of the Baby Boom Generation—quiet and perhaps conflicted, but open to sharing his sexual orientation to those “in the know.”

For the better part of his life, Hudson did not publicly address his sexual orientation (Griffin 2020) but was a cis man and was straight acting in public. Moreover, Hudson



Fig. 14.4 Truman Capote (*Source* Photo by Carl Van Vechten. Courtesy of: Van Cechten Collection, U.S. Library of Congress)



Fig. 14.5 Andy Warhol in Moderna Museet, Stockholm, before the opening of his retrospective exhibition. Brillo boxes are seen in the background (Source Image courtesy of Lasse Olsson/Pressens bild)

actively denied rumors about his sexual orientation for much of his life (Oppenheimer and Vitek 1987), fearing being “outed.” He remained fully closeted until he became ill with HIV/AIDS in 1984 (the same year Capote died). Hudson was one of the first major celebrities to be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, and his coming out was implied de facto when he publicly revealed his HIV/AIDS diagnosis in July 1985 (Oppenheimer and Vitek 1987). Hudson was born a member of the Greatest Generation and remained



Fig. 14.6 1952 Publicity photo of Rock Hudson from *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?* (Source Image courtesy of Universal Pictures)

both a birth member and an LGBTQ+ member of that generation for the entirety of his life.

Each of these three men, born within a year of one another, belonged to the same birth generation. Still, each chose to express his gender and sexual orientation differently, effectively coming of age with their LGBTQ+ identity at various points throughout their lifespan. Their behaviors, outward expression of gender, and degree



Fig. 14.7 Gore Vidal (*Source* Photo by Carl Van Vechten. Image courtesy of: Van Cechten Collection, U.S. Library of Congress)

of comfort with identifying as LGBTQ+ varied depending more on their LGBTQ+ generation than their birth generation.

As with Capote, Vidal, and Hudson, a desire or lack of desire to congregate and be associated with other LGBTQ+ individuals in public impacted the emergence and subsequent development of gay neighborhoods. Initially, gay neighborhoods were populated by astereotypical individuals who did not “fit” into the predominant heteronormative society or were persecuted for their behaviors or beliefs. Capote is a prime example of such an LGBTQ+ individual, and throughout his lifetime, he was ahead of his time in being both publicly and privately “out.” Capote, arguably less cis than either Hudson or Vidal, frequented gay establishments and was regularly seen about town in gay neighborhoods in New York. Initially, during this time, gay neighborhoods were mostly the domain of “sissies,” “fairies,” or “queers” (Gordon and Meyer 2007). Other LGBTQ+ individuals avoided gay neighborhoods either out of contempt or fear of public association with LGBTQ+ people or the denigrative “queer” label that was connected to those who frequented or lived in gay neighborhoods. Over time, however, gay neighborhoods diversified and became less homogeneous, and this diversity helped achieve freedom of association beyond the stereotype. Other LGBTQ+ individuals, perhaps less comfortable with being stereotyped as “fairies” or “sissies” (Fone 2000), began to participate in the vibrant LGBTQ+ life the gay neighborhoods enshrined (Hanhardt 2013).

Another contemporary of Hudson, Vidal, and Capote—and a member of the greatest generation—is Andy Warhol. Born in 1928, Warhol defied all conventions, especially those related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Though he identified as homosexual, details regarding his relationships remain mostly unclear, even today (Gopnik and Halstead 2020). Throughout his career, Warhol was unique in that he completely disregarded any societal label for himself or others. Between the 1960s and the 1980s (throughout the latter part of his career), Warhol interacted socially and comfortably with a diverse spectrum of personalities (Gopnik and Halstead 2020; Koestenbaum 2015) including the überwealthy, celebrities, up-and-coming stars, starving artists, and homeless Bohemians. Warhol also located his studio within or nearby various gay neighborhoods in Manhattan. In this way, Warhol’s liberal attitude mirrored attitudes in gay neighborhoods as home to not only LGBTQ+ individuals but as inclusive, accessible, and permissive neighborhoods where economic status became less important than creative energy, potential, and persona.

Warhol, however, was a formative and formidable force in the shaping of gay neighborhoods, first as voyeur and then as provocateur and later as an observer and unintentional historian of sorts. Throughout his diaries, Warhol referred to evolving LGBTQ+ urban spaces, especially in and around New York City, as gay neighborhoods began to become performative and public but safe places for LGBTQ+ people. In 1977, Warhol reflected on his daily life in New York City: “we walked around the Village. In the old days you could go over there on a Sunday and nobody would be around, but now it’s gay gay gay as far as the eye can see—dykes and leather bars with the names right out there in broad daylight—the Ramrod-type places” (Warhol and Hackett 1989: 51). Later, Warhol reflected on his time in New Hope, Pennsylvania, noting that it was “90 percent gay. We went to a place called Ramona’s and a

drag queen served us and people were drinking at 2:00 pm. Gay old guys. It was too gay for me, it drove me crazy. Like a time warp. A gay hotel-motel. The drag queen looked like Rupert's mother with the blonde beehive. She had on pants but a four-inch leather belt really tightening in her waist... Then, we went to places run by gay sons and fat mothers. Antiques places" (Warhol and Hackett 1989: 718). Warhol's diary provides insight into the constellation of characters that participated in creating the gay neighborhoods of New York through the 60s, 70s, and 80s.

Despite his fascination with gay places and his high-profile interjection into gay neighborhoods, Warhol—despite his sexual identity—viewed himself as an outsider or observer (Koestenbaum 2015). "Gay" referred to other people, but in his mind, "gay" did not refer to him. The complexities of his self-identity, sexual orientation, and sexual expression were in ways well in advance of the time in which he lived. In this way, Warhol and his obsession with celebrity and cultural "influencers" and broad acceptance and documented fascination with others (Gopnik and Halstead 2020) defied his birth generation. His attitudes and behaviors are closer to Millennial behaviors than to his birth generation. However, regarding his own outward sexual identity, Warhol was very much typical of his birth generation—closer in behavior to Vidal and Hudson in viewing homosexuality as outside of his own experience, despite his engagement in same-sex relationships. The complexity of his coming of age in a time when homosexuality was illegal, mixed with his fascination with celebrity and outlandishness, sparked a curiosity in Warhol that helped to shape and support the culture of gay neighborhoods in New York City in the 1960s through the 1980s as inclusive and creative spaces. Through his art and signature publication *Interview* magazine, Warhol helped normalize same-sex relationships and LGBTQ+ culture and construct a public face and voice for his followers—subsequent generations of LGBTQ+ individuals. He provided for his followers and for successive generations of LGBTQ+ people a type of freedom that he himself seemed reluctant to engage.

14.5 The Homonormative Saeculum and the Events that Shaped a Century of LGBTQ+ Culture

The experience for LGBTQ+ people—framed by the understanding and treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals reflected in the values of mainstream society—is often quite different from that of non LGBTQ+ people. Various degrees of implicit or explicit discrimination have existed (and continue to exist) for LGBTQ+ people. Attempts by LGBTQ+ individuals to "fit in" to—or find safe space among—heteronormative society vary based on birth generation and other factors. In heteronormative society, an individual is influenced by the events of the world, but in homonormative society, the formula is compound. Individuals are shaped by the events of the world, layered by fear or apprehension about how LGBTQ+ people are treated (or mistreated) by society at large and the perception (or observation) of how LGBTQ+ people are

received by an individual's immediate social circle. Therefore, clarifying the experience of a "gay generation" could also shed light on the attitudes and behaviors of LGBTQ+ individuals and even the degree to which LGBTQ+ engage gay neighborhoods and gay space. We propose appending the heteronormative generational names popularized by Strauss and Howe to better incorporate LGBTQ+ experiences as follows:

- *The Silent Generation—or the “Closeted Generation”*—gay men came of age just before, during, and immediately after World War II and lived in a world in which there was intense social pressure to conform to gender stereotypes. For many gay men, the choice to outwardly identify as gay was not an option, and doing so meant risking stigmatization, harassment or shunning (Bergling 2004). For this generation, gay—for men—equated with feminine characteristics—suggestive of the “lesser” sex—and the pejorative taunts “fairy” and “sissy” were used to denigrate the masculinity of gay men. Homosexual relations for this generation were illegal, and being discovered or “outed” as a homosexual could bluntly end a career and ruin social standing. The social stigma against gay men was strong, and few gay and queer men willingly chose to endure pressure or harassment. Consequently, few gay men chose to be “out” during this era. Those that did often fled to larger cities like New York and San Francisco. To avoid persecution and harassment by the police, these early pioneers further gravitated within these large metropolitan areas to the margins of central cities—abandoned and forgotten neighborhoods populated by those that heteronormative society has labeled social outcasts and criminals—that became some of the first recognizable gay neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were diverse, inclusive, and tolerant. Residents of these early gay neighborhoods banded together to protect each other and fight against a sometimes oppressive social culture.
- *LGBTQ + individuals born during the Baby Boom Generation—the “Liberation Generation.”* Gay men from this generation matured during the 1960s and 1970s. Many more outwardly expressed their sexual orientation (compared to the previous generation), though being clandestinely gay but still “in the closet” was common (Morrow 2001). High profile gay men hid their sexual orientation for fear of being “outed.” Remnants of the social stigma and shame prevalent during the previous generation persisted. However, the social turmoil of the late 1960s led to a broad social and sexual revolution in the 1970s (Troiden and Goode 1980). *The Homosexuals*, was a 1967 documentary produced and aired by CBS and hosted by Mike Wallace who framed homosexuality as an illness. Wallace interviewed guests who supported this claim and further edited the interviews to reinforced his supposition that homosexuality was a deviant illness. One retrospective review of the program noted *The Homosexuals* was “the single most destructive hour of antigay propaganda” in American history (Besen 2003: 227). The show “not only had a devastating effect on public opinion but also was a nuclear bomb dropped on the psyches of gay and lesbian Americans, who, prior to this show, had never been represented as a group on national television” (Besen 2003: 201).

However, by the late 1970s, gay men began to appear in popular mainstream culture. On television, Lance Loud in *The Loud Family* and Billy Crystal in *Soap* helped to introduce mainstream audiences to gay characters, not as Disney villains, deviant criminals, or effeminate stereotypes, but as “normal” individuals. Despite vibrant private lives, many high-profile gay men, such as Andy Warhol, lived during this time “quietly” (i.e., publicly “in the closet”). Soon the “gay liberation” movement began. These contemporaneous social movements were considered progressive and permissive. Free love, equal rights, and expanded civil rights helped to buoy rights for LGBTQ+ individuals. Despite the tumultuous transition, the winds of change had begun to blow for the LGBTQ+ community during this period (Duberman 2019).

- *Generation X—the “Out” Generation.* The experience of Generation X was markedly different than previous generations with regard to homosexuality. By the 1980s, mainstream acceptance of homosexuality was beginning to grow—slowly—but social pressure against homosexuality remained. Gay slurs became part of typical teenage slang, but some members of this generation braved societal disdain and disapproval and chose to live publicly as gay men or lesbian women. They were bolstered by the experiences of those from previous generations as they began to shed the cultural shame that encouraged LGBTQ+ individuals to stay in the closet, and they relished in the outcomes of the gay liberation movement as gay and lesbian individuals and their allies began to celebrate “gay freedom.” During this time, LGBTQ+ individuals tentatively began to find a collective voice, however mainstream heteronormative attitudes prevailed. Systemically and in comparison to today, bullying was more common and more tolerated; the notion of learning to “stand up for yourself” in the face of adversity was prevalent, and gender stereotyping was only starting to be examined.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ members of Generation X were thunderstruck by the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals was framed in part by a sympathetic mainstream public disappointed and outraged by a lack of government acknowledgment and response and a blithe refusal to confront suffering brought about in the early days of the AIDS pandemic. Rock Hudson, a high-profile Hollywood heartthrob famous in the 1950s and 1960s, publicly revealed his HIV positive status and complications from AIDS (Griffin 2020; Oppenheimer and Vitek 1987). This news was met with icy silence by his longtime friends, then-President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan. As “safe sex” became a topic introduced to most high schoolers in health education courses, so too was—for the first time in any sanctioned capacity—the implication of homosexuality. High-profile efforts such as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, and the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project helped to forge public awareness of the societal and institutional marginalization of homosexuality and the necessity to address the AIDS pandemic with facts and not with fear. At the same time, other organizations fought to denigrate LGBTQ+ individuals and against funding to find a cure for AIDS.

Generation X took notice of members of the Greatest Generation and Silent Generation as they struggled—often publicly—to reconcile the conflicting values of their generations: to acknowledge homosexuals as productive members of society while admitting that previous treatment of LGBTQ+ people may have been unkind or immoral.

In contrast to previous times when popular cultural references implied shame or deviance related to homosexuality, many of the cultural touchpoints for Generation X viewed homosexuality as a “normal” part of society, suggesting an opening for the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. During the formative years of development for Generation X, psychologists and mental health professionals debated clinically normalizing homosexuality. As recently as 1968, the APA listed homosexuality as a mental disorder. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) asked all members attending its convention to vote on whether they believed homosexuality to be a mental disorder: 5,854 psychiatrists voted to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders, and 3,810 voted to retain it. The APA compromised, removing homosexuality from the list but replacing it with the label “sexual orientation disturbance” for people “in conflict with” their sexual orientation. In 1987, the APA removed homosexuality as a classified mental disorder (Burton 2015; Mayes and Horowitz 2005; McCommon 2006; Rissmiller and Rissmiller 2006).

Simultaneously, the evolution and quasi-normalization of homosexuality played out for Generation X in popular culture. Pedro Zamora, who was both gay and HIV+, became one of the first openly gay reality television stars. He appeared on *The Real World*, then a wildly popular show and generational touchpoint which aired on MTV. Zamora introduced Generation X to being gay, out, and proud of it. Shortly after, Ellen DeGeneres made television and social history in 1997 when both she and the character she played in her eponymous television show came out as a lesbian. Changes in societal norms, reflected in popular culture, aided mainstream and heteronormative audiences to better understand LGBTQ+ individuals as compassionate human beings and not as stereotyped gay caricatures. By the early 2000s, LGBTQ+ culture had begun to fuse into mainstream culture—still relegated to an unequal place, but proudly present at the table (Johnston 2017). During this generational period, gay liberation had advanced to gay freedom and eventually became gay *pride*.

- *The Millennial Generation—the “Proud Generation”* are those born between the mid-1980s and the early 2000s and followed Generation X. LGBTQ+ individuals in this cohort and came of age at the beginning of the new millennium were less concerned with previously entrenched stigmas and stereotypes (MetLife Mature Market Institute 2010). Members of the Millennial Generation were more likely to be “out and proud” and socially more accepted than previous generations. Homosexuality became increasingly more accepted by heteronormative society during the period as this generation came of age, culminating in the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005, Sweden in 2009, and the United Kingdom in 2013; in the United States, legalization of same-sex marriage first occurred state by state, but eventually the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) legalized same-sex marriage nationwide (Hart-Brinson 2018). However,

in sharp contrast to members of the Silent Generation, Greatest Generation, Baby Boom Generation, and Generation X, LGBTQ+ Millennials have had far fewer societal roadblocks to express their gender orientation and sexual orientation and are more likely than members of previous generations to describe fluidity or changes in sexual orientation over time (Vaccaro 2009). Further, they have come of age during a time of political correctness and comparatively low tolerance of behaviors that fuel stigma and division—bullying, racism, and sexism. Because of the lesser exposure to social friction for LGBTQ+ members of the Millennial Generation, many LGBTQ+ gays and lesbians are understood by members of other generations to be blithely unaware of the persecution, harassment, and struggles endured by predecessor LGBTQ+ individuals. In this way, LGBTQ+ Millennials are seen by others to take for granted their equalities and freedoms, which were fought for by LGBTQ+ people who came before them.

- *Generation Z—the “Fluent Generation”*— The newest generation, Generation Z, completes the present saeculum and includes those born between 2005 through today. The behaviors, values, and perspectives of Generation Z are different from those of preceding generations (Archer 2012), shaped in part by the connectivity provided by digital technologies (Mowlabocus 2016) and the ability to form and participate in virtual communities using social media (MetLife Mature Market Institute 2010). Generation Z came of age in a period of expanding rights for LGBTQ+ individuals punctuated by landmark legal cases such as the U.S. Supreme Court case *Bostock v. Clayton County*, in which the Court held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees against discrimination (Jurva 2020) on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Today, these young people are likely to find a more open space for discussing their sexual orientation with family, parents, and mentors at a young age (Dean 2014). Furthermore, they will find greater acceptance as they explore various paths related to sexual orientation and sexual identity. They are unlikely to be subjected to the same degree of heteronormative social stigma of generations past related to status as a sexual minority person.

14.6 The Intersection of LGBTQ+ Generational Cohorts and Gay Neighborhoods

Why is *place* so important for young gay people? During a “coming out” or “coming of age” related to sexual identity, many people leave an oppressive place in which they find themselves which may include separating from family, siblings, or parents. Many people explore their sexual identity as teenagers or college-age students and then move to a new place to begin their adult life. Place, in this way, becomes vital in self-selecting community and expressing personal values along with sexual identity. For LGBTQ+ people, this transition may be especially important as young people

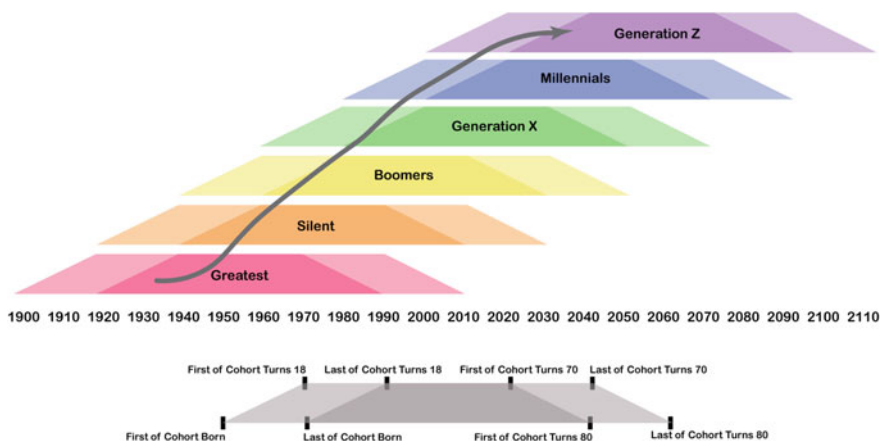


Fig. 14.8 LGBTQ+ generations and neighborhood change (Source: Graphic by authors)

transition from parental and familial control to making their own decisions in adulthood, which underscores the layering for LGBTQ+ individuals of birth generation and “coming of age” generation.

The energy young adults bring to gay neighborhoods is the consistent (Bitterman 2020a). This energy is also the constituent that frames LGBTQ+ generations, which helped to shape the gay neighborhoods in existence today. The desire among LGBTQ+ individuals to live in a community such as those found within gay neighborhoods has been consistently evolving and changing over the past five generations, and the influx of young adults from each LGBTQ+ generation, along with their energy and ideas helps to sustain gay neighborhoods for the next generation, as shown in Fig. 14.8.

While the popularity of specific neighborhoods may wax and wane with generational attitudes and values, the overall trajectory has been an upward one. In Fig. 14.8, the present moment is depicted as a plateau. The stewardship and forward momentum of gay neighborhoods has consistently been in the care of members of the previous generation who have “come of age” and then handed down to younger members of subsequent generations. This graphic suggests that gay neighborhoods began to emerge following World War II, fueled by the Greatest Generation members as they returned from fighting World War II (Chauncey 1995). Substantial growth continued through the 1950s and 1960s as members of the Silent LGBTQ+ generation came of age and again through the 1970s as members of the Boomer Generation came of age. The period from the 1960s to the 1980s is often referred to as “the great gay migration,” when many LGBTQ+ individuals moved to cities to establish their lives. The baby boomers fueled a period of sharp growth in gay neighborhoods during the 1980s and 1990s before LGBTQ+ members of Generation X had come of age. Growth continued until about 2000 as LGBTQ+ members of Generation X came of age, but has plateaued since LGBTQ+ members of the Millennial generation have started to come of age.

Birth generation attitudes persist throughout a person's lifespan, and values—the embodiment of these attitudes—are typically formed early in adult development. For LGBTQ+ individuals, these values may shift or be overlaid by values of the LGBTQ+ generation to which they later belong. While societal mores change over time, generations provide constant frames of reference, and a “worldview” that remains tethered to a generational cohort. The case study of Hudson, Capote, Warhol, and Vidal illustrates the disassociation between birth generation and LGBTQ+ generations. The difference for most LGBTQ+ people is that the product is typically more complex and multifaceted as the generational touchpoint is rooted in a heteronormative society.

The complexity of gay identity during the middle to later twentieth century—borne of generations influenced by social values and cultural mores instilled in their parents by their parents a century before—resulted in a conflicted state of existence for gay neighborhoods during their emergent and formative years. Those who frequented, inhabited, and visited gay neighborhoods balanced a personal disassociation with their LGBTQ+ status, persistent cultural judgment and shame, and a desire for discretion with the freedom to express their true feelings through cautious participation and permissiveness. Older generations of LGBTQ+ pioneers helped build gay neighborhoods as safe spaces unthreatened by the harassment and persecution of a hostile world (Bitterman and Hess 2021). These respites provided fertile ground for a first generation of pioneers to organize, mobilize, and activate a wave of advocacy for LGBTQ+ recognition and rights. These trailblazing generations shifted the public perception of “being gay” away from illegality and dereliction toward tolerance and normalcy. The societal stigma attached to being gay was magnified during the HIV/AIDS pandemic—and the adversity experienced by gay men during (and after) that pandemic—shaped a generation of LGBTQ+ activists, pioneers, and allies (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Challenging those in power and the institutions of power was no small effort for these trailblazers. Gay neighborhoods served as the geographic centers of a cross-generational movement, and gay neighborhoods remain essential to the shared cultural memory of the struggle for dignity, rights, and civil protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. These hard-won aspects underpin LGBTQ+ pride celebrations today. The uneasy balance of identity and gay neighborhoods common among the Greatest Generation was quickly torn apart by Baby Boom leaders in gay neighborhoods during the HIV/AIDS crisis. The stigma and pretense quickly evaporated to ensure survival. However, as later generations came to more broadly tolerate LGBTQ+ individuals, the judgment and stigma of LGBTQ+ individuals did not immediately dissipate. Gay neighborhoods during this period from 1980 to 2000 provided a respite for LGBTQ+ people—and especially gay men—from heteronormative standards and judgment based on the associated expectations.

Gay men from three generational cohorts—the Silent Generation, the Greatest Generation (like Warhol, Vidal, Hudson, and Capote) and Generation X—were part of the “great gay migration” to cities in the 1960s through the 1980s (Weston 1995). People from marginalized groups could feel more comfortable, more accepted, and freer in large urban centers. After they migrated to large urban centers, they found themselves settling in gayborhoods: businesses—especially bars, restaurants, and

cafes—catered to this captive audience. While most gay neighborhoods have historically been welcoming and inclusive to nearly everyone, the majority of gay neighborhoods were predominantly home to gay men. At the same time, the bars, cafes, and businesses supported a broader constituency under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (and, later, non-LGBTQ+ people). Lesbian women and other LGBTQ+ individuals tended to live elsewhere, and some viewed gay neighborhoods as gay “male” space. For example, bars and nightlife provide one example of the differences in inclusive and exclusive LGBTQ+ space common in the near past.

Until about 20 years ago, most LGBTQ-friendly bars tended to cater to one shade of people beneath the LGBTQ+ umbrella. The target market became part of the identity of the bar (“lipstick” lesbian women, “twink” [i.e., young] gay men, “bears,” etc.). While welcoming, in general, lesbian bars were not frequented by gay men; lesbian women also did not typically frequent gay bars, and so on. However, gay bars became increasingly “gay-friendly” by actively welcoming allies and friends of the LGBTQ+ community. In this way, the bars became less exclusive and more inclusive (and today most welcome everyone—including those who do not identify as LGBTQ+) but are notably “less gay.” This specific division common among bars in gay neighborhoods originally meant that the many stripes of the LGBTQ+ community had individual space within a larger shared domain: the gay neighborhood. Similar observations could be made about cafes, restaurants, and shops in gay neighborhoods.

A loss of regular neighborhood bars has reduced social mixing opportunities among LGBTQ+ people from various generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Eeckhout et al. 2021). While previous generations of gay men preferred to socialize in bars visited strictly by gay men, those attending parties in gay neighborhoods today seek inclusive “gay-friendly” dances and events (Eeckhout et al. 2021): “the relatively exclusive, niche-specific, semi-public spaces of lesbian and gay bars that promised a safe haven in a largely hostile environment lost their *raison d’être* faster than anyone would have expected a few decades ago” (Eeckhout et al. 2021, 238). These changes in how LGBTQ+ individuals socialize in gay neighborhoods underscores broader societal shifts among younger generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

Between 2000 and 2020, some gay neighborhoods have appeared to plateau in popularity and use. The reasons for this perceived plateau are many and explored elsewhere throughout this book (Hess and Bitterman 2021). One notable shift is younger members of the Millennial and Z generations (who participated less directly in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights) may not fully grasp the importance of gay neighborhoods on LGBTQ+ culture and lesbian and gay life (Bitterman and Hess 2021) and may have a lesser propensity to engage in the community offered by gay neighborhoods. This may signal an emerging shift or potential disconnect between older and younger LGBTQ+ generations, especially as fluidity in gender expression and sexual orientation shifts LGBTQ+ identity among the younger generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Effectively, for younger generations, making mainstream and heteronormative neighborhoods “more gay” is more desirable than simply gravitating to existing gay neighborhoods. The result is that gay neighborhoods, as members of later generations, begin to pull away and become “less gay.”

With these shifts, some anxiety has arisen among the denizens of LGBTQ+ neighborhoods about the perceived demise of the incidental physical importance of these spaces, which may have interrupted the continuity among LGBTQ+ generational cohorts and accentuated the disconnects between various groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (Bitterman and Hess 2021). The closure of gay bars, emerging virtual gay spaces, and changes in the character of gay neighborhoods are reminders that as these places transition from being home to generations rooted in the struggle, to playgrounds of generations benefitting from that struggle, now may be a critical time to examine the present plateau in the trajectory of gay neighborhoods (Coffin 2021). These younger individuals may view gayborhoods as relics of the past or may find gay neighborhoods not to be welcoming in ways that match contemporary sensitivities toward inclusivity (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

Gay neighborhoods provide one means for examining generational evolution and change, and perhaps most acutely reflect a discontinuity between value and the need/desire for shared place. Gay neighborhoods also provide a physical location for capturing LGBTQ+ cultural history and provide community support for organizations that capture and commemorate this history. Memory is short from generation to generation in relaying shared experience and collective history. Despite claiming to be motivated by the struggles of past generations (Hall-Kennedy 2020), members of more recent LGBTQ+ generations often are unaware of specific details of the struggles and challenges encountered by previous generations, partly because these (typically) oral history details remain largely unrecorded and the places associated with the historical record are usually not fully documented or commemorated (Miller and Bitterman 2021). Unrecorded, the resultant collective wisdom forged by banding together as a community to overcome shared challenges risks being lost as moments pass into history. Over time, this transition away from an instigating problem may cause younger LGBTQ+ individuals to take for granted the freedoms, acceptance, and rights hard-won by previous generations of LGBTQ+ people (Bitterman and Hess 2021). This discontinuity can shift behaviors and the focus of immediate importance from one generation to the next and contribute to a loss of community and perception of relevance for gay neighborhoods.

A lack of continuity and awareness may threaten the existence (Podmore 2021) and the lasting value of gay neighborhoods (Miller and Bitterman 2021). In the United States, a national effort was started during the Obama administration to identify, memorialize, and landmark sites that provide significance to the history of the LGBTQ+ community (Miller and Bitterman 2021). This important endeavor was intended to affirm the critical importance and relevance of these sites for generations to come (Bitterman and Hess 2021). The survival of smaller gay districts (and gay districts located in small- and mid-sized cities) is more threatened than established gay districts in larger metropolitan areas (Ghaziani 2021), and some locations have informally commemorated LGBTQ+ significant places within or near gay neighborhoods.

14.7 Future Possibilities for Gay Neighborhoods

The perspectives regarding gayborhoods among successive generations of LGBTQ+ residents is changing. Attitudinal perspectives among generations are one significant factor in shifting demand for gayborhoods among LGBTQ+ groups. We believe that the inter-relation of these factors both shapes and reshapes the lived experience for LGBTQ+ people in neighborhoods and cities. As the stigma associated with identification with groups under the LGBTQ+ umbrella decreases universally, the need/desire for living in places underscored by segregation and self-isolation may also change.

The physical building blocks of gay neighborhoods—commercial establishments (bars, restaurants, bookstores), services (community centers, health clinics), and residences—may be removed or displaced due to various urban forces including neighborhood change, revitalization, gentrification, socio-cultural influences (tastes, preferences, and attitudes), and even equal rights legislation (Bitterman 2020a; Eeckhout et al. 2021; Hess 2019, Hess and Bitterman 2021). However, if gayborhoods (or elements of gayborhoods) are at risk of or indeed disappearing, then the need to preserve these memory spaces becomes urgent so that the social action that occurred there is documented, (Miller and Bitterman 2021) especially for future generations.

Today, many LGBTQ+ individuals—especially younger groups of individuals—embrace a broadly inclusive definition of sexual orientation and find little value in labels such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “transgender,” and other sexual minorities (Podmore 2021). These younger individuals may view gayborhoods as relics of the past or may find gay neighborhoods not to be welcoming in ways that match contemporary sensitivities toward inclusivity (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Similarly, the older residents in gayborhoods are often less comfortable with the sexual diversity that younger people easily accept or the sexual fluidity they may practice. It can be difficult to distinguish between queer and hipster (Podmore 2021), and the hipster aesthetic marks gayborhoods as distinctly non-heteronormative space. For non-LGBTQ+ individuals, “the idea that sharing space with hipsters serves to disrupt heterosexual norms and to recode the spaces as progressive, creative and open” (Podmore 2021, 304) underscores the generational shift with regard to gay neighborhoods. This is not a new phenomenon, as illustrated by the example of how Andy Warhol engaged the gay neighborhoods of New York and the various types of individuals that found a sense of belonging there.

Sexual fluidity among later generations shifts the generational perspective of gay neighborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021). Among those traditionally not found beneath the LGBTQ+ umbrella, gender fluidity and diversity of gender expression—long conflated with “being gay”—has become more clearly articulated and is becoming more socially accepted. Shifting perceptions of gender, gender identity and fluidity, and gender expression—paralleling the rise of “gay-friendly” culture—have given a broader mainstream voice to queer culture (Seidman 1994). We now live in a post-binary multi-polar world, and this change is reflected in neighborhoods and places (Hess 2019).

One example of the shifting language surrounding LGBTQ+ identity is the familiar amalgamation of words that reference homosexuality as a cultural touchpoint, which are becoming increasingly common. For example, “metrosexual”—a straight male with grooming or fashion-conscious characteristics typically associated with gay men—is one example of this cross-over. Similarly, a “lumbersexual” is a homosexual with specific “butch” characteristics (manner or dress) reminiscent of a lumberjack. “Cuomosexuals” are those individuals who appreciate the efforts of New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo, especially in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic (Miles et al. 2021). In contrast to the “de-gaying” of gay neighborhoods, this shift could be considered the “gaying” of heteronormative society.

The increased precision of language to describe LGBTQ+ individuals represents significant changes in worldview and perspective led by later generations who embrace less prescriptive and less rigid descriptors related to gender and sexual orientation. Observing the more recent blurring of differentiation between queer culture and hipster culture in the gay village of Montréal, Podmore (2021, 303) argues that “the boundaries between hipsters and queers were blurred rendering all young people in Mile-End as queer.” As generational thinking related to the expression of identity changes, this will likely alter gay neighborhoods and, indeed, all neighborhoods (Bitterman and Hess 2021), though the long-term effects of these changes remain unclear.

Perhaps “second generation” gay neighborhoods will serve future cohorts of LGBTQ+ residents, citizens, families, and visitors by providing similar (and perhaps new, unimagined) functions just as established gay neighborhoods have served past generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). While not all “seed” communities will flourish and external forces may even extinguish some, it is likely that as the needs of LGBTQ+ citizens and families change, so too do the types of neighborhoods these citizens and families require as gay neighborhoods potentially reconfigure for the future. In this way, gay neighborhoods could reconstitute around the archetype, reflecting their existence for the previous five decades or in a form that does not yet exist. Moreover, we anticipate that established gay neighborhoods will propagate via an “afterglow” (Coffin 2021) as historically relevant sites become landmarked or memorialized (Miller and Bitterman 2021). We expect to see new types of gay communities emerge in the future, especially as the Baby Boom Generation and Generation X (and subsequent generations) age into retirement (Hess 2019; Bitterman and Hess 2021). However, these neighborhoods may be different than those we know today.

14.8 Synthesis and Conclusion: Connections for LGBTQ+ People Across Generational Cohorts

To conclude this chapter, we synthesize the material presented to develop five take-away messages. The takeaway messages underscore a layered approach to interrogating generational theory related to LGBTQ+ individuals and experiences in gay neighborhoods. We aim to enlarge scholarship about gaps between generational identity for LGBTQ+ people since traditional generational theory has seldom been applied to LGBTQ+ people or communities.

In particular, we seek to extract from a considerably detailed investigation of the most recent six generations, a more nuanced understanding of how LGBTQ+ members of various generational cohorts view the nation of segregated gay neighborhoods and how they have (or have not) contributed to sustaining gay neighborhoods to bestow them on subsequent generations of LGBTQ+ people.

14.9 Takeaway Messages

Takeaway Message 1: Generational Worldview Shapes Gay Neighborhoods

Different generations of LGBTQ+ individuals view and value gay neighborhoods differently.

Members of LGBTQ+ generational cohorts can be identified according to a typical 20-year span. We argue that the process of achieving societal acceptance and winning civil rights may be different for each of the constituents under the LGBTQ+ umbrella and that LGBTQ+ people experience “layered generations” based on their birth year and time when they came of age.

Throughout their evolution, gay neighborhoods have been nurtured and sustained by LGBTQ+ members of earlier generations (as shown in Fig. 14.8) for the generation that follows. Interest in gay neighborhoods, however, has begun to decrease among younger Millennials. We attribute this decline partly to different generational pressures—threats of terrorism, violence, and a general lack of a sense of collective safety—that have shaped lifestyle attitudes for this generation of young adults. In contrast to previous generations, many Millennials remain closer to home and retain close relationships with parents and family members. As LGBTQ+ members of earlier generations encounter less social resistance to their LGBTQ+ identification or expression of sexual orientation, members of later generations may view gayborhoods as relics of the past or may find gay neighborhoods not to be welcoming in ways that match contemporary sensitivities toward inclusivity (Bitterman and Hess 2021).

Takeaway Message 2: Gentrification May Be Killing Gay Neighborhoods

Gay neighborhoods are waning as older residents are selling or moving, and LGBTQ+ people from younger generations are not replacing them.

This observation may be more related to real estate cost and the value placed on homeownership among members of the Millennial generation than about the value of LGBTQ-supportive community. As noted, generational differences in homeownership and living at home with parents longer is more common among Millennials than among previous generations (Bleemer et al. 2014).

Gay neighborhoods were in their evolutionary infancy during the Baby Boom Generation and Generation X periods, and property was inexpensive during this early period. However, urban real estate demand has changed over time as gay neighborhoods have gentrified or hypergentrified (Moss 2017). Often, LGBTQ+ individuals that belong to earlier generations simply cannot afford to live in established gay neighborhoods, and living independently is often not a priority for those in earlier generations.

Members of later generations also appear to be more comfortable discussing their gender identity and orientation with parents, family, and friends. The need to “run away” or physically re-locate to a gay neighborhood to find acceptance may be waning, but by staying behind in heteronormative neighborhoods, these young individuals may (perhaps unknowingly) be making these neighborhoods “more gay.”

Takeaway Message 3: More Recent Generational Cohorts Embrace Technology, and This Imperils Gay Neighborhoods

Technology allows later LGBTQ+ generations to create virtual communities and has decreased the demand for and interest in gay neighborhoods.

Technology, perhaps more than any other factor, defines the generational divide. It has enabled a younger generation to socialize in a manner different from their elders. However, technology has also provided opportunities for members of older generations to stay connected. While technology is often cited as a potential reason for the possible decline of interest in gay neighborhoods among younger LGBTQ+ individuals, this assessment is shortsighted because technology has also enabled many older LGBTQ+ individuals to remain connected despite advanced age. For example, LGBTQ+ members of earlier generational cohorts may appreciate the nightlife that gay neighborhoods provide, but younger LGBTQ individuals also frequent gay bars, restaurants, and other gay neighborhood establishments technology in hand. For one generation, the attraction is place-driven, for another it may be place, driven by technology.

Millennials and subsequent generations may place a different value on living among LGBTQ+ community members in a gay neighborhood because technology lets them live anywhere and still actively communicate with the people with which they desire to associate. We note that various generations of LGBTQ+ individuals engage technological change differently, and the COVID-19 pandemic has further influenced the way nearly everyone engages technology (Miles 2021; Miles et al. 2021).

Takeaway Message 4: Heteronormative Neighborhoods Become “More Gay” While Gay Neighborhoods Become “Less Gay”

Millennials and later generations seem more comfortable disregarding societal expectations and constraints and less comfortable self-segregating into gay neighborhoods.

Over the years and as the generations progressed, some LGBTQ+ individuals left gay neighborhoods, forced out in part by increasing housing costs related to gentrification and hypergentrification. To remain viable, many gay bars, restaurants, cafes, shops, and other gay-oriented establishments in gay neighborhoods adapted and welcomed people from more diverse groups (including straight people), making those neighborhoods “less gay.” At the same time, mainstream bars, clubs, shops, and restaurants across the broader city began to more overtly welcome LGBTQ+ individuals making those neighborhoods “more gay.” As noted, Millennials typically experience less resistance than previous generations in expressing their sexual orientation and identity. They may be making heteronormative neighborhoods “more gay” without being aware that they are doing so.

Takeaway Message 5: Enhanced Civil Rights for Later Generations Stifle the Need for Gay Neighborhoods

Greater societal acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals makes more recent generations less likely to live in gay neighborhoods. There is consequently a view that many gay neighborhoods have lost their authenticity.

Younger LGBTQ+ individuals from more recent generational cohorts have come of age in a time when being gay is broadly accepted throughout mainstream culture, and LGBTQ+ individuals enjoy greater recognition and enhanced civil rights and legal protections. As a result, the desire to purposely isolate with like people for protection in specific geographic locations has seemingly diminished. Millennials—whether LGBTQ+ or not—are likely to behave more uniformly regarding housing preferences and choices about neighborhoods and cities for their residential location (Nash 2013). These observations suggest broader societal shifts, not necessarily a diminished demand for or interest in gay neighborhoods (Fig. 14.9).

Most gay neighborhoods were, for many years, centered around gay bars and nightlife that provided gathering space for sexual minorities. Gay neighborhoods have historically provided a degree of insulation from police brutality, hate-fueled violence, and harassment, especially among those misunderstood or ostracized by the mainstream. However, as LGBTQ+ individuals enjoy greater civil rights and legal protections, social stigma related to identifying as LGBTQ+ has decreased. Compared to generations past, younger LGBTQ+ individuals tend to enjoy a greater degree of familial support when identifying as a sexual minority. Cultural shame associated with LGBTQ+ status in the Silent and Greatest Generations has diminished and has been replaced for subsequent generations by pride. These changes are markedly generational.



Fig. 14.9 People of all ages—and from several generational cohorts—find common ground in the Church Street neighborhood in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (Source Image courtesy of Robert Modzelewski)

Significantly, with the legal right of same-sex couples to marry, the gay family model has transformed. For example, a gay baby boomer likely has a somewhat different nuclear family make-up than a millennial gay man may have or may wish to have. A more traditional family structure (two married adults with children) is becoming more common in LGBTQ+ communities, and this may serve to change the flavor of gay neighborhoods as LGBTQ+ families seek amenities (such as daycare, schools, and family-centered medical care) that were not traditionally associated with gayborhoods. However, this shift does not mean that gay neighborhoods are dead or dying. LGBTQ+ individuals recognize gay neighborhoods as the center of gay culture and will often socialize and celebrate in these locations. Meanwhile, the need to seek refuge in an urban gay neighborhood has diminished because LGBTQ+ individuals continue to proudly fight for equality and civil rights, ensuring that smaller cities and towns are more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people as residential settlements everywhere become “more gay” through a diffusion of formerly concentrated LGBTQ+ communities.

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Chapter 15

Commemorating Historically Significant Gay Places Across the United States



Camden Miller and Alex Bitterman

Abstract The stories of gay spaces across the United States are largely unrecorded, undocumented, and are not centrally collected or archived beyond informal reports and oral histories. Evidence demonstrates that the preservation of historic sites allows for future generations to benefit from intangibles related to community and identity. However, the LGBTQ+ community has been unable to gain benefits that place-based, historic sites can provide, due to an inability to commemorate spaces that have shaped LGBTQ+ history in significant ways. This chapter explores the disparities between the preservation and commemoration of significant LGBTQ+ spaces and the amount of funding distributed to these sites. As of 2016, LGBTQ+ sites comprised only 0.08 percent of the 2,500 U.S. National Historic Landmarks and 0.005 percent of the more than 90,000 places listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This representation is well short of the share of American adults that identify as LGBTQ+ , which in 2017 was approximately five percent of the United States population. In 2010 the Administration of President Barack Obama launched the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative under the National Historic Landmarks Program. This effort underscored a broader commitment to include historically underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals. As a result, LGBTQ+ communities became eligible to receive funding for projects through the Underrepresented Community Grant Program. An analysis of the distribution of Underrepresented Community Grant Program funds revealed that the LGBTQ+ community receives considerably less funding compared to other underrepresented communities. The findings from this study suggest that there is still a significant amount of work that remains to be done to integrate LGBTQ+ histories into historic preservation programs that exist at various levels of programming (local, state, and federal).

Keywords Historic preservation • Place-based identity • Underrepresented Community Grant • National Park Service • LGBTQ+ heritage

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15.1 Generations of Gay History

Gay spaces across the United States are steeped in important and ephemeral history. However, the stories of these spaces—and the people that lived the struggle to gain LGBTQ+ rights—are largely unrecorded, undocumented, and are not centrally collected or archived beyond Wikipedia entries and oral histories. Many gay places and gay neighborhoods have no formal means of recognition or historic protection such as those that are available to other classifications of landmarks from state or federal agencies. The pioneering generation that gave rise to the LGBTQ+ rights movement is aging and the time to capture the unprecedented—and largely undocumented—history of their efforts and struggle is endangered. As this generation of LGBTQ+ elders ages and eventually passes on, the detailed histories, documents, and stories of this courageous generation will be lost and will become unavailable for future scholarly analysis or review (Bitterman and Hess 2016; Bitterman and Hess 2021). With this loss, aspects of the history of the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States stands a chance of becoming lost, forever, in the shuffle of history. It is vital that all groups are equally represented in their ability to memorialize and preserve their own histories and culture as part of a broader cultural context. While “people survive the loss of places that support their identity,” (Mayes 2018) these places take on a greater meaning. The phrase “many times, these places survive in memory,” (Mayes 2018) suggests a type of “afterglow” which “denotes a post-place as an imaginary-symbolic effect that percolates through deterritorialized networks” (Coffin 2021). In this way, “the continued presence of old places helps us know who we are and who we may become in the future” (Mayes 2018).

Late in the Obama administration (2014–2017) a United States Federal effort, through the National Park Service as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior—endeavored to identify, commemorate, and landmark sites that were significant to the LGBTQ+ struggle for civil rights across the United States—began to see some unrecognized work start to gain traction (U.S. Department of the Interior 2014a). This effort built upon an emerging heritage effort that began in the 1960s through legislation focusing on the preservation of significant sites in the built environment of special historic value. However, in the years following the Obama administration stewardship, the Federal effort to identify, landmark, and protect LGBTQ+ heritage sites has been de-prioritized at the Federal level. As discussed later in this chapter, certain U.S. states, such as New York, have stepped into fill the post-Obama Federal void by identifying, commemorating, and protecting LGBTQ+ heritage sites within state boundaries.

Efforts to commemorate and landmark significant LGBTQ+ sites become part of the history and ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ civil rights. These civil rights have historically been explicitly denied by both government and society (National Park Service 2019b; Garretson 2018). LGBTQ+ spaces, though important to LGBTQ+ people, belong to everyone and are part of a diverse and rich history, extending beyond the specific history of LGBTQ+ individuals. Evidence demonstrates that the preservation of historic sites allows for future generations to benefit from intangibles

related to community and identity (Mayes 2018). Historic sites allow for people to define who they are, to identify a sense of self, and to feel as though they belong to a welcoming community or a distinct effort or movement (Wood 1999; Mayes 2018; Zinn 2014).

The preservation of historically significant sites extends beyond maintaining old buildings or installing commemorative plaques at important sites. Historically significant LGBTQ+ sites have the ability to impact generations of people, their identity, and their lives by providing LGBTQ+ individuals and others with a source of inspiration and motivation (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Hess and Bitterman 2021). However, the LGBTQ+ community has been unable to gain the intangible benefits that place-based, historic sites can provide, due to an inability of the LGBTQ+ community to memorialize and commemorate spaces that have been significant to shaping its history. In this way, the preservation of historic LGBTQ+ sites is more significant than just the physicality of place. The importance of preserving significant LGBTQ+ sites and the benefits of place-based history are explained by LaFrank (2020), the New York State Parks & Sites Historian for the New York State Historic Preservation Office:

This is helping real people to appreciate not only their history, but to appreciate and love themselves, to accept themselves, to find community with other people like themselves, and just to be themselves. In other words, to erase all of the old hiding and shame, and I don't want to go so far as to say it, but I think it saved people's lives. It seems to me that this goes way beyond preservation. Preserving people and preserving communities is just not the same as putting a plaque on an old house, not that I'm against that, I've hung my share of plaques. But it provides a more expansive view of history that benefits all of us. And so, the idea of expanding history to include everybody's story and everybody's history. It helps people to validate their own lives, appreciate their own lives, and appreciate each other. (LaFrank 2020)

In thinking about moving forward, it is necessary to understand the importance for everyone, regardless of how they identify, to be seen.

The effort to preserve and commemorate sites significant to LGBTQ+ history has been ongoing for nearly fifty years. In 1995, urban historian and architect Dolores Hayden hoped for an expansive social history of place that included ethnicity and gender, and that would be transformative, “redefining the mainstream experience, and making visible some of its forgotten parts” (Hayden 1997: xi–xii). In increasing the use of Federal funding to support historic preservation, Hayden finds a mandate for a more expansive history by referring to Gans (Gans 1975: 33) “private citizens are of course entitled to save their own past, but when preservation becomes a public act, supported with public funds, it must attend to everyone's past.” This includes the past of LGBTQ+ people, whose lives and experiences have in some cases, been actively erased (National Park Service 2019b: 02-12-13). Hayden and Gans argue that if preservation is a public act, supported by public funding, then preservation should be attentive towards everyone's past. However, if this is indeed the case, then why does funding seem to be limited and only minimally allocated to LGBTQ+ sites, yet other types of heritage sites receive more funding for nominations to be written and sites to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places or as a National Historic

Landmark? We argue that the commemoration of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites encompasses a degree of importance beyond simply preserving history through the stories of the sites themselves, but that preservation and commemoration becomes a way to recognize people through the process of celebrating place. However, when that celebration and commemoration of those sites remain untold or systemically silenced, the history does not remain unknown, but rather acts as a method of social exclusion and oppression.

15.1.1 Violence and Commemoration

The United States is home to more than 1,000 battlefields from the French & Indian War, the War of 1812, The American Revolution, and the American Civil War (Civil War Sites Advisory Commission 1993; Gossett and Mitchell 2007).¹ Many battlefields commemorate the violent evolution of the fight for equality, recognition, and freedom of every American citizen. The preservation of these battlefields is maintained by various government agencies across the United States.

Violence and conflict similarly punctuate the LGBTQ+ struggle for recognition and equality (Hanhardt 2013). Sadly, many of the sites that could and arguably should be commemorated in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights have dark or violent histories. These places are the battlefields upon which struggles for civil rights were fought. The suffering of many valiant LGBTQ+ individuals made possible the freedoms and legal protections enjoyed today. None of these sites are presently commemorated or supported by government agencies, except for perhaps one of the most known, The Stonewall Inn in New York City, which was the site of groundbreaking riots during the late 1960s that spilled out into the streets (Duberman 2019) and spurred a helped initiate significant gay rights movements during a period of sexual liberation (Carter et al. 1999).²

Other sites of violence towards LGBTQ+ individuals include:

- The UpStairs Lounge, a gay bar located in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana, was site to one of the most horrific arson attacks on June 24, 1973, resulting in the deaths of 32 people (University of New Orleans History Department 2012).

¹Sites that are associated with wars fought on American soil have been identified, surveyed, and assessed through the American Battlefield Preservation Program (ABPP) established by the Secretary of the Interior in 1991. The Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, which was established by Congress in 1990, has identified 384 principal Civil War battlefields (Civil War Sites Advisory Commission 1993). The National Park Service has identified and documented 677 significant sites associated with the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War (Gossett and Mitchell 2007).

²One of the requirements for sites to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the “50-year rule.” This standard demonstrates chronological boundaries that have been constructed by the United States Secretary of the Interior to filter out newer sites that have not reached “historical significance” (Sprinkle Jr. 2007).

- A desolate site on Snowy View Road in Laramie, Wyoming where 21-year-old Matthew Shepard was the victim of one of the most notorious U.S. hate crimes centered around homophobia. Shepard was viciously beaten, tortured, and left to die by convicted murderers Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, who were aided and enabled by Chasity Vera Pasley and Kristen Leann Price, all of whom were in their early 20s (Sheerin 2018).
- And more recently, the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando which was the location of the second-worst mass shooting by a single gunman in United States history on June 12, 2016, resulted in the deaths of 49 people and the injury of 53 others (Beckett 2016).

Violence toward LGBTQ+ people has occurred in various places. Many of these sites remain unidentified and potentially unknown for those who were too young, not born, or unaware of events as they happened. Immediately following tragic events, the public often demonstrates support by setting up makeshift of temporary memorials that sometimes persist for years; however, the effort to have these sites commemorated and preserved—officially—especially at a state and national level has been challenging. This effort is important in order to remember the lives—and the individuals—that were lost. Landmarking and commemorating these sites ensures that the memory of those who lost their lives in the battle for LGBTQ+ rights are not forgotten. While meaning and importance of the sites endures for generations to come, the remembrance of these tragedies helps to avoid similar acts of violence in the future. However, commemorating sites of LGBTQ+ violence and struggle remains a challenge, as the United States government spends significantly more resources to commemorate and maintain battlefields than LGBTQ+ sites, which comparatively receive precious little funding or support.

15.2 Significant LGBTQ+ Sites

The commemoration of LGBTQ+ sites is an important component of the broader American historical narrative, and is vital for the LGBTQ+ community to identify a significant role in its shared history as well as to educate others about the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms. A statement from the co-founders of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project highlights the importance of place-based identity and the preservation of physical sites associated with LGBTQ+ history:

We're interested in tangible heritage and what that means and the interpretation of it. But the intangible benefits for people are profound. For instance, a kid coming out or who is afraid to go to a Pride March can read about these places in the privacy of their own home, on the computer or on a mobile device. This information gives access to people that otherwise would not be able, for various reasons, to go and see these sites, or to explore their own histories. If I was that kid, it would have helped knowing that there is this rich history. It's not just that Stonewall was a riot and there was a gay movement that resulted. You are able to look at New York in a different way and really understand your connection to it emotionally and historically. That is profound. (Dolkart and Lustbader 2020)

Elsewhere in this book, scholars explain how gay places matter (Ghaziani 2021, Hess and Bitterman 2021), and we argue in this chapter that historically significant gay places also matter. Physical historic sites encourage place-based and in situ recognition, tourism, and commemoration by allowing individuals to find deeper connections and feel a sense of belonging and identity that they might not otherwise experience. This is especially the case with minority groups, including sexual minorities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. When minority groups are able to feel connected to a physical space, these sites then have the potential to become places of community, acceptance, and belonging.

The cultural significance of LGBTQ+ sites varies. Some LGBTQ+ historic sites are buildings or locations, such as the Stonewall Inn. In other instances, the sites are slightly larger and encompass neighborhoods or parts of neighborhoods with a proximity to or concentration of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites, such as Greenwich Village in New York City, which surrounds Christopher Street. Occasionally, the site is an entire historically significant neighborhood, like the Castro district in San Francisco. Each of these types of site offers a unique degree of importance to the broader LGBTQ+ historical narrative and intersects a still larger contextual American historical narrative. For example, lessons learned about sexual health safety from gay neighborhoods during the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s spread quickly across gay neighborhoods throughout the United States and then more slowly into mainstream American society (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Hess and Bitterman 2021). This incubation and transference is important for remembrance and commemoration, not only for LGBTQ+ individuals, but for a broader and inclusive cultural heritage and public health history.

As noted, many historically significant LGBTQ+ sites are located in or near gay neighborhoods. A sense of place and pride in place becomes more significant, especially as gay neighborhoods experience “de-gaying” due to gentrification and demographic change (Bitterman and Hess 2021; Hess 2019, Spring 2021). Supporting the commemoration of places steeped in LGBTQ+ history—private residences, bars, cafes, or parks—enables these places to become places of community celebration and focal points for gay neighborhoods to strengthen or potentially for new gay neighborhoods to emerge (Kinahan and Ruther 2020).

15.2.1 LGBTQ+ Heritage Initiative

The United States National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established the preservation of historic and archaeological sites within the United States, resulting in the creation of various entities managed by the National Park Service: National Register of Historic Places (NRHP or NR), the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) list, and

State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) (U.S. Department of the Interior 1966).³ Through these programs, the United States government commemorates various significant heritage sites that represent and reflect the diverse American population (National Park Service 2019c). However, LGBTQ+ individuals are largely underrepresented by these efforts. Place-based programs orchestrated by the U.S. National Park Service are significant to the narrative of United States history and American people and culture, but fall well short of representing all people and narratives. To ameliorate this shortfall, the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative program was enacted in 2014 by the National Park Service for a number of minority communities that are underrepresented in the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks listings, including: African American, American Latina/Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Disabled, Indigenous People, Women, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Through this effort, the National Park Service has begun to take action to tell “the history of all Americans in all of its diversity and complexity” (National Park Service 2019d:1). At present, LGBTQ+ sites make up only 0.08 percent of the 2,500 National Historic Landmarks and 0.005 percent of the more than 90,000 places on the National Register of Historic Places as of 2016 (National Park Service 2019b). This representation is well short of the share of American adults that identify as LGBTQ+, which in 2017 was approximately 5 percent (Newport 2018).

15.2.2 Protecting American LGBTQ+ Heritage

In November 1999, the United States Congress enacted the National Park System New Area Study Act of 2000 which directed the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to conduct a series of special resource studies.⁴ The Civil Rights Framework for Identifying Significant Sites, completed in 2002 and revised in 2008, lays out a plan for studies to focus specifically on civil rights sites at a multi-state level, leading to a call for projects that would address the underrepresentation of certain groups in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks programs (Fig. 15.1) (National Park Service 2008, 2019b).

In 2010, the Administration of President Barack Obama launched the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Heritage Initiative under the National Historic Landmarks Program (U.S. Office of the Press Secretary 2016) and by so doing, underscored a broader commitment to include historically underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals and communities. The four goals of the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative include (1) increasing listings in the National Register of Historic Places, (2) identifying, documenting, and nominating National

³The National Register of Historic Places recognizes historical significance at local, state, and national levels while the National Historic Landmark program acknowledges exceptional national significance (National Park Service 2019b).

⁴The New Area Study Act of 2000 (S. 1349) falls within Public Law 106-113, Appendix C, “National Park Service Studies Act of 1999”.

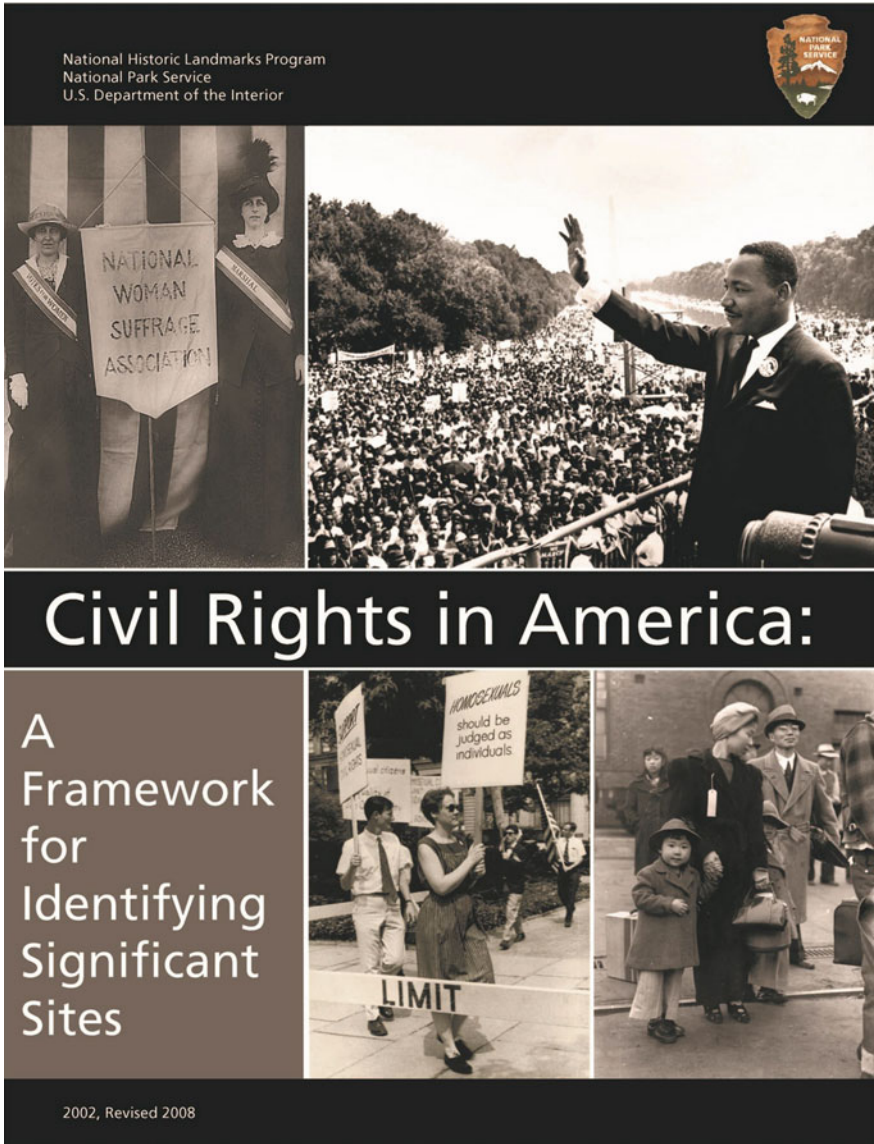


Fig. 15.1 Cover of “Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites.” Cover of the report features a number of groups which are underrepresented in NRHP and NHL programs, including Barbara Gittings and Randy Wicker in picket line outside Independence Hall, Philadelphia, PA, July 4, 1966, carrying a sign that says “Homosexuals should be judged as individuals” (Source National Park Service, 2008, public domain image)

Historic Landmarks associated with LGBTQ+ heritage, (3) engaging the community to identify additional sites associated with LGBTQ+ history and heritage, and (4) to encourage National Park Service units to interpret associated stories (National Park Service 2019b: 02-6).

Increasing the number of listings of LGBTQ+-associated properties in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks facilitates preservation of the significant stories of many of these sites and properties. Not only will this initiative help to identify new sites, but this effort will also support the documentation and nomination of other LGBTQ+ significant sites. In addition, sites that may already be listed have the opportunity to “come out” as LGBTQ+ sites and have the stories of these places publicly unveiled and enriched through community recognition. This will allow for more LGBTQ+-associated histories to be revealed and shared, and by so doing, allow for more places to hold meaningful connections for all people, thereby increasing the capacity for place-based identity of LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative also aims to engage scholars and LGBTQ+ community members who can work to identify possible sites associated with LGBTQ+ heritage and history. This effort will lead to the nomination of properties for various levels of recognition and preservation at the local, state, and national level.

Community involvement engages not only professional historic preservationists and academics, but also those involved with making history at these sites, as well as armchair historians, champions, and activists in uncovering the untold or lesser-known stories of the LGBTQ-significance of these sites. This inclusive approach allows citizens to shape who gets to tell the story and history of a community or place. Ultimately the initiative attempts to encourage the National Park Service and all affiliated agencies at the local, state, and national level to begin to interpret LGBTQ+ stories that are associated with the sites that already are maintained, preserved, and protected. Even if LGBTQ+ history is not yet formally documented, the groups who oversee these places are encouraged to begin to research and disseminate these stories at relevant sites using various approaches including, tours, didactic signage, pamphlets, and other educational materials.

Memorializing, commemorating, and preserving LGBTQ+ sites is not only vital to the education and celebration of the LGBTQ+ community, but also creates a physical relation to and experience in places for people to make distinct connections to history. Memorializing LGBTQ+ spaces creates tangible, visceral experiences with place-based history that can provide people with connections to an identity, a moment, and a story. LGBTQ+ historic spaces should not be considered differently than other historically significant sites, and thus should be considered on the same terms and eligible for equal funding and support.

15.2.3 *Aim of Landmarks Dedication*

Although the original preservation act became law in 1966—44 years prior to the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative—the collective public voice of the LGBTQ+ community was, at that time, still emerging, gaining acceptance, and struggling for equality. Then, the fledgling and emergent LGBTQ+ community was thus unable to collectively devote time and energy into identifying and preserving places that were historically significant or meaningful as they struggled to gain a collective voice and unified identity. Even though gay places were listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmark lists after the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the explicit connection to LGBTQ+ heritage was almost always left out of inventory and nomination efforts (National Park Service 2019b). Oftentimes, the connection to LGBTQ+ heritage and history was never explicitly written in inventory and nomination documents, but rather only carried out through local knowledge of the site and oral storytelling on site tours or didactic signage on-site. For this reason, many of the current efforts to commemorate LGBTQ+ places are not necessarily to write nominations to nominate new sites, but rather to explicitly memorialize the LGBTQ+ connections in already-nominated or listed sites.

The LGBTQ Heritage Initiative was expanded in 2014 to include a new theme study to identify places and events associated with LGBTQ+ Americans that would be included in the National Register of Historic Places and listed as National Historic Landmarks (U.S. Department of the Interior 2014a). As mainstream acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals continues to grow, and as expression of sexual orientation and gender representation has diversified in recent years, the resulting increase in public support for LGBTQ+ rights and civil liberties has enabled bolder and inclusive heritage efforts. Likewise, the body of LGBTQ+ scholarship continues to increase, providing critical support and information necessary to commemorate LGBTQ+ spaces. Sites that were previously not celebrated for their prominence and significance in LGBTQ+ culture and history have lately been designated as “lavender landmarks” (National Park Service 2019b) and by June 2016, ten places were included on the National Register of Historic Places or have been designated as National Historic Landmarks because of their association with or significance to LGBTQ+ history (National Park Service Service 2019b: 02-7). These sites include the Stonewall National Monument (New York City, NY); Dr. Franklin E. Kameny Residence (Washington, DC); James Merrill House (Stonington, CT); Carrington House (Fire Island Pines, NY); Cherry Grove Community House & Theater (Cherry Grove, NY); The Henry Gerber House (Chicago, IL); Bayard Rustin Residence (New York, NY); Julius’ Bar (New York, NY); Edificio Comunidad de Orgullo Gay de Puerto Rico (AKA Pride House; AKA Casa Orgullo) (San Juan, Puerto Rico); and the Furies Collective House (Washington, D.C.). Though efforts in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights has occurred for decades, the efforts to identify, commemorate, and landmark LGBTQ+ historically significant sites has begun only relatively recently (Fig. 15.2). This delay is explained by LaFrank (2020), the New York State Parks & Sites Historian for the New York State Historic Preservation Office:

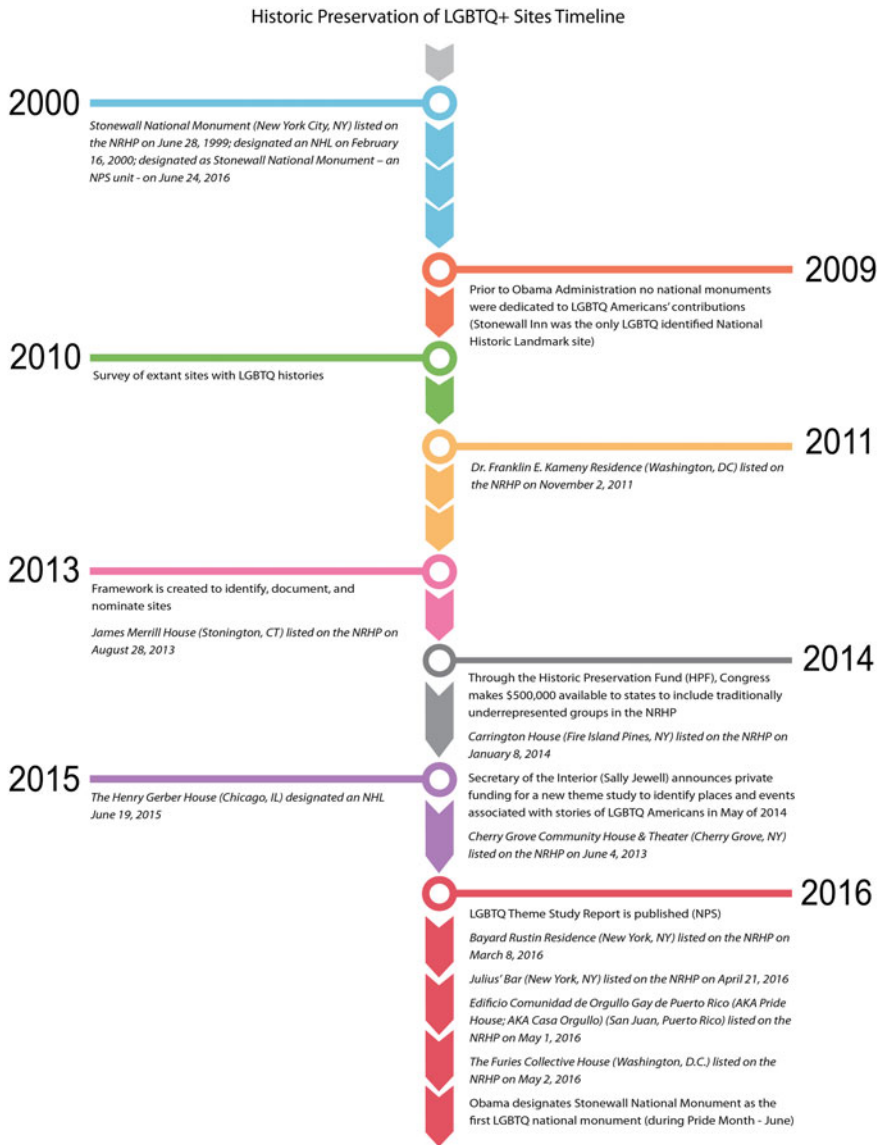


Fig. 15.2 Timeline showing progression of LGBTQ+ preserved sites. The sites listed in the timeline are those that are either on the NRHP or NHL, intentionally designated for their importance as a historically significant LGBTQ site (Source Timeline by authors)

I think it parallels what was happening in society. It took a long time for LGBTQ rights. First we had “don’t ask, don’t tell” during Clinton and then we gradually had same sex marriage. And whether we like it or not, these things take a long time; society takes a while to accept things like this and for people to become understanding and get used to it. (LaFrank 2020)

15.2.4 Initial Results of the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative

One of the early outcomes of the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative was the creation of a national map of places across the country significant to LGBTQ+ history and heritage (Fig. 15.3). This map is part of an ongoing crowd-sourced exercise in which the public is encouraged by the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative and the National Park Service to contribute specific sites to the inclusive narrative of the LGBTQ+ community (National Park Service 2019e). While initiated as part of the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative, this map is maintained as a joint effort of the National Park Service, Quist, and the Rainbow Heritage Network. A number of sites appear on this map that were previously nominated for being historically significant (based on National Park

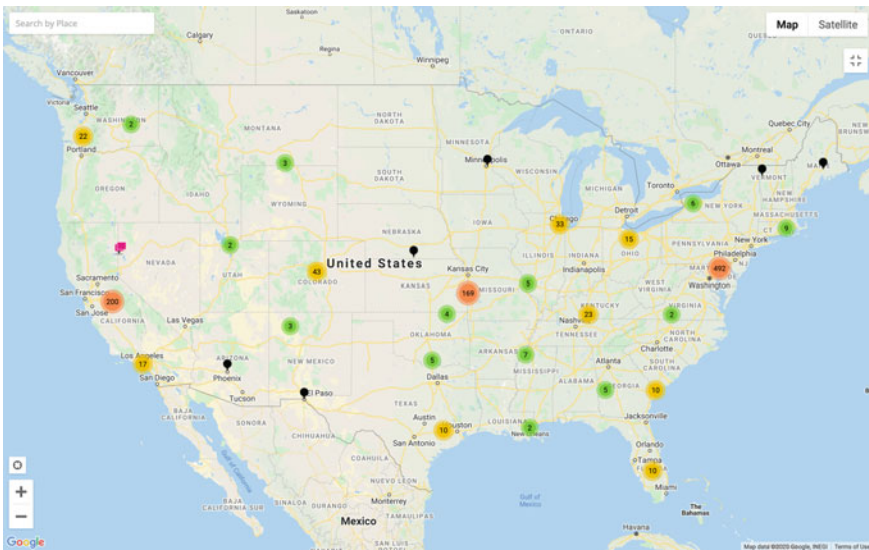


Fig. 15.3 Map created using HistoryPin.org as a part of the NPS LGBTQ Heritage Initiative, part of an ongoing project in which people are asked to contribute to this inclusive story of the LGBTQ community in order to support an inclusive history (Source National Park Service, Quist, and Rainbow Heritage Network, 2015, public domain image)

Service criteria for the National Register of Historic Places or National Historic Landmark listings),⁵ however, the relevance of these sites as LGBTQ+-specific historical sites was mostly omitted on original nomination forms.

The LGBTQ+ mapping project helps to make LGBTQ+ heritage and history more visible. The grassroots, bottom-up approach to collecting significant history is part of LGBTQ+ heritage that has allowed for inclusion and connectivity in the process of making America's history more inclusive. As of 2020 the LGBTQ+ mapping project has listed 1,161 sites (National Park Service, Quist, and Rainbow Heritage Network 2016) and collects additional information about existing sites that have been previously listed, as well as information about potential sites that have not yet been identified. The novel, collective, and contributory method for assembling information ensures broad access to a thorough, inclusive history about LGBTQ+ places and ensures the history and importance of these places is not lost (National Park Service 2019a).

Another significant advancement stemming from the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative was the publication of a 1,262-page theme study by the National Park Service that documents the national LGBTQ+ experience (Fig. 15.4) in 2016. This document represents the first account of the LGBTQ+ community in the history of the United States (National Park Service 2019b) by the U.S. Federal Government. This 2016 LGBTQ theme study utilized a new methodology—compared to that of previous theme studies—to effectively illustrate the degree to which the LGBTQ+ community has been underrepresented in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark programs. The 2016 LGBTQ theme study utilized several methodological approaches including “modeling the telling of LGBTQ history using place; a commitment to community, including being accessible and useful and in recognizing many LGBTQ communities in the United States; the importance of multiple voices; the need to acknowledge and respect identity; and the inclusion of difficult and painful histories” (National Park Service 2019b: 02-22-23). Typically, theme studies include previously listed places to illustrate how the properties associated with the theme meet program requirements. In the case of the 2016 LGBTQ theme study, however, this method proved to be ineffective because so few (only about ten) LGBTQ-inclusive sites were listed. The 2016 LGBTQ theme study models and demonstrates ways in which LGBTQ+ history could be recounted by using place-based examples and providing information on how to link those histories with National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark program guidelines and requirements for the future listing of properties (National Park Service 2019b).

The 2016 LGBTQ theme study is organized into six sections (Introduction, Preserving LGBTQ History, Inclusive Stories, Themes, Places, and Legacy) and emphasizes central nature of the LGBTQ+ dynamic histories and experiences. The study aims to connect the complex, multi-polar, intersectional histories of LGBTQ+

⁵Specific details about NPS criteria for National Register of Historic Places listings (National Park Service Cultural Resources 1990) and National Historic Landmarks listings (National Park Service Cultural Resources 1999).

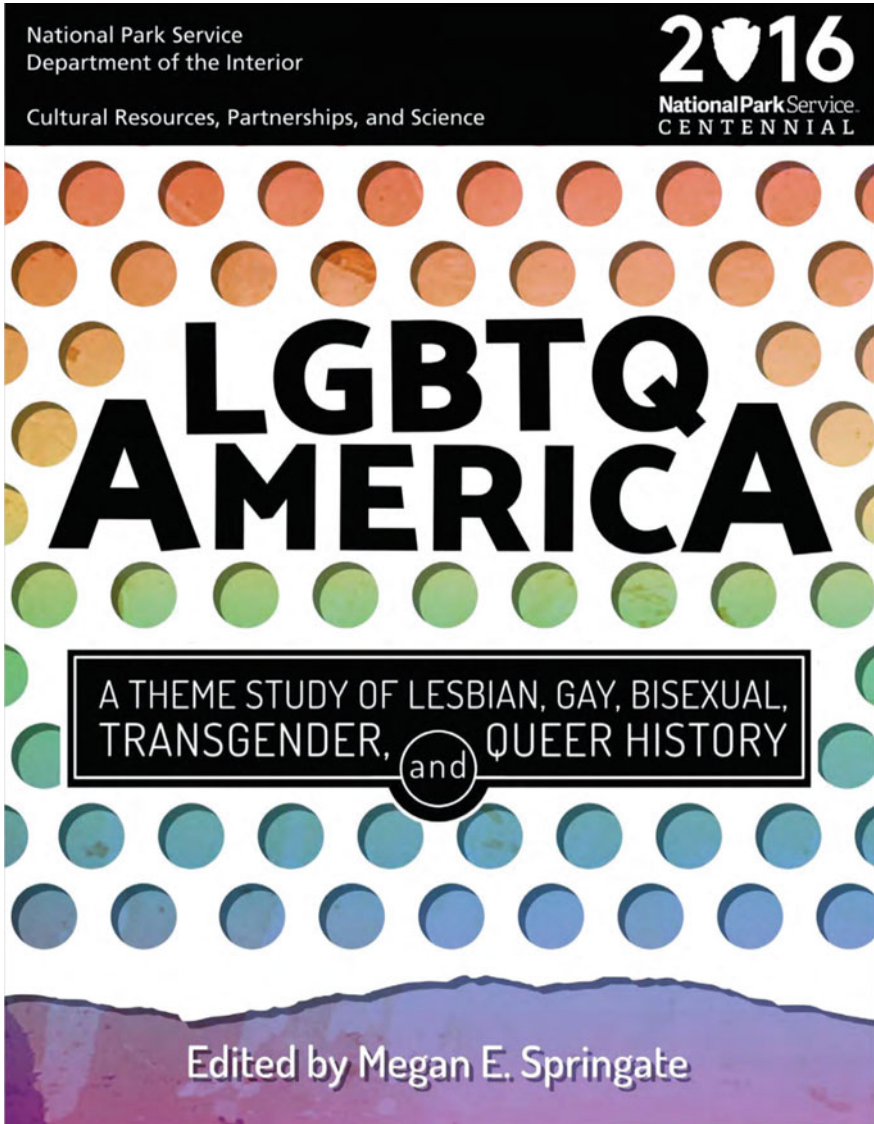


Fig. 15.4 Cover of “LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History,” a 1,262-page, multi-chapter report published in 2016 as part of the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative (*Source* National Park Service 2019b, public domain image)

communities to that of the broader United States history. Through the six in-depth sections, this theme study makes clear connections to broader American history, places, and landscapes throughout the country in ways that the LGBTQ+ community had previously been excluded. The manner by which the theme study begins to illustrate connections that had not been explicit in the past makes the completion and publication of the 2016 LGBTQ theme study an important first step toward increasing the number of sites that commemorate and celebrate LGBTQ+ history and heritage, increasing visibility and inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community. This initial step, made possible by funding from the United States government, was a success which has gained much-needed traction and momentum for the LGBTQ+ community toward a collective effort to uncover and tell the histories and experiences of LGBTQ+ Americans.

The significant work accomplished as a result of the 2016 LGBTQ theme study and the effort to have LGBTQ+ sites intentionally listed in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks—for the reason of being significant to LGBTQ+ history—is not just thanks to the people directly working on these projects, but also to decades of tireless advocacy by the LGBTQ+ community, activists, and allies. These steps to make historic preservation more accessible, equitable, and inclusive has resulted in the greater visibility and awareness of LGBTQ+ untold histories through historic sites and structures, museums, interpretive sites, and city streets.

15.3 Current Status of the Preservation of LGBTQ+ Sites

Despite important advances and structural support, according to the National Park Service Heritage data (2014–2019), no grant programs funded through the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative currently support the research and/or preservation of individual LGBTQ+ historic sites (National Park Service 2019a). This arrangement differs from other historic preservation efforts in that some other preservation initiatives and programs provide dedicated funding set aside for specific initiatives and programs. That is not to imply that LGBTQ+ sites cannot apply for awards from other, more generic pools of funding, but the means by which funding is available to protect, commemorate, and memorialize LGBTQ+ sites remains opaque. While sources of funding for LGBTQ+ sites do exist, the regulations and procedures for obtaining funding are unusually cumbersome. For example, one extra burden required by many of these funding sources is that the site is already listed as a National Historic Landmark or is already included in the National Register of Historic Places, each a laborious effort in their own right. Some funding sources which remain available for LGBTQ+ historic sites outside of Federal programs include state and local governments, private foundations, historic tax credits, historic trusts, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Park Service 2019a).

Efforts to incorporate historically underrepresented groups in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark listings have been made

by the United States Congress by providing funding available to states through the Underrepresented Community (URC) Grant Program (National Park Service 2020b). Managed by the National Park Service and funded by the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF)⁶, the Underrepresented Community Grant Program was created to provide resources to traditionally underrepresented groups in the National Register of Historic Places for projects including surveys and inventories of historic properties associated with these communities (National Park Service 2019a, 2020b). The Underrepresented Community Grant program guidelines indicate, “grants are awarded through a competitive process and do not require non-Federal match. Eligible applicants are limited to State Historic Preservation offices, Federally Recognized Tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian Organizations, and Certified Local Governments” (National Park Service 2020b). Theoretically, these funds could be used by state offices of historic preservation and other governmental agencies to protect and memorialize LGBTQ+ sites.

In each of the fiscal years 2014 through 2019, Congress appropriated \$500,000 for grants that provided funding for surveys, inventories, and the designation of properties associated with underrepresented communities in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark listings (National Park Service 2014; U.S. Department of the Interior 2014b).⁷ See Fig. 15.5. The Underrepresented Community Grant Program made available a total of \$750,000 in grant funding for the 2020 fiscal year. This grant program has provided funding to 75 projects over the past six years (from 2014 to 2019) across 34 states (Table 15.1).⁸ A wide range of agencies have received funding from this grant program including, state departments and preservation offices, municipalities, indigenous tribes and villages, historic and archeological districts, and historical societies. The grant award per project has ranged from \$3,847 to \$72,000 with projects being awarded an average of \$40,979 (the median project award was \$43,158).⁹

Since the beginning of the Underrepresented Community Grant Program in 2014, approximately 10–18 projects have been awarded funding each year. Underrepresented communities receiving funding for heritage projects over the past six years include LGBTQ+, African American, Indigenous communities, American Latina/Latino, Asian American, and Pacific Islander, and Women. Table 15.2 and Fig. 15.6 provide a summary of the number of projects each underrepresented community has received along with the total funding dollars per year per category and since the Underrepresented Community Grant began in 2014.

⁶The Historic Preservation Tax Fund is not supported with tax dollars, but rather supported by revenue from Federal oil leases on the Outer Continental Shelf (National Park Service 2020b).

⁷Three projects in 2015 and one project in 2017 that listed multiple Underrepresented Community Categories. These are noted in italicized text.

⁸Included in the 34 states is the District of Columbia and the Federated States of Micronesia National Government.

⁹The 2019 dataset for the Underrepresented Community Grant Program did not include the individual monetary awards distributed for each project, thus these values are calculated using the figures from 2014 to 2018.

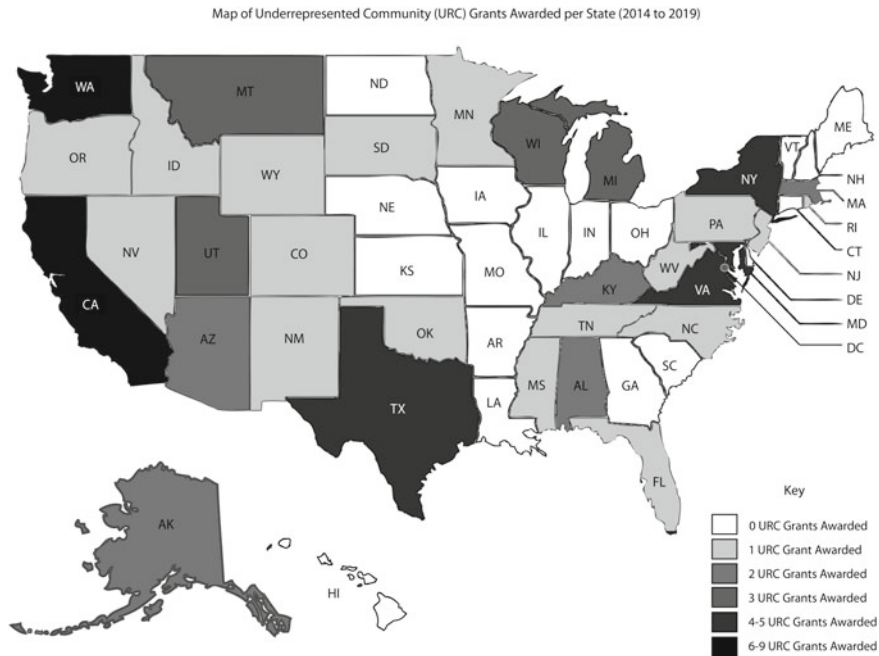


Fig. 15.5 Number of Underrepresented Community Grants awarded per state from 2014 to 2019 (Source Map by authors)

Based on the analysis presented in Table 15.2 and Fig. 15.6, the LGBTQ+ community receives considerably less funding, both in terms of the number of projects (7.9 percent of the total number of projects funded since 2014) as well as the amount of funding (8.4 percent of total available funding since 2014). In fact, all other communities (except projects related to women) received more funding than the LGBTQ+ group. It should also be noted that four of the 6.2 total projects related to LGBTQ+ heritage have been part of a four-phase project for New York City (comprising over 50 percent of the funding awarded to LGBTQ+ projects; approximately \$125,000 out of the total \$211,000). This is not to imply that funding is not necessarily being approved for projects related to the LGBTQ+ community, as the lack of projects funded could be related to a lack of applications for funding. However, anecdotal data implies that indeed, LGBTQ+ projects do indeed receive considerably less funding, despite a notable number of applications.

15.3.1 Constancy of Application

LGBTQ+-significant places and gay neighborhoods are now considered “worth preserving” due to a heightened awareness as a result of increased media coverage

Table 15.1 Table showing list of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees in each year since the start of the program in 2014 to 2019 (U.S. Department of the Interior 2014a, b, 2017a, b, 2019, National Park Service 2020c)

List of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees (2014–2019)				
FY	State	Grantee/Project	Category	Grant Award (\$)
2014	California	California State Historic Preservation Office	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$30,079
2014	Idaho	Rapid River Fishery in Partnership with the Nez Pierce Tribe	Indigenous Heritage	\$25,090
2014	Kentucky	Nomination of Whiskey Row Historic District and Henry Clay Hotel	LGBTQ+ Heritage	\$25,000
2014	Massachusetts	Boston	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	\$25,000
2014	Maryland	Baltimore	African American Heritage	\$60,000
2014	Montana	Identifying African American Heritage Places	African American Heritage	\$27,788
2014	New Mexico	Tribal and Pueblo Nations Preservation Summit	Indigenous Heritage	\$59,620
2014	New York	New York City	LGBTQ+ Heritage	\$49,999
2014	Rhode Island	College Hill Historic District	African American Heritage	\$25,000
2014	South Dakota	Architectural Surveys of Shannon County	Indigenous Heritage	\$26,000
2014	Utah	Iosepa Polynesian Archeological District	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	\$42,050
2014	Virginia	Virginia Indians National Register Project	Indigenous Heritage	\$70,000
2014	Washington	Yakima Valley and Seattle	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$34,374
2015	Alaska	Organized Village of Kake Nomination Project	Indigenous Heritage	\$33,153
2015	California	City of Los Angeles Asian American Historic Context Project	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	\$72,000

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

List of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees (2014–2019)				
2015	California	City of San Francisco Civil Rights Project	<i>African American, Asian American, Latino/a American, LGBTQ+, and Women's Heritage</i>	\$55,000
2015	Maryland	Calvert County Piscataway Indian Archaeology Multiple Property Nomination Project	Indigenous Heritage	\$47,000
2015	Minnesota	Fort Snelling Historic District National Historic Landmark Update Project	<i>African American, Asian American, Indigenous, and Women's Heritage</i>	\$60,000
2015	Montana	Butte, Montana Ethnic Atlas, and National Register Nomination Project	<i>African American and Asian American Heritage</i>	\$56,000
2015	New York	New York City Casitas Survey and Nomination Project	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$46,000
2015	North Carolina	African American Resources in North Carolina Nomination Project	African American Heritage	\$70,000
2015	Virginia	Spotsylvania County Heritage	African American Heritage	\$3,847
2015	Wisconsin	Wolf River Archaeological District National Register Nomination Project	Indigenous Heritage	\$57,000
2016	Alabama	Alabama Historical Commission	African American Heritage	\$33,361
2016	Arizona	White Mountain Apache Tribe	Indigenous Heritage	\$48,526
2016	California	State of California	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	\$50,000
2016	Colorado	State Historical Society of Colorado	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$43,158
2016	District of Columbia	District of Columbia Office of Planning	LGBTQ+ Heritage	\$50,000
2016	New York	New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, & Historic Preservation Office – Phase 2	LGBTQ+ Heritage	\$49,999

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

List of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees (2014–2019)

2016	Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission	African American Heritage	\$30,000
2016	Texas	City of Socorro	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$19,800
2016	Virginia	Virginia Department of Historic Resource	African American Heritage	\$50,000
2016	Washington	Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation	Indigenous Heritage	\$49,992
2016	Washington	State of Washington Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$50,000
2016	Wisconsin	Wisconsin Historical Society	African American Heritage	\$25,164
2017	Alaska	Igiugig Village	Indigenous Heritage	\$43,479
2017	Alaska	State of Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation	Indigenous Heritage	\$48,668
2017	Arizona	Arizona Department of Parks	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$42,760
2017	California	State of California	Indigenous Heritage	\$41,872
2017	California	Pala Band of Mission Indians	Indigenous Heritage	\$48,295
2017	Maryland	Maryland Department of Planning/Maryland Historical Trust	Women's Heritage	\$30,500
2017	New Jersey	City of Paterson	African American Heritage	\$35,000
2017	Tennessee	City of Memphis	African American Heritage	\$45,000
2017	Texas	City of Austin	<i>African American, American Latina/Latino Heritage</i>	\$43,200
2017	Texas	County of Milam	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$50,000
2017	Virginia	Virginia Department of Historic Resources	Indigenous Heritage	\$34,486
2017	Washington	City of Pasco	African American Heritage	\$20,000

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

List of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees (2014–2019)				
2017	Washington	Suquamish Indian Tribe of the Port Madison Reservation	Indigenous Heritage	\$16,470
2018	Alabama	Alabama Historical Commission	African American Heritage	\$40,000
2018	California	Pala Band of Mission Indians	Indigenous Heritage	\$49,531
2018	District of Columbia	District of Columbia Office of Planning	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	\$40,000
2018	Kentucky	Louisville Jefferson County	African American Heritage	\$50,000
2018	Michigan	Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan	Indigenous Heritage	\$46,302
2018	Michigan	City of Detroit	African American Heritage	\$40,000
2018	Montana	Montana Historical Society	African American Heritage	\$27,052
2018	Nevada	Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs/Historic Preservation Office	Women's Heritage	\$46,415
2018	New York	NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation—Phase 3	LGBTQ+ Heritage	\$25,000
2018	Texas	Ysleta del Sur Pueblo	Indigenous Heritage	\$44,439
2018	Utah	Utah Division of State History	American Latina/Latino Heritage	\$36,000
2018	Washington	Muckleshoot Indian Tribe	Indigenous Heritage	\$30,420
2018	West Virginia	West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture & History	African American Heritage	\$24,841
2019	California	Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	California	San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	District of Columbia	District of Columbia Office of Planning	Women's Heritage	n/a
2019	Florida	City of Sarasota Newtown Conservation Historic District	African American Heritage	n/a

(continued)

Table 15.1 (continued)

List of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant program awardees (2014–2019)				
2019	Federated States of Micronesia	Federated States of Micronesia National Government—Mahkontowe: A Micronesian Landscape	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	n/a
2019	Massachusetts	Commonwealth of Massachusetts	African American Heritage	n/a
2019	Maryland	Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland Historical Trust	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	n/a
2019	Michigan	Michigan Strategic Fund	African American Heritage	n/a
2019	Mississippi	Mississippi Department of Archives and History	African American Heritage	n/a
2019	New York	NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation –Phase 4	LGBTQ+ Heritage	n/a
2019	Oklahoma	Ysleta del Sur Pueblo	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	Oregon	Utah Division of State History	American Latina/Latino Heritage	n/a
2019	Utah	The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	Virginia	City of Virginia Beach	African American Heritage	n/a
2019	Washington	Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation	Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage	n/a
2019	Washington	Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians of Washington	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	Wisconsin	Stockbridge-Munsee Community	Indigenous Heritage	n/a
2019	Wyoming	Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office	African American Heritage	n/a

of LGBTQ+ issues, advocacy, and overall greater public acceptance. Therefore it is sensible to expect an increase in the rate in which sites are being intentionally listed as LGBTQ+ sites. However, data indicates that rate of LGBTQ+ listings in the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks has remained steady since the original effort to identify, commemorate, and landmark these sites during the Obama administration. While funding for the preservation of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites has continued—but has not increased—during the Trump administration (Dolkart and Lustbader 2020; Chibbaro Jr and Lou 2018; LaFrank 2020), the outcome of these funding efforts remains uncertain.

Table 15.2 Table summarizing the Underrepresented Community (URC) Grant Awardees for each underrepresented community in each year from 2014 to 2019. The table also provides the total number of projects awarded and dollars awarded for each underrepresented community from 2014 to 2019

	Summary of Underrepresented Community (URC) grant awardees (2014–2019)												Total Since URC Grant Began	
	Total per Year													
	2014	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		USD	#	
Underrepresented Community	#	USD	#	USD	#	USD	#	USD	#	USD	#	USD	#	USD
LGBTQ+	2	74,999	0.2	11,000	2	99,999	0	0	1	25,000	1	n/a	6.2	210,998
African American	3	112,788	2.95	127,847	4	138,525	3.5	121,600	5	181,893	6	n/a	24.45	682,653
Indigenous	4	180,710	3.25	152,153	2	98,518	6	233,270	4	170,692	6	n/a	25.25	835,343
American Latina/Latino	2	64,453	1.2	57,000	3	112,958	2.5	114,360	1	36,000	1	n/a	10.7	384,771
Asian American and Pacific Islander	2	67,050	1.95	126,000	1	50,000	0	0		40,000	3	n/a	8.95	283,050
Women	0	0	0.45	26,000	0	0	1	30,500	1	46,415	1	n/a	3.45	102,915

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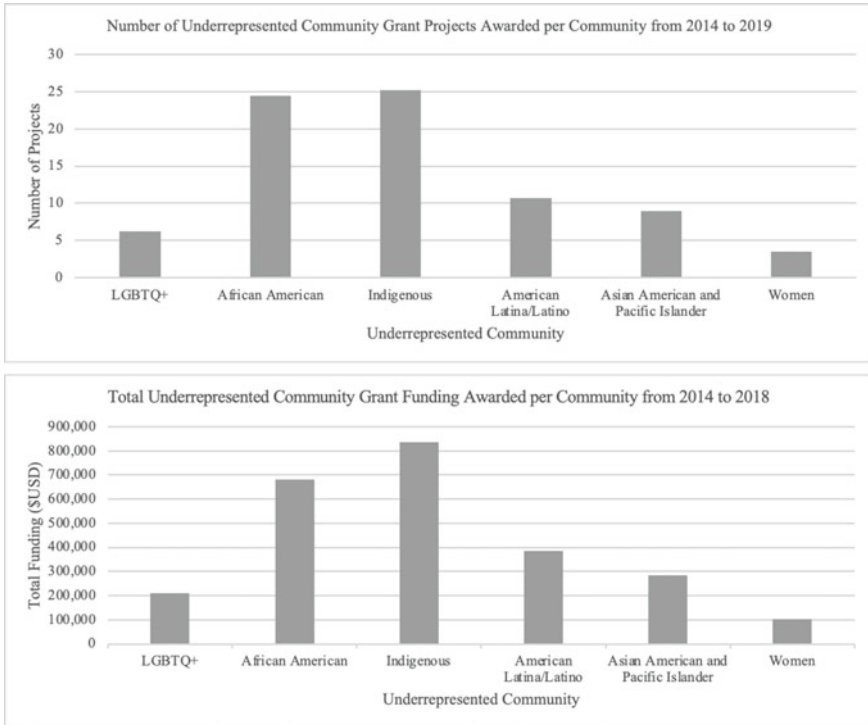


Fig. 15.6 Total number of Underrepresented Community (URC) Grant projects awarded per underrepresented community from 2014 to 2019 (top) and the total monetary URC Grant funds awarded per underrepresented community from 2014 to 2018 (bottom) (Source: Graphs by authors)

While funding through the Underrepresented Community Grant has continued and even increased in order to fund more projects focused on preserving the heritage of underrepresented communities, much work remains for the preservation of LGBTQ+ sites.

Evidence of remaining work is evident through the sharp differences in levels of funding and number of LGBTQ+ projects that have been awarded Underrepresented Community Grants compared to the much higher number of projects and more sizable grant amounts awarded to projects for other underrepresented communities. Whether it is due to systemic de-prioritizing LGBTQ+ projects, application barriers for the nomination of LGBTQ+ sites, a low likelihood of acceptance, or the fact that there is simply not enough capacity at the grassroots level to work on these projects, the share of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites commemorated is underwhelming. Considering that many of the significant LGBTQ+ sites are places of violence—just like the numerous battlefields that are meticulously preserved across the United States—the amount of funding for LGBTQ+ sites is notably less to that provided for the preservation and commemoration of battlefields. Specifically, the American Battlefield Preservation Planning (ABPP) Grant (which is just one of the

many Federal funding sources for battlefields) has provided over \$23 million since 1996 towards preserving significant sites associated with wars on American soil (National Park Service 2020a), where efforts to commemorate, preserve, or memorialize LGBTQ+ sites under the Underrepresented Community Grant program (the only Federal funding source currently available for LGBTQ+ sites) is one-tenth of one percent of that level of support.

15.4 The Future of Preserving the Past

Mirroring the fight for LGBTQ+ rights and equality, the process for preserving historic and culturally significant LGBTQ+ sites faces many systemic challenges. Though positive improvements have been made to the funding and protections of LGBTQ+ sites, an opportunity for more significant progress remains. Thus, celebration of the LGBTQ+ communities and assistance in educating the public about the ongoing campaign for LGBTQ+ rights and equality resides in the political views and persuasions of those in power. For now, it seems, a quiet effort to commemorate LGBTQ+ sites, begun under the Obama administration, has escaped budget cuts and scrutiny by the Trump administration.

Despite the obvious inequities in the process of preserving LGBTQ+ sites of historical significance, the effective bottom-up collaboration and grassroots approach led by local communities, groups, and organizations is notable to ensure the preservation and commemoration of LGBTQ+ sites. LGBTQ+ communities across the United States have shown leadership by beginning to identify sites that represent historic and iconic value and are worthy of preservation (National Park Service 2019b). An example of a successful bottom-up approach is the New York City LGBT Historic Sites Project (Fig. 15.7), which has identified specific properties and locations within the New York City metropolitan area that are significant in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights. The rich stories of these places were largely undocumented at the time the original National Register of Historic Places inventory and nomination forms were completed (Dolkart et al. 2015). The map provides public access to a valuable and continually updated resource that enhances the existing landmark status in a way that is specific to LGBTQ+ history (Dolkart et al. 2015). The New York City LGBT Historic Sites Project provides numerous interactive maps that allow for people to explore this history through various themes and walking tours in order to work towards educating and inspiring future LGBTQ+ generations about the community's contributions to American history and the struggles it has endured and overcome. The New York City LGBT Historic Sites Project provides an example of a comprehensive project that could serve as a model for similar projects in other cities.

Another similar grassroots effort advocating for the preservation and landmarking of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites is the Rainbow Heritage Network (National Park Service 2019b; Rainbow Heritage Network 2015). The Rainbow Heritage Network is a national organization dedicated to the preservation and recognition of

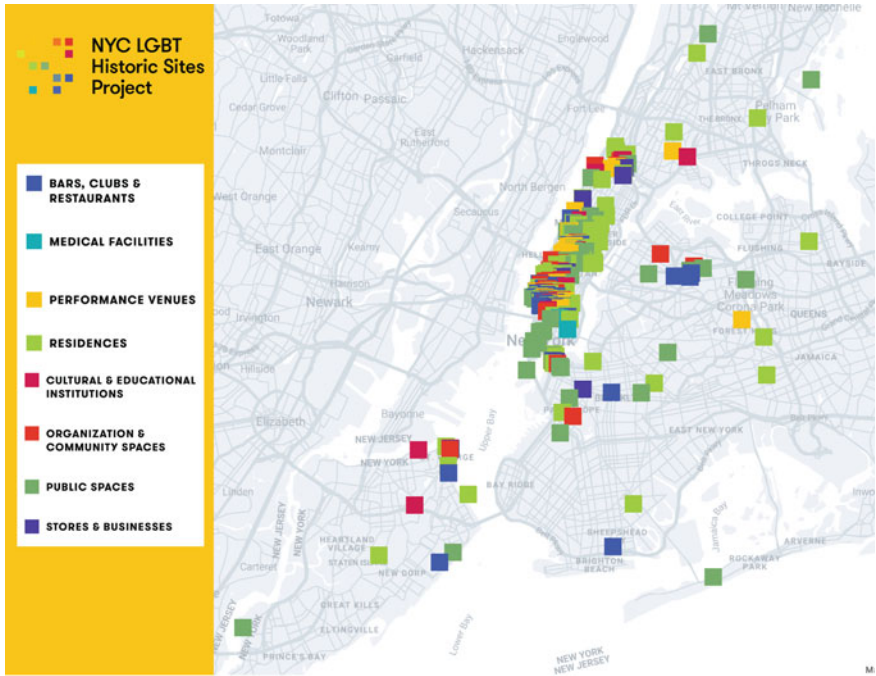


Fig. 15.7 Map created by NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, a scholarly initiative that began in August 2015 as a way to provide the public with a resource in which they can broaden their knowledge of LGBT history (Source Dolkart, Andrew S., Ken Lustbader, Jay Shockley, and Amanda Davis. 2015)

LGBTQ+ sites, history, and heritage. This group provides opportunities to network, advocate for sites, construct and maintain archives, discuss preservation initiatives, and receive assistance with building connections between repositories and donors of historical material (Rainbow Heritage Network 2015). The efforts put forth by the Rainbow Heritage Network have allowed for several smaller grassroots groups to connect through the compilation of a comprehensive directory in addition to organizing a list of resources intended to support local preservation advocacy efforts at various levels and regions throughout the country.

Unfortunately, bottom-up, grassroots approaches to preservation of LGBTQ+ spaces and neighborhoods have certain limitations. Using grassroots processes for commemorating historically significant LGBTQ+ places involves not just understanding and interpreting historical sites, but doing so within the context of a marginalized, statistically invisible, silenced LGBTQ+ population (Frisch 2021; Hess and Bitterman 2021). Therefore, much of the work that must be completed involves amending existing nominations for the National Register of Historic Places and ensuring that LGBTQ+ history is included in future nominations and ensuring applicants are aware of the ability to seek project funding based on LGBTQ+ historical status or significance. Changing the manner by which LGBTQ+ sites could be

listed as historic sites will involve proper education on how to properly amend and complete nominations to include the complete and uninhibited history, not simply the history that people believe will be accepted by the National Park Service and the general public. Unfortunately, reviewing all of the previously submitted nominations on the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmark listings to see what sites might have omitted ties to LGBTQ+ histories is a huge undertaking. This effort will require both a substantial investment of time and significant resources to fund the work that needs to be completed.

The burden and expense of identifying and landmarking LGBTQ+ significant sites, buildings, and neighborhoods with either the existing National Register of Historic Places or National Historic Landmark program is initiated and performed locally, thus resulting in a time lag between site identification and the site receiving landmark status. Delays and time lags can expose the nomination and designation process to political pressure. The process of landmarking a site, regardless of level (local, state, or federal) is costly and lengthy, thus emphasizing the need for LGBTQ+ community members, allies, and advocates to become educated with the nomination process and develop skills necessary to assist with preparing landmark nominations. These supporters must be willing to remain connected to the process for a long duration. The development of relevant skills is vital to the progress of incorporating LGBTQ+ histories into previous and future nominations. Since anyone can prepare and submit nomination forms, the review of draft nominations by state and federal historic preservation office staff is vital to maintaining quality control. Unfortunately, administration of these programs have been chronically understaffed (National Park Service 2019b) which compounds barriers to securing funding for LGBTQ+ sites. Broadening the scope of those who are able to share their knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ contexts and histories, and ensuring that there is engagement of LGBTQ+ expertise during the review process, will allow for the increased contribution and visibility of historically significant gay places.

While various steps are being taken simultaneously at local, state, and national levels, several steps can be addressed in order to ensure that LGBTQ+ sites are appropriately celebrated and commemorated so that future generations may connect with these important heritage touchpoints and histories, including:

- Encourage LGBTQ+ groups to apply for funding and educate grassroots entities on how to engage the application process. Because other types of projects (i.e., historic preservation projects receiving tax credits) tend to be more lucrative commercial undertakings, historic preservationists tend to focus more on these types of nominations rather than cultural or heritage projects.
- Ensure written nominations (National Historic Landmarks or National Register of Historic Places) focus equally on site history and physical attributes of sites. The preservation of significant sites is not just about the site looking “historically pretty.”

- Encourage the integration of LGBTQ+ history into school curriculums and preservation survey work. This is often challenging, especially if a historic preservationist is not completely familiar with a site and is apt to overlook “untold histories.”
- Focus efforts on recording oral histories before the aging LGBTQ+ populations are gone forever.
- Encourage more professional organizations, like businesses, corporations, and institutions, to be more receptive to putting forward LGBTQ+ preservation and commemoration initiatives as priorities.
- Incorporate LGBTQ+ heritage more into the daily work of preservationists, educate the public about LGBTQ+ history when appropriate on tours, and integrate LGBTQ+ stories into projects and written nominations.
- Expand the celebration of LGBTQ+ history and heritage beyond the months of June (LGBTQ+ Pride Month) and October (LGBTQ+ History Month) in the United States.
- Utilize new communication tools through social media to repackage otherwise static historic documents and nominations to relate history and heritage to people today.

While a consistent effort towards commemorating historically significant gay places has been made, a significant amount of work remains to incorporate and integrate LGBTQ+ histories into the various historic preservation programs at all levels of programming (local, state, and federal).

15.5 Takeaway Messages

The analysis in this chapter of work being done to commemorate and preserve historically significant LGBTQ+ sites produces the following three takeaway messages:

Takeaway message 1. Creativity should be used in understanding and applying nomination criteria to LGBTQ+ spaces; the Stonewall nomination utilized the framework in which battlefield nominations are written.

One of the ways in which more LGBTQ+ histories can be incorporated into National Register and National Historic Landmark nominations—and in historic preservation work more generally—is through employing more creative ways by which significant LGBTQ+ places are situated and contextualized in historical narrative. Often for preservationists the propensity to disregard buildings or sites that are not “architecturally rich” or “aesthetically pleasing” becomes evident in the nomination process that too often focuses on the physicality of a structure during its period of significance. This is not to say, however, that sites that are no longer extant should not be nominated, but rather culturally rich sites should be considered with a different perspective, similar to how the nomination for

Stonewall ingeniously utilized a framework typically used to write and nominate battlefields. This creative approach better captures the historical significance in the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights and produced a successful nomination. Just as with a battlefield nomination, the Stonewall nomination described different stagings and movement of the two sides (in this case police and LGBTQ+ protesters). Additionally, the authors interviewed numerous people and wove together a descriptive account of how the uprising occurred in such a way that the written nomination document left a reader with little doubt that the site was historically significant (Carter et al. 1999).

Takeaway message 2. Funding is available for commemorating and preserving LGBTQ+ sites, however, the mechanism to apply for funding is not widely disseminated among smaller groups or organizations.

Although funding for the nomination of sites to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as National Historic Landmarks is available, the mechanism to apply for funding is unfortunately not widely publicized in a manner that allows for those who do not work in the field of preservation to learn about the availability of funding, the funding cycle, or how to apply. While there are LGBTQ+ groups that may be interested in applying for preservation funds to commemorate historically significant places of LGBTQ+ heritage, the application process remains an unwieldy task that requires significant time and resources. The process of researching and preparing nominations is not simple, and completing the application process is fully dependent on the work of preservationists, professionals, activists, and engaged community members, ideally with oversight and assistance from state historic preservation offices. State historic preservation offices have become inundated with projects that are more profitable for developers, including preservation projects receiving tax credits, and these typically take precedence. A common perception among state historic preservation office officials is that the time to work on process civil rights projects—such as nominations for sites related to and significant for the LGBTQ+ community—is sparse.

Takeaway message 3. LGBTQ+ organizations are applying for funding and want to landmark significant LGBTQ+ places.

Moving forward with commemorating historically significant gay places, it is important now more than ever to raise public awareness about the LGBTQ+ community's contributions throughout the history of the United States and also important to draw attention to the struggles LGBTQ+ individuals have endured to advance the fight for equality, civil rights, and acceptance. The preservation of historically significant LGBTQ+ sites endeavors to make the invisible visible so that future generations are able to learn, commemorate, and celebrate LGBTQ+ community and heritage.

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Chapter 16

Plateaus and Afterglows: Theorizing the Afterlives of Gayborhoods as Post-Places



Jack Coffin

Abstract A number of commentators have acknowledged the decline of gayborhoods and the concomitant emergence of non-heteronormative diasporas in societies where sexual and gender diversity is normalized (Ghaziani 2015; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2017; Bitterman 2020). Academic studies tend to focus on the new lives that are being led beyond the gayborhood and the diminished distinctiveness of the territories left behind (e.g. Ghaziani 2014). In contrast, this chapter explores the possibility that gayborhoods can continue to influence sociospatial dynamics, even after their physical presence has diminished or disappeared altogether. Individuals and collectives may still be inspired by the memories, representations, and imaginaries previously provided by these erstwhile places. Indeed, the metaphor of a non-heteronormative diaspora relies on an ‘origin’ from which a cultural network has dispersed. In this sense gayborhoods can continue to function as post-places, as symbolic anchors of identity that operate even if they no longer exist in a material form, even if they are used simply as markers of ‘how far the diaspora has come’. The proposition that gayborhoods are becoming post-places could be more fully theorized in a number of ways, but the approach here is to adapt Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987: 22) notion of plateaus, which denote a “region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end”. From this perspective gayborhoods are not spatial phenomena that reach a climax of concentration and then disappear through dissipation. Instead, they can be described as becoming more intense and concrete in the latter half of the twentieth century before gradually fading after the new millennium as they disperse gradually into a diaspora as memories, habits, and so forth. Put another way, non-climactic gayborhoods leave ‘afterglows’, affects that continue to exert geographical effects in the present and near future. This conceptualization is consequential for theory, practice, and political activism, and ends the main body of this edited volume on a more ambitious note.

Keywords Deleuze · Guattari · Place · Plateau · Afterglow · Assemblage · LGBTQ+

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16.1 Introduction

The sexualization of space, the spatialization of sexuality, and the relations of both to gender identities and gendered spaces; taken together, these phenomena represent a complex area of inquiry that has inspired decades of scholarship across academic disciplines.¹ Looming large in these literatures are *gayborhoods*, concentrations of people, practices, and places that are associated with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, and other non-heteronormative (LGBTQ+)² cultures. Gayborhoods are typically dominated by commercial environments (such as bars) and events (like Pride festivals), often attracting the attention of mainstream brands (of which there are too many to enumerate), so it is unsurprising that marketing scholars and consumer researchers have taken an especial interest in these districts (see Coffin et al. 2016). However, recent discussions have focused on the decline, and even disappearance, of gayborhoods as LGBTQ+ people no longer need spaces of (self-) segregation in an era of increasing societal acceptance (Ghaziani 2014, 2015) and deterritorializing technologies like dating applications for smartphones (Miles 2021). Yet, academic research suggests that the spatial diffusion of LGBTQ+ cultures away from gayborhoods does not signal a destructive de-spatialization but rather a more dynamic series of ongoing re-spatializations across a multitude of spaces (Bitterman 2020), many of which are peripatetic, ephemeral, and inconspicuous to varying degrees (Visconti 2008). It appears that the sociospatial dynamism of sexuality and gender appears to be in a “transitional stage toward a post-gay, post-binary-identity era” (Hess 2019: 230), in which the future of gayborhoods becomes more, rather than less, interesting for researchers of all kinds.

Many chapters in this edited volume have noted how gayborhoods have changed in the past and how they are continuing to change in the present, explicating their ever-changing role as places with personal and political significance. None of these chapters can provide a definitive prediction about the *future* of gayborhoods, not least because each is shaped by cultural, political, and infrastructural conditions that “are often unique to each place and must be investigated thoughtfully and carefully” (Bitterman 2020: 99). As so pertinently pointed out by Visser (2013: 269), “current Western theory is not only insufficient to explain gay spatial realities in the Western/Northern context itself, but it totally ignores (and is irrelevant to) the

¹I hesitate to invoke the term ‘interdisciplinary’ here. Many authors develop their arguments within their own scholarly silos and most multi-author edited volumes anchor themselves within particular academic arenas (e.g. DeLamater and Plante 2015). I do not present this observation as a criticism—disciplinary depth can be just as valuable as anti-disciplinary aggregation. However, to my mind the present volume is perhaps one of the first to be truly *inter*-disciplinary in its ambition to assemble authors from all sorts of scholarly backgrounds.

²Negotiations regarding the correct nomenclature for non-normative sexualities and genders are ongoing among academics and non-academics (Ghaziani 2011). In this chapter I follow Coffin et al. (2019) in adopting LGBTQ+ as an acronym that carefully counterbalances succinctness and inclusiveness. However, I urge my contemporary readership to watch this space keenly. Future readers are likely to find LGBTQ+ outmoded, just as using ‘gay’ as an overarching term seems somewhat awkward (to me, at least) at the present time.

majority gay population located in very different and diverse settings elsewhere”. For example, Eeckhout et al. (2021) demonstrate how Antwerp, a typically North-Westerly cultural context, did not develop a gayborhood in the North American sense of the term. The conditions that constitute gayborhoods are also subject to change. For instance, the narrative of decline and disappearance is predicated on the assumption of widespread social liberalization, a trend which is well-evidenced but not inexorable (Pinker 2018). In recent years this historical trend has been challenged by the rise of populist politics and cultural xenophobia in the ostensibly ‘post-gay’ developed world, as well as regressions elsewhere (Coffin et al. 2019). Acknowledging these contingencies, this chapter cannot aspire to a sweeping theorization of gayborhoods and their future; rather, I adopt the more humble ambition of providing an alternative line of thinking that may help scholars to sidestep the dualism of ‘decline’ versus ‘endurance’ that implicitly underpins much of the existing literature (Coffin et al. 2016).

This alternative line of thinking is encapsulated in the concept of the ‘post-place’, which denotes how a disappearing gayborhood (or other physical locale) can continue to exert an influence, albeit an altered one, on the sociospatial dynamics of urban conurbations (and beyond). To help develop a more sophisticated conceptualization of post-places, I turn to the post-phenomenological perspectives provided by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, drawing particularly from their anti-climactic notions of plateaus and afterglows. Theorizing post-places may be useful for scholars interested in gayborhoods as a substantive topic area, but may also be transferred more generally to any instance where emplaced materiality gives way to more virtual and imagined forms of spatial affect, such as Hadrian’s Wall and other ruinous sites (e.g. Warnaby et al. 2010; Warnaby and Medway 2017).

16.2 The Phenomenology of Place

Before developing my own Deleuzoguattarian lines of thinking, it is worthwhile outlining the phenomenological precepts of the place concept in order to preface the post-phenomenological positions that follow. The phenomenological point of departure is the importance of experience and the concomitant delineation between space and place (Cresswell 2004, 2013). From a phenomenological perspective *space* denotes meaningless material arrangements, while *place* describes meaningful manipulations of materiality into meaningful three-dimensional forms (Visconti et al. 2010). Stated succinctly, place is “a meaningful location” (Cresswell 2004: 7). Such phenomenological thinking has greatly influenced the study of gayborhoods and other LGBTQ+ sites, albeit often implicitly. Sexuality and gender become salient when space becomes place, as meaningless environments become meaningful locations inflected by cultural connotations and sociosymbolic segregations. After years of research there persists a prevalent “notion that if space is not made gay or lesbian, then it *must* be straight”, such that “straight space [...] becomes the underlying frame with which we work: the space that gays subvert and the place that lesbians cohabit”

(Bell et al. 1994: 32). Even when theorizations treat space as asexual and genderless, because it lacks humanity,³ they tend to be tacitly heteronormative in postulating that space is sexualized or gendered only by conspicuous material symbols and symbolic practices of LGBTQ+ identity (Kates 2002; Rosenbaum 2005; Visconti 2008).

Thanks to the phenomenological presuppositions, LGBTQ+ cultures have been informed by an underlying sociospatial dialectic of in/visibility, at least up until the turn of the millennium (Keating and McGloughlin 2005; Ghaziani 2015). The apparent decline and disappearance of gayborhoods in the years hence is partly explicable by the shift towards more subtle signals of sexuality (Brown 2006; Ghaziani 2014). However, this shift to subtlety also reflects a post-binary mood within non-normative cultures (Ghaziani 2011; Hess 2019), which arguably challenges the ocularcentric conceptualizations of conventional phenomenology and its heteronormative distinction between invisible straight-space and visible LGBTQ+ places. Instead of conflating phenomenology with observable markers of identity, it may help to return to the origins of the term as a *philosophy of experience* (Thompson et al. 1989). As the links between visible symbolism and felt subjectivity dissolve, a particular place is defined via subjective experience, rather than through symbolically communicative objects or actions. This encourages scholars to adopt a more sensitive approach to theorizing the dynamics between sexuality, gender, space, and place. For instance, Ghaziani (2021) argues that urban scholars should listen more closely to LGBTQ+ people, whose street-level experiences may facilitate a more nuanced understanding of gayborhoods than the ‘supra-individual’ patterns provided by demographers. In a similar vein, the minutiae of everyday experience may help to highlight how gayborhoods may become more than just physical places, as long as the phenomenology of experience is understood in a less conventional (but also more traditional) sense.

16.3 Post-Phenomenological Perspectives

Despite the scholarly successes of phenomenological thinking, not all geographers or geographically-inclined academics presume phenomenological precepts. Many adopt different philosophical positions to advance alternative accounts of sociospatial phenomena, such as neo-Marxism (Soja 1980; Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 2005) or Thrift’s (2008) Non-Representational Theory (NRT), emphasizing how spatial arrangements can influence social phenomena without needing to be consciously

³Thus, this heteronormativity is also anthropocentric. Animals and plants have sexualized and gendered characteristics as well as territorial and spatial configurations. Is it such a stretch of the imagination to consider how these might also entwine? The vital materialism of Deleuze and Guattari, which builds on the earlier philosophical precedents of Spinoza and Nietzsche, posits that desires and (re)productive tendencies are found in everything from rocks to rainwater. Such philosophical positions could afford explorations of unfamiliar topologies that anthropocentric assumptions presently preclude (see Coffin, 2021).

recognized as places (Coffin and Chatzidakis 2021). Given that these alternative approaches de-centre the theoretical primacy of human experience, they can be grouped together under the heuristic heading of *post-phenomenology*, which retains the phenomenological interest in experience but jettisons the figure of “a fully formed subjectivity ‘in control’”, meaning that “experience is not individualized into ‘whole’ and coherent subjects, but rather presents a fractured sense of subjectivity” (Hietanen and Sihvonen 2020: 2). This term also encompasses the array of assemblage approaches that abound across social theory. The appellation of assemblage has many sources in social theory (Marcus and Saka 2006), but as a theoretical tool it was most extensively developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1986, 1987), becoming a way of conceptualizing “the world as constituted from more or less temporary amalgamations of heterogeneous material and semiotic elements, amongst which capacities and actions emerge not as properties of individual elements, but through the relationships established between them” (Canniford and Bajde 2016: 1). Accordingly, an assemblage approach can be used to conceptualize geographies as multi-scalar arrangements of relational activities (Anderson and McFarlane 2011; McFarlane and Anderson 2011; Allen 2011), or topologies (Cresswell 2013). As noted by Canniford et al. (2018: 235), “from an assemblage perspective, space is constructed from distributed entanglements [...] in this view, spaces and the actions that occur there can be seen to be constructed from a broader network of things than initial appearances might warrant”. Nash and Gorman-Murray (2017) proposed that the concept of assemblage could enable scholars to account for the diverse and dynamic geographies of contemporary LGBTQ+ cultures, but the application of this approach remains limited.

The assemblage is not the only concept that Deleuze and Guattari developed. As noted by Roffe (2016: 42–43), “further resources exist in their account that may yet be put to work”. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari worked together on a number of texts including *Anti-Oedipus*, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Much like Michel Foucault, their contemporary and Deleuze’s colleague, these authors are scholarly superstars who are often cited in passing by academics who have not necessarily read the original texts but rather engaged with them at a distance via secondary sources. This is perhaps partly due to their discursive style, which is “at times formidably difficult” (Roffe 2016: 42), “owing more to poetry than prose” (Coffin 2019: 2). Their writings draw from a range of sources and address a plethora of topics, adopting a non-linear structure that seeks to put their ‘rhizomatic’ philosophy into practice. Yet a consistent theme in their work is an attempt to explain reality in terms of open-ended and open-to-change ‘becomings’ that blur and blend bodies of various kinds into machinic systems (Coffin 2019; Hietanen et al. 2019). Deleuze and Guattari constructed a cadre of concepts to crystalize their complex and changeable ontological outlook. Although the assemblage⁴ is one of the more

⁴It is worth noting here that the term assemblage is actually an Anglophone translation of the original French term *agencement*, and that the appropriateness of this translation is contested (Phillips 2006;

famous of these concepts, the plateau represents another that may be productive for scholars interested in LGBTQ+ topologies.

16.4 Plateaus and Afterglows

Despite its eponymous status, the notion of the plateau is not developed extensively as a concept within the pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Rather it operates more as a performative device. In the ‘Author’s Note’ at the start of the book, Deleuze and Guattari (1988) explain that all of the chapters are ‘plateaus’ that can be read in any order, except the conclusion which should be read last. Aside from this early exegesis, the plateau is only deployed a smattering of times within the remaining pages. However, Deleuze and Guattari are said to have supported imaginative interpretations of their work (Roffe 2016; Price and Epp 2016; Botez and Hietanen 2017), espousing what I have previously described as a “critical-creative spirit” (Coffin 2019: 8).⁵ When introducing his Deleuzoguattarian-inspired ‘assemblage theory’, Manuel DeLanda (2006: 3) noted that “the relatively few places dedicated to assemblage theory in the work of Deleuze [and Guattari]... hardly amount to a fully-fledged theory”. Instead, DeLanda (2006: 4) used his own conceptual creativity to draw these theoretical fragments together with resources from other sources, stating “readers who feel that the theory developed here is not strictly speaking Deleuze’s own are welcome to call it ‘neo-assemblage theory’, ‘assemblage theory 2.0’, or some other name”. In a similar vein, I will draw inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari but define the nebulous notion of the plateau in my own terms, reworking it and the attendant concept of the afterglow into rhetorical resources apt for application to the study of erstwhile gayborhoods and other post-places.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 21) describe how “a plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end”. In terms of geology, a walker must ascend or descend along some other plane in order to reach the flat surface of a particular plateau. Metaphorically, this means that the term can imply changes in speed and orientation, as well as embeddedness within wider geographical and historical features (Fig. 16.1). They add an anthropological association when they argue that “Gregory Bateson uses the word ‘plateau’ to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards

Law 2009; Roffe 2016). Some, like Hietanen and Andéhn (2018: 552), prefer to use *agencement* as this is more suggestive of “the intertwined nature of all forces in such emergent events, rather than ‘assemblage’, which connotes a more technical notion designating an arrangement of objects”.

⁵The ‘critical’ is crucial here: it means thinking critically in the sense of questioning conventions and other taken-for-granted ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and becoming; however, it also means thinking critically of Deleuzoguattarian interpretations, and not treating Deleuze and Guattari’s licence of creativity as a kind of hyper-relativism masquerading as pragmatism (i.e. ‘my interpretation works within the context of this paper, so it cannot be criticised’). Buchanan (2015: 383) argues that Deleuze and Guattari wanted concepts to have “cutting edges”, so different interpretations of Deleuzoguattarian thinking can (and should) be evaluated.



Fig. 16.1 A geological plateau (*Source* Image by author)

a culmination point or external end” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 21–22). Unlike the climax of a mountain peak or the nadir of the valley floor, a plateau is flat in all directions and does not culminate in anything except more of the same, unless one changes orientation and leaves the plateau via one of many sloped vectors. Referencing Bateson’s work with Balinese sexual culture, Deleuze and Guattari associate plateaus with intense experiences that do not result in orgasmic release but rather ongoing sensations. This contrasts sharply with the Western model of sexuality, as well as the Western model of thought and action generally. “It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind”, Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 22) write, “to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value”. In the broadest sense, then, plateaus refer to phenomena that have their own logics or arrangements, but are also embedded or interconnected into wider topologies, and thus affect the trajectories of those who pass across their planes.

The concept of the plateau can be applied to study places in ways that appreciate identity and relationality while avoiding linearity and teleology. The rise and decline of gayborhoods can be thought of as a linear narrative (Coffin et al. 2016), and one that emphasizes the goal-driven or ‘teleological’ activities of conscious place-makers. In contrast, Deleuzoguattarian thinking is open to the non-linear messiness of unexpected ruptures and connections by non-conscious forces that do not have any particular objective or orientation (Hietanen et al. 2019). It is post-phenomenological in the sense that it treats the experience of place as an ephemeral ‘becoming’ that emerges from the machinic entanglements of heterogeneous entities (Coffin 2019).

Such becomings may be ephemeral, but their effects can be carried to other times and places in alternative forms, as when the direct experience of a place becomes a memory then applied to products and services (Brunk et al. 2018; Andéhn et al. 2019). Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 22) put this more poetically, writing that “lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants”. Thus, the place-as-plateau concept emphasizes the entanglement of geographical phenomena in ways that may not be foregrounded as prominently by the place-as-meaningful-location conceptualization (c.f. Cresswell 2004). Relationality is something that is often overlooked or left implicit in studies of spatiality (Coffin et al. 2016), except in cases where places are explicitly defined as ‘other’ (Foucault 1986; Chatzidakis et al. 2012; Roux et al. 2018), or when relationships to place are presented as proxies to interpersonal relationships (Debendetti et al. 2014; Rosenbaum et al. 2017). Drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari, relational ontologies have become increasingly popular in geography (Massey 2005; Murdoch 2006) and marketing (Giovanardi and Lucarelli 2018; Canniford et al. 2018), representing a response to this theoretical tendency to elide sociospatial interconnectivity in favour of more isolated conceptualizations (Cresswell 2013). Plateaus build on this precedent.

The related notion of the afterglow does not come directly from Deleuze and Guattari but rather via Brian Massumi, a philosopher who also served as the English language translator of *A Thousand Plateaus*. In his translator’s foreword Massumi (1987, p.xiv) writes that “in Deleuze and Guattari, a plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically dissipated in a climax”. This description accords with the arguments made in the previous two paragraphs, but Massumi (1987, p.xiv) adds that “the heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave an afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities”. This is akin to the optical illusions that can be created by looking at a white surface after staring at certain brightly coloured images for several seconds (Fig. 16.2). Although this idea of an afterimage is only briefly mentioned, I feel it has much merit in helping to understand gayborhoods as *post*-places. It means that the relational effects of a place-plateau may linger, even if the physical location disappears, as long as the experience of that place is sufficiently intense to leave enduring marks, or ‘afterimages’. In turn, these afterimages allow a place to ‘live on’ as a *post*-place, moving from the visible marks considered by conventional phenomenological thought to the less visible, but indelible and influential, marks recognized by *post*-phenomenological thinking. As detailed below, the term ‘afterimage’ may be used to describe consciously recalled memories, but also preconscious habits, unconscious associations, and non-conscious environmental processes. Given that many of these phenomena are non-visual, I propose that the term *afterglow* as an alternative to the ocularcentric ‘afterimage’. Some glows may be visually apprehended but others keenly felt, and the term *afterglow* has associations apposite for scholars of sexuality and gender. Regardless of terminology, the crucial consequence of the afterimage or *afterglow* is identical—both terms refer to affective intensities whose energies are redirected into other forms and flows rather than released in a climatic cessation. It is this fading-out and fading-into that engenders the notion of a *post*-place, to which I presently turn.



Fig. 16.2 An example of a high contrast image that can create optical afterglows (*Source* Image by author)

16.5 Post-Placing Gayborhoods

From a phenomenological perspective a gayborhood is an area of urban space that becomes meaningfully differentiated as an LGBTQ+ place, with perceptions and practices (re)producing geographical arrangements within its perimeter that do not necessarily pertain elsewhere, at least not with as much potency. A gayborhood is born as it becomes distinctively LGBTQ+ and declines or ‘dies’ as its physical or imagined differences dissolve. However, from a post-phenomenological perspective a gayborhood can have an afterlife even if its physical presence is lost. This is because gayborhoods, like most meaningful places, produce intense affective experiences that leave their marks in the minds and bodies of humans, as well as in the heterogeneous bodies that constitute the non-human environment. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 80) stress that “we may take the word ‘body’ in its broadest sense”. Bodies of water, political bodies, and bodies of knowledge all count in this broader definition of embodiment, as do the bodies of city streets and urban squares. If a plateau becomes sufficiently intense, as a physical place that can be experienced first-hand, then it can leave an afterglow that continues to exert an effect through the bodies of those that experienced this intensity. The plateau describes a place as a physical-sensual environment within a particular territory, while the afterglow denotes a post-place as an imaginary-symbolic effect that percolates through deterritorialized networks.

How might afterglows continue to affect bodies and perpetuate the afterlife of a post-place? At a conscious level, people may compare contemporary sites within an LGBTQ+ diaspora to their memories of the erstwhile gayborhood. Stone (2021)

shows that events like the Spanish Town Parade can link LGBTQ+ people ‘vicariously’ to a sense of place and community, even one that no longer exists in a spatially concentrated form. In terms of plateaus and afterglows, this vicariousness may be analysed as a form of afterglow that percolates through parades and other events, indirectly linking a (post-) place to a wider diaspora. Even if a physical gayborhood persists, it may be influential more as an afterglow than as a physical place, and this afterglow may take on a greater importance in the urban fabric as the gayborhood evolves or dissolves. Interestingly, Stone’s account of the Spanish Town Parade highlights how heterosexual and even homophobic influences have begun to corrupt the contemporary manifestations of this non-normative event, thus suggesting that positively charged afterglows from the past may be diluted or distorted by competing influences in the present. Similarly, the identity of a place itself may become palimpsestic as the afterglows of previous incarnations compete with present-day interpretations and attempted re-appropriations in the near future. This topological layering of competing influences is vividly demonstrated in the case of Philadelphia (Niedt 2021), while the contribution by Podmore (2021) suggests that LGBTQ+ places across a conurbation are defined by dynamic dis/identifications with a contested centrally located gayborhood.

A comparative analysis of gayborhoods with different historical and geographical trajectories, such as that conducted by Gorman-Murray and Nash (2020), suggests that while such places provide opportunities for community, belonging, and identity, they also constrain the emergence of other possible topologies. Thus, the decline of a gayborhood may actually be liberating for those subjectivities that have been largely occluded by the homonormative gayborhoods of the past (Frisch 2021), by rebalancing the centripetal and centrifugal forces within a particular milieu (Doan and Atalay 2021). If afterglows persist, then the limiting effects of gayborhoods may diminish without losing all of the positive effects that they used to provide. If so, it is also important for scholars to analyse instances where the afterglows of post-places fail to carry effects that were once engendered in the erstwhile physical place. Wienke et al. (2020) demonstrate how districts with a higher concentration of same-sex couples (i.e. gayborhoods) can reduce rates of depression and increase self-esteem. It is unlikely that such mental health benefits can be recreated by afterglows alone. Some, such as memories, may even make people feel *worse*, suggesting that afterglows may even reverse or invert the powers of a particular physical place. Then again, afterglows like habits may be able to carry across some of the positive affect from a place into a post-placed diaspora. Such speculations are best put to the empirical test.

Plateaus and afterglows add to a discursive repertoire which already abounds with metaphoric attempts to capture the ambivalence, ambiguity, and ambivalence of contemporary LGBTQ+ topologies. The notion of a diaspora, so eloquently employed by Bitterman (2020), makes little sense without a ‘home’ or central place from which a culture has dispersed. Analogously, the globally diffuse Jewish population would not be described as a diaspora without the notion of a physical place from which the Jewish culture emerged. The Jewish analogy also highlights how

the idea of a homeland is not simply an academic reference point to define a diaspora but also an affectively-charged afterglow that lingers in the hearts and minds of deterritorialized cultures, even after many centuries. Such afterglows can also inspire action at the individual and collective level, as illustrated by the social movement to re-establish the Jewish homeland in the state of Israel. In the case of LGBTQ+ diasporas, empirical research suggests that opinions may vary about whether the decline of gayborhoods should be lamented, celebrated, or some mixture of the two (Coffin et al. 2016; Ghaziani 2014), yet the identity of these diasporas are all affected by the afterimage of their lost local gayborhood. Subjects socialized into topologies that did not develop a clearly demarcated gayborhood—for example those in Italy (Visconti 2008) and Taiwan (Hsieh and Wu 2011)—may not ascribe to a diasporic logic.

In contrast to the diaspora, Doan (2019: 5) provides a planetary metaphor, writing of gayborhoods as “mini suns around which LGBTQ individuals orbit, some closer, some further away”. What happens when the physical place disappears, no longer exerting its influence on individuals? One possibility is that gayborhoods which “burn too brightly may run out of fuel”, eventually exploding and then becoming ‘black holes’ (Doan 2019: 5). This might be one way of interpreting Manchester’s Gay Village, as a slow-motion supernova manifest in bankrupt LGBTQ+ businesses and a black hole of boarded-up premises (Fig. 16.3). The slow diffusion designated by plateaus provides an alternative account to such climatic and cataclysmic conceptualizations, with gayborhood enterprises becoming untenable only because many



Fig. 16.3 Closed premises in Manchester’s Gay Village (*Source* Image by author)

other spaces become ‘friendly’ (Rosenbaum 2005) or ‘post-gay’ (Brown 2006). In the case of Manchester it appears that the city center ‘gayborhood’ is less of a black hole and more of a white dwarf, diminishing physically but not quite losing its influence. Ghaziani (2014) has written about the physicality of disappearing gayborhoods remaining as historical markers, but the nuanced dynamics of how gayborhoods linger as afterglows could benefit from further analysis and theorization.

The plateau comes closest to the analogy of archipelagos proposed by Ghaziani (2019), especially as Deleuzoguattarian thinking redirects scholarly attention to influences “beneath the surface of salience” (Coffin 2019: 2), and thus considers the figurative landmass connecting islands beneath the waters. Put less figuratively, afterglows can also analyse and account for unconscious influences. A consciously perceived image in the individual mind or collective imagination may inspire action, but so too can an indelible and inarticulable mark left by an affective intensity. In marketing theory there has been a (re)turn to the psychoanalytic argument that some, if not most, of human subjectivity is unconsciously determined (Cluley and Desmond 2015). Such an appreciation might also be applied to afterglows, which may subtly shape sociospatial responses in ways that are difficult to pinpoint. In my own research many participants described Manchester’s Gay Village as an undesirable place in terms of atmosphere and service, yet they still felt a desire to visit and patronize this district for reasons that they could not articulate. This may necessitate a more psychoanalytic, or post-phenomenological, approach to analysis (Cluley and Desmond 2015; Hietanen and Sihvonen 2020). Posthuman sensibilities may also be advantageous, insofar as afterglows may also leave their marks in unconscious arrangements of non-humans. Geo-tagging photographs, writing customer reviews, or searching for a location on smartphone maps are all lingering records, even when physical places are lost. These may shape the results of internet searches and contribute to the ongoing performativity of marketing systems (Cluley and Brown 2015), which are increasingly automated in the post-marketing project of hyper-relevance (Darmody and Zwick 2020). These electronic afterglows may also affect the physical landscape by influencing urban planning, especially given that the prevailing penchant for ‘smart cities’ insists that all decisions should be based on big data rather than creative design (Fleming 2020). Here organic afterglows, such as the malleable memories of a place, may actually reduce resistance to capitalist logics of accumulation (Brunk et al. 2018), thus augmenting the electronic afterglows of data-driven urban development. As shown by Miles (2021), Grindr and other technologies create hybrid sociospatial arrangements that disrupt traditional, ‘low-tech’, theorizations of sexuality, gender, space, and place. Future research will need to carefully consider the complex configurations of human and non-human afterglows, and quickly; in Manchester’s Gay Village developments are already well underway (Fig. 16.4), and well on their way to erasing the gayborhood without much local resistance.

On the topic of future research, there are plenty of theoretical, practical, and political questions that invite further exploration. How affectively intense does a gayborhood (or other place) need to be in order to generate an afterglowing post-place? Do all places leave an afterglow, or is it only those that reach a certain threshold of affective intensity? If the latter, is there a typical threshold that affect needs to



Fig. 16.4 A new development in Manchester's Gay Village (Source Image by author)

reach or does this vary greatly between contexts? Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of singularities as events that lead to a qualitative change in an assemblage, a kind of 'tipping point' that is distinct from other changes. A simple example is that of heating water, with each incremental increase having little effect except that which tips over a 'boiling point' and transforms liquid water into steam (DeLanda and

Harman 2017). In terms of places, it may be that only those that ‘boil over’ into spectacular experiences, powerful protests, or some other atypical threshold may leave afterglows. The Stonewall Inn Riots represent a case-in-point: the riots were a cultural watershed that set in motion many affects and actions, and the place is now a site of pilgrimage for many LGBTQ+ people (see Ghaziani 2015). It is likely that the Stonewall will remain as a post-place even if the physical site is closed down, but other raided bars, which “failed to achieve the mythic status of Stonewall” (Armstrong and Crag 2006: 725), may not leave a lingering afterglow of affect.

Practical questions for non-academic stakeholders also abound. Should town planners, place marketers, and policy-makers attempt to anticipate post-places when designing places? Should they seek to nurture afterglows as valuable urban assets when gayborhoods and other once-significant spaces are displaced by gentrification? Or, are afterglows dangerous sources of attachment and resistance that should be avoided by those who wish capitalist accumulation and alteration to advance unabated? Place marketing studies of historical sites certainly suggest that afterglows can be valuable (Warnaby et al. 2010), but in vibrant places like cities afterglows may act as undesirable attachments that place branding consultants need to expunge (Warnaby and Medway 2013). Here one can observe how practical questions should provoke political considerations also. Who gets to decide which places should become post-places? Who benefits from afterglows and who loses out? Might afterglows become a post-rationalization for allowing important places to decline, presented as a salve for sociospatial refugees? For instance, selling cities as cosmopolitan and accepting may suggest that certain groups, such as trans* people, no longer need gayborhoods as safe spaces, especially in an era of digitalization. However, such narratives elide the enduring inequalities of access and assimilation (Coffin et al. 2016), and may be promoted by powerful actors intent on replacing LGBTQ+ community spaces with more profitable real estate. More often than not, the political, practical, and theoretical effects of afterglows will form ambiguous admixtures that are difficult to disentangle.

16.6 Conclusion: Beyond the Gayborhood in Space, Time, and Scholarship?

The notion of places as plateaus that leave post-phenomenological afterglows is one that extends the influence of a particular place beyond its geographical boundaries to a cultural diaspora that exists across wider urban, suburban, and rural geographies. This chapter applied such ideas to the case of gayborhoods, but they might also be appropriate when analysing a range of other (post-) places. These notions extend the power of place across space but also time, beyond the ostensible ‘death’ of a place as a physical site that can be visited and experienced in the phenomenological first-hand. While phenomenology focuses on the physical and representational aspects of places-as-environments, the post-phenomenological approach developed here may be applied also to places that are physically diminished, such as ruins (e.g. Warnaby et al. 2010; Warnaby and Medway 2017), or those that are replaced by less distinctive



Fig. 16.5 A photograph from the Manchester Pride Parade (*Source* Image by author)

forms, such as the Powerscourt shopping mall in Dublin (Maclaran and Brown 2005). Such places live on in their afterglow, as memories, digital traces, and the collective imagination of culture. As plateaus and afterglows represent conceptual tools that can be transferred to other research areas, it might be argued that the emergence and evolution of LGBTQ+ topologies should not be considered a discrete topic of

interest for a niche group of scholars. Instead, we might be more ambitious and argue that gayborhoods are actually acute cases of broader processes that can be of general interest to geographers, sociologists, consumer researchers, and others. The lives and afterlives of gayborhoods are not simply stories of sexual and gender minorities, but a narrative structure that speaks to aspects of the universal human condition like acceptance, community, identity, change, and love (Fig. 16.5).⁶

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⁶This book chapter was written in 2019 and finished in the early months of 2020. In the weeks hence, the pathogen known as Covid-19 has proliferated to pandemic proportions. Although events are still unfolding, it can be said with some confidence that the concepts discussed in this chapter remain relevant. Afterglows abound under the aegis of quarantine culture, and many physical places may not survive the socioeconomic shocks that follow a period of local lockdown.

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Part VI
Epilogue

Chapter 17

After/Lives: Insights from the COVID-19 Pandemic for Gay Neighborhoods



Sam Miles, Jack Coffin, Amin Ghaziani, Daniel Baldwin Hess,
and Alex Bitterman

Abstract Beginning in 2020, COVID-19 produced shock-shifts that were felt across the globe, not least at the level of the local neighborhood. Some of these shifts have called into question the role of physical places for face-to-face gatherings, including those used by LGBTQ+ people. Such open questions are a key concern for a book on gayborhoods, so this chapter engages in three analytic tasks to provide preliminary reflections on how pandemics problematize places. While acknowledging a range of threats and challenges that the pandemic poses to the future of LGBTQ+ spaces, this chapter focuses on the potential opportunities and unexpected benefits that COVID-19 can create, running counter to more pessimistic predictions that abound in popular discourse. First, the chapter contextualizes how the COVID-19 pandemic is reminiscent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, allowing the gayborhood to be well-equipped to respond with grassroots activism, particularly in the face of government inaction or apathy. Second, the chapter explores trends that can ensure the future vitality of LGBTQ+ spaces, including (i) the potential of mutual aid networks, (ii) the power of institutional anchors in LGBTQ+ placemaking efforts, (iii) urban changes related to homesteading and population shifts, (iv) innovations in the interior design of physical spaces, and (v) opportunities to enhance social connections through augmented virtual engagements. Far from signaling the death knell of LGBTQ+ spaces, these

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trends demonstrate the enduring appeal provided by neighborhoods and communities. Third, the cognitive schemas of lockdowns, re-closeting, and digitalscapes are identified as unique expressions of the shifting spatialities of sexuality in post-pandemic urban space. The chapter concludes by arguing that place will still matter for LGBTQ+ people in a post-COVID-19 era, albeit with altered meanings and material expressions. The socio-spatial consequences of the novel coronavirus will be a confluence of positive *and* negative developments, and while some will be reversed as soon as an effective vaccine is found, others will linger indelibly in bodies and the built environment for years to come.

Keywords AIDS · Coronavirus · COVID-19 · Gayborhoods · Gay neighborhoods · HIV · LGBTQ+ · Pandemic · Public health

17.1 Introduction: Once More, Without Human Contact?

In the midst of the coronavirus epidemic, we are all bombarded... by calls not to touch others but to isolate ourselves, to maintain a proper corporeal distance. (Žižek 2020: 1)

During a global pandemic where people are implored to remain spatially distanced, are physical places of co-presence still viable for LGBTQ+ communities? Are they important in an era of virtual meetings and online dates? How has the significance of gay neighborhoods changed with the novel coronavirus as a backdrop? These are vital questions for an edited volume that has sought to demonstrate that “gayborhoods matter.” Several chapters have looked at LGBTQ+ districts in the past and the present, as well as speculating about their possible futures, yet they were written *before* COVID-19 spread across the globe and transformed our social, economic, and geographical realities in ways hitherto unfathomable. A critical reader might conclude that some of the preceding chapters require a reorientation to accommodate post-COVID-19 realities. In this epilogue, five contributors convene to articulate a vision that acknowledges the need to reconceptualize gayborhoods. Ultimately, we argue that places will still matter in the post-pandemic urban landscape. Far from signaling the death knell of LGBTQ+ spaces and places, the collective experience with COVID-19 demonstrates the enduring appeal provided by urban areas of physical proximity (see Fig. 17.1). Quarantine measures and the “new normal” of technologically mediated meetings have threatened the economic viability of gayborhoods, but absence, especially an enforced one, makes the heart grow fonder—and thus a second wave of place attachments and localized activism present a viable future as well (see Fig. 17.2).

While this chapter can only speculate about the post-pandemic realities of LGBTQ+ people and places, we predict that the socio-spatial consequences of the coronavirus will be a confluence of positive *and* negative developments. While some of these will be reversed as soon as an effective vaccine is found, others will linger in our bodies and in the built environment (see Fig. 17.3). For instance, the call to maintain physical distance is not so different from the injunction on intimate contact



Fig. 17.1 Greenwich Village is one of the key centers of LGBTQ+ life in New York City (Source Image by Anne Hanavan)



Fig. 17.2 Pavement tables permit spatial distancing for customers at the famed Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York City (*Source* Image by Anne Hanavan)

imposed by the arrival of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. For many LGBTQ+ people, the current situation is reminiscent of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; even those too young to have experienced it first hand still grew up in its cultural shadows (Bitterman 2020b). This prior experience is productive—the gayborhood is uniquely equipped to respond with grassroots activism, particularly in the face of government inaction or apathy—but it is also potentially problematic, as it may trigger negative memories of trauma, encourage individualistic withdrawal from human contact, or provide historical models that delimit reimagining what LGBTQ+ geographies could become. On this last point, while there are certainly parallels between the two pandemics, there are also significant differences. Digital technology, for example, may encourage LGBTQ+ communities to diffuse, rather than to gather together in gayborhoods as they did during the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Coffin 2021; Miles 2021).

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, we articulate the analytic parameters of the current pandemic. In this discussion, we define COVID-19 as a “glocal” phenomenon, one with transnational as well as local expressions and implications. This property of the pandemic is important to understand before we can consider how it might affect the meanings of the gayborhood and other types of LGBTQ+ spaces. Next, we review a range of empirical transformations and trends. We seek to maintain a balanced tone in our discussion, considering the threats and challenges that COVID-19 poses alongside opportunities and unexpected benefits



Fig. 17.3 Residents and visitors in gayborhoods everywhere (in Chicago) follow COVID-19 regulations including wearing masks and practicing spatial distancing (*Source* Image by William Ivancic)

for the future of LGBTQ+ urban spaces. Based on this discussion, we propose that academics, activists, and other stakeholders should reconsider the guiding metaphor of “the gayborhood” and instead conceptualize LGBTQ+ geographies in more innovative and expansive ways.

17.2 Do Places Matter? Empirical Trends for the Future of LGBTQ+ Spaces

It is limiting to view COVID-19 as a uniformly destructive force for gayborhoods and other types of LGBTQ+ spaces. In this section, we highlight the unexpected opportunities that a pandemic can generate for urban sexual communities. Five trends strike us as promising, even in moments of widespread uncertainty, for ensuring the vitality of LGBTQ+ spaces: (1) the power of mutual aid networks, (2) the power of institutional anchors in placemaking efforts, (3) urban change related to homesteading and population shifts, (4) innovations in the architecture and interior design of physical spaces, and (5) opportunities to enhance social connection through augmented virtual engagements. Together, these themes can refocus conversations about the effects of pandemics away from assumptions of demise and community dilution to emergent empirical realities of reconstitution and community resilience (see Fig. 17.4).

- (1) *LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations can participate in “mutual aid networks” to respond to the current public health crisis, particularly by drawing on community-specific knowledge and experience related to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.*

The HIV/AIDS pandemic strengthened LGBTQ+ spaces by creating a consolidated urban network which activists used to tackle the ravages of the disease. Similarly, queer communities may once again self-organize by using gayborhoods as a base to disseminate information or distribute face masks and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). LGBTQ+ communities and organizations leveraged their collective expertise and resources to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic by reducing stigma, encouraging widespread testing, and negotiating better access to treatment (Ghaziani 2008). Despite this well-documented historical example, present-day governments and policy makers have generally overlooked the potential benefits such as grassroots collective activities when considering their responses to COVID-19. For instance, the UK government chose to build centralized laboratories to process tests and rejected an offer to create a complementary network of smaller local providers (BBC 2020a).^{1,2} There remain opportunities for authority figures to work with grassroots organizers,

¹Sir Paul Nurse, the chief executive of the Francis Crick research institute, described the proposed approach using the analogy of the Dunkirk evacuation in World War.

²The government has put some big boats, destroyers in place. That’s a bit more cumbersome to get working and we wish them all the luck to do that, but we little boats can contribute as well.



Fig. 17.4 Community organization and non-profit services adapted to meet COVID-19-related regulations, including the DC Center for LGBT Community in Washington, DC (Source Image by Elizabeth R. June)

not least because the latter can generate a sense of ownership of health outcomes by (and for) local populations (Marston et al. 2020).

The potential for action by mutual aid networks within communities, aided by mobile digital technologies, peer-to-peer communication, and a healthy dose of campaigning and activism—all independent of centralized or formalized networks—is already evident in the response to COVID-19 (Butler 2020; Villadiego 2020). The businesses and residents in gayborhoods could build similar movements, attracting external supporters (e.g., visitors and governments) to create a grassroots response to COVID-19 *with their gayborhood at the center*. In an acceptance speech in June 2019 for the Isabelle Stevenson Tony Award for her outstanding service to the LGBTQ+ community, the American actress Judith Light explained that gay men, lesbians, and their allies have a great deal of knowledge about the AIDS pandemic, which they can pass along to other groups and future generations (Bitterman and Hess 2021). She characterized LGBTQ+ people as a “community of leadership.” It is our hope that by engaging in their leadership capacity and working together cooperatively—through gayborhood meetings to plan community events, through guerrilla or grassroots advertising campaigns for gay community venues, or through exchanging skills and sharing resources—LGBTQ+ communities can capitalize on the strength of their local spaces and sense of communal wellbeing.

- (2) *New types of LGBTQ+ institutional anchors may develop within and outside gayborhoods in response to the pandemic, fostering novel commercial outlets and community spaces.*

A second unexpected opportunity is that COVID-19 may augment the role of “institutional anchors” (Ghaziani 2014a), distinctive facilities that provide salient markers of urban sexualities (Ghaziani 2021). Consider the recent case of the Little Gay Shop in East Austin, Texas. As recent transplants from New York City, owners Justin Galicz and Kirt Reynolds wanted to open a queer community space that was not centered on alcohol and partying. When you enter this little shipping container on Airport Boulevard, you will find all manner of queer paraphernalia, including t-shirts, pins, patches, books, and magazines. This can be considered an institutional anchor because it provides a place that allows local residents, tourists, and other actors to engage with queer culture, reproducing it through their experiences and enactments.

Galicz and Reynolds encountered media reports which suggested that LGBTQ+ bars, from Austin to New York City, have closed at greater rates as cases of COVID-19 surged. Music festivals, like South by Southwest in Austin, have also been canceled. In light of these challenges posed by the pandemic, the duo realized that a community space like theirs is more important than ever. “They [artists] are people that either freelance or they rely solely on pop-ups and markets and fairs and all of these different types of events to make their living,” Galicz remarked in an interview with *The Austin Chronicle*. “With all of those being canceled or postponed, we felt a responsibility to help them in anyway way we can.” The owners routinely share their proceeds with local queer

artistic and political charities.³ By extending research on the enduring effects of anchor institutions in the context of assimilation, we argue that new anchors are forming which can provide financial support, cultural offerings, and social opportunities in a pandemic. Unlike other kinds of businesses or organizations, institutional anchors are totems of communal life that represent distinct ways of life. These places, like the Little Gay Shop, can survive even while some bars shutter.

- (3) *In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTQ+ groups may migrate from gayborhoods to other mobilities and settlement patterns.*

A number of media headlines, such as “Coronavirus may prompt migration out of American cities” and “Americans flee cities for the suburbs,” suggest that the pandemic has induced a major demographic shift.⁴ But is this shift temporary, or will it have longer lasting effects? In the US, this outbound migration is most pronounced in New York City, where an estimated 5% of the population left the city for a period of time (see Fig. 17.5).⁵ Some headed to vacation homes, while others sought solace with extended family in the suburbs.^{6,7} The call to shelter in place and a nearly universal mandate to work from home have led some to “predict doom for America’s biggest cities,” while others fear “an urban ice age.”⁸ Even larger migrations have been seen elsewhere in the world, often with more dramatic and disastrous effects. For example, in India the loss of income caused by lockdown forced millions of migrant workers to return to their villages; with transport systems overwhelmed, this reverse migration involved people walking hundreds of miles, with some dying from exhaustion or due to accidents on the road (BBC 2020b). Many countries have attempted to mitigate the socioeconomic effects of these mass movements. In the UK, the government is trying to encourage workers to return to the office (BBC 2020c), effectively attempting to “thaw” the urban economy of restaurants and other services catering to these workers and their clients. However, Florida (2020) predicts that the pandemic will accelerate an attraction to the suburbs for families, while pushing young people and businesses into more peripheral, and thus affordable, urban areas.⁹ See Fig. 17.6.

³<https://www.statesman.com/entertainmentlife/20200720/little-gay-shop-opens-in-east-austin-with-art-books-and-big-dreams;> <https://www.austinchronicle.com/columns/2020-07-31/qmm-unity-the-best-little-gay-shop-in-austin/>.

⁴<https://fortune.com/2020/07/17/people-leaving-cities-coronavirus-data-population-millennials-marriage-families-housing-real-estate-suburbs/>.

⁵<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/16/nyregion/nyc-coronavirus-moving-leaving.html>.

⁶<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/06/pandemic-cities-moving-remote-work/613069/>.

⁷<https://www.zillow.com/research/2020-urb-suburb-market-report-27712/>.

⁸<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/06/pandemic-cities-moving-remote-work/613069/>.

⁹<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-07-02/how-coronavirus-will-reshape-u-s-cities>.



Fig. 17.5 Restaurants and bars in gay neighborhoods closed temporarily and adapted to COVID-19 safety precautions (Source Image by Anne Hanavan)



Fig. 17.6 LGBTQ+ neighborhoods serve an important function in mid-sized cities, such as the Allentown neighborhood in Buffalo, New York (*Source Image by Alex Bitterman*)

Although some manifestations of this outward migration are contoured by wealth, like vacation homes, sexuality seems to be a more prominent determinant than class here. These fears are reminiscent of critiques of gayborhood studies for their metronormative emphasis (Halberstam 2005). Not all LGBTQ+ people live in cities, and their collective engagement is not exclusively urban. Indeed, scholars have documented diverse spatial expressions and placemaking efforts in peri-urban (Forsyth 1997), suburban (Brekhus 2003; Tongson 2011), and rural environments (Bell and Valentine 1995; Gray 2009), along with ordinary cities (Robinson 2006; G Brown 2008) those in the Global South (Brown et al. 2010). All of these sites are captured by the imagery of cultural archipelagos (Ghaziani 2019a).

Overlaying pandemic-related population shifts onto scholarly critiques of the gayborhood reveals the power of an expansive analytic gaze that reaches beyond city-center locations. In short: we must shift our focus from urban settlements to wider mobilities (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014; Hess 2019; Bitterman 2020a). As an example, Bain and Podmore (2020) use Surrey and New Westminster, peripheral metropolitan locations outside the Vancouver urban core, to show how placemaking is a function of resource landscapes (e.g., commercial infrastructure and gathering spaces that residents can use to organize social activities), political opportunity structures (e.g., institutional, policy, planning,

and funding frameworks), and inter-organizational relations (e.g., informational, financial, and interpersonal networks). Settlements in places like Surrey and New Westminster may be characterized by less territoriality than downtown Vancouver, and they may lack the critical mass to support the type of institutional density that characterizes the gayborhood, but queer visibility is still undeniable. One respondent asserted with optimism: “that’s what’s unique about New Westminster. We don’t have a village. The whole community is our inclusive village” (Bain and Podmore 2020: 11). In Surrey, NY, which has fewer resources and less political support for LGBTQ+ people, “a fragmented and sporadic solidarity” has emerged among its comparatively smaller group of LGBTQ+ residents. In common, the two locales show the importance of using more imaginative measurement protocols to assess placemaking efforts beyond the downtown core of major cities.

- (4) *Pandemics can induce innovations in the configuration and design of interior spaces, which can revive the importance of LGBTQ+ spaces, especially bars, without compromising public health protocols and safety procedures.*

For more than a decade—long before COVID-19 appeared—gay bars have been closing. As many as 37% of gay bars in the US shuttered from 2007 to 2019 (Mattson 2019). Between 2006 and 2016, 58% of LGBTQ+ bars, pubs, and nightclubs in London shut down as well (Campkin and Marshall 2017; Ghaziani 2019b). These multi-national findings require us to separate questions about the sustainability of gay bars in general from the specific effects posed by a pandemic. For example, researchers have shown that there were more gay bars operating during the height of the AIDS pandemic than there are today, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the temporary closures that COVID-19 has induced can (and in some instances already have) become permanent failures, there are still more than 800 gay bars open across 46 US states.¹⁰ The wisdom here is to focus on an ethos of survival and adaptability—but the question is how to do it.

During the early months of the pandemic, states and municipalities across the US implemented measures to enforce “social” or “physical distancing,” a public health initiative that has proven to reduce the rate of transmission for respiratory viruses (Lipton and Steinhauer 2020; see Figs. 17.7 and 17.8). By mid-March 2020, more than half of US states issued closure orders for their bars. As the virus spread, some countries, like Spain, Iran, Argentina, Brazil, India, Germany, and Italy placed their citizens on lockdown, a requirement which forced people to “stay home” or “shelter in place.” These measures created a crisis for LGBTQ+ communities. Would the novel coronavirus “permanently damage or reshape” urban sexual cultures?¹¹ “LGBTQ venues are our own churches. It’s where we form and nurture our community and the individuals within that,” said John Sizzle, a Drag DJ who co-owns The Glory, a queer bar in East London. “Our

¹⁰<https://slate.com/human-interest/2020/05/gay-bars-struggling-reopen-coronavirus.html>.

¹¹<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/06/how-quarantine-reshaping-queer-nightlife/612865/>.



Fig. 17.7 Gay bars, like this one in the Church Street neighborhood of Toronto, added pavement markings requiring patrons to practice spatial distancing in compliance with COVID-19-related regulations (Source Image by Rob Modzelewski)



Fig. 17.8 Retail and commercial outlets in the Church Street neighborhood in Toronto remind customers to follow safety measures for the COVID-19 pandemic (Source Image by Rob Modzelewski)

long-term future is not clear at all.” With voluntary and enforced lockdown sheltering measures in place, many LGBTQ+ establishments were operating at significantly reduced capacity. This threatened the ability of owners to pay their rent, utilities, and payroll. “We’ll die!” exclaimed Joaquin Pena, owner of Madrid gay bar Marta Carino.¹² What does the case of Covid-19 teach us about the mechanisms of LGBTQ+ creative resilience?

Interior design is a key theme that has enabled bar owners to survive plagues and pandemic. Andersson (2009) shows how gay bars in London’s Soho gayborhood expressed an aesthetic that was designed to counter their stigma as “contaminated” by virtue of their association with AIDS. The result was a very particular look: clean chromed surfaces, “clean” and “hygienic” white walls, minimalist furniture, and youthful “pretty boy” bartenders who projected an image of good health. This aesthetic, which was “profoundly shaped by AIDS” (Andersson 2019: 2994), diffused to gay bars around the world. The style might read today as “homonormative,” to borrow Andersson’s critique. By tracing its historical origins, however, we can appreciate how then, like today, gay bar owners have used synergies between architecture, interior design, and urban space (Campkin

¹²<https://nationalpost.com/pmn/entertainment-pmn/well-die-gay-bars-risk-coronavirus-collapse>.

2007) as a mechanism of creative resilience and adaptive community building in a pandemic.

The Pumpjack in Vancouver provides a contemporary example. As lockdown restrictions eased in British Columbia, some LGBTQ+ establishments considered the possibility of re-opening. According to the protocols established by WorkSafeBC, bars and nightclubs were allowed to do so provided they followed certain safety procedures. Pumpjack was among the first gay pubs—in the gayborhood, no less—to reopen in June 2020. The staff received personal protective equipment, which ensured that guests were served by someone wearing a mask or a face shield. The owner also installed Plexiglas around the bar, along the windows in the front that face the street, and in between the booths. “It’s going to be a new experience,” said Byron Cooke, the general manager. This sentiment of cautious optimism was shared by bar owners across Canada. Dean Odorico, the general manager of gay bar Woody’s in Toronto, added, “The gay community has already lived through a health crisis with AIDS and it brought the community together and it made it a lot stronger... People at the time thought it was the end of days and it definitely wasn’t... The gay community is so resilient.”¹³

- (5) *The COVID-19 pandemic offers new possibilities—available to wider audiences—for establishing virtual communities, not only to replace but also enhance previous ways of connecting.*

The final generative effect related to the COVID-19 pandemic is a reimagining of the possibilities of the virtual: what it is, how it works, and who feels included within it. In August 2020, *Global News* published the following headline: “The show must go on(line): Vancouver hosts virtual parade amid COVID-19.”¹⁴ Rather than canceling Pride, as some cities did, the Vancouver Pride Society (VPS) announced that it would shift its celebrations to a series of online events (see Fig. 17.9). “Pride can’t be cancelled,” the non-profit organization declared—“only re-imagined.” Organizers worked tirelessly, and quickly to identify creative alternatives to in-person events. In May, VPS issued a press release: “Vancouver Pride 2020 will go ahead as a virtual reimagining!”¹⁵ The release outlined a week-long events lineup for the newly dubbed “Virtual Pride 2020.” Highlights included a Virtual Pride Parade, a dedicated day of queer weddings at city hall, and a public (again virtual) disco. VPS also agreed to issue refunds to those who needed them most, and they agreed to pay trans, two-spirit, and queer artists, performers, and musicians as they transitioned their events into a digital space. In a public statement, VPS expressed gratitude, and a generative spirit: “We are so thankful for our Pride family and partners, and for your continued support as we now shift towards creating a different kind of Pride celebration – but one which continues to celebrate diversity and bring us together when we need it most.”¹⁶ On the day of the event, British Columbia Premier John Horgan

¹³https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/qj4bgx/queer-nightlife-will-find-a-way-through-covid-19.

¹⁴<https://globalnews.ca/news/7246594/coronavirus-vancouver-virtual-pride-parade/>.

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NACS

Fig. 17.9 Many LGBTQ+ celebrations in 2020 switched from in-person to virtual events, include the Pride event in Buffalo, New York (Source Buffalo Pride Week, used with permission)

tweeted photos of himself at previous parades and wrote, “missing celebrating #VancouverPride in person. But Pride cannot be cancelled.”¹⁷

Cities like London, Denver, and Dublin also held virtual Pride events during the summer of 2020. This prompted the *New York Times* to publish an official “2020 Virtual Pride Guide.” The journalist Maya Salam, noted, “LGBTQ Pride events will look and feel very different this year, but many are still on – online.”¹⁸ Salam acknowledged that “in the era of the coronavirus, traveling and gathering are not options for many. But that should not hinder the spirit and mission of Pride: to remind community members and allies that they are not alone, but part of a greater push for equality, and to elevate the voices and causes central to LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized groups.” The global

¹⁷<https://www.citynews1130.com/2020/08/02/vancouver-pride-virtual-parade/>.

¹⁸<https://www.nytimes.com/article/gay-pride-2020-events-online.html>.

reimagining of Pride—and its inherent symbolism—demonstrates with particular force the resilience of urban queer communities in a worldwide crisis. Whether a virtual pride celebration can capture the same spirit as its physical manifestation remains up for debate. Certainly a crowded, enthusiastic, often sweaty in-person parade becomes impossible, while other elements are compromised or reconfigured, with varying degrees of success. These elements, so key to a physical pride celebration, were no doubt in many cases poorly replicated online in this uncertain year. However, if we recognize alternative potentials of online pride celebrations—whether inclusivity, accessibility, or creativity, of different community members—then there may yet prove to be a generative future for online and hybrid gayborhood community events. See Fig. 17.10.

17.3 Concluding Remarks: Beyond the Master Metaphor of the Gayborhood?

This edited volume has focused on the past, present, and possible futures of gayborhoods. One critique of the prefix “gay” as a descriptor for these urban areas is that it overemphasizes gay male experience, while potentially erasing others in the “LGBTQ+” acronym. The reasons for strategically retaining “gay” were noted in the first chapter of this book (Hess and Bitterman 2021), but what garners less critical questioning is the latter part of the “gayborhood” portmanteau. In a strict sense, *neighborhood* denotes a spatial concentration of people and organizations whose features contribute to group identity. However, the term also connotes collectivity, togetherness, and many other qualities that are favorably regarded in most cultural contexts. Accordingly, deploying the term “gayborhood” gathers a positive charge, and its potential decline or disappearance is tacitly treated as a negative development. Yet, while the term “neighborhood” certainly directs attention toward certain phenomena, it also delimits other understandings from emerging. This is problematic during a paradigm-shifting event such as a global pandemic. What if something new—something different and as of yet unnamed—is being formed that we cannot adequately capture, or properly consider, by our conventional cognitive schemas about LGBTQ+ urban spaces and places? Is it possible that “the gayborhood” is no longer the most appropriate archetype for discussions about LGBTQ+ spatiality in a post-COVID-19 era?

Spatial metaphors abound in studies of sexuality and gender. Take “the closet,” a concept interrogated by Sedgwick (1990) and also immediately recognizable to LGBTQ+ people and heterosexuals alike. The closet creates an internal space with connotations of claustrophobia and containment, but also safety and comfort, depending on the circumstances (Pantazopolous and Bettany 2010). For years the emphasis was on the negative, with the assumption that everyone wants to “come out” if they can (Cass 1979). Yet, familiarity with a restrained space like the closet might help in the era of COVID-19. After all, what is home quarantine if not a larger closet?



Fig. 17.10 In-person Pride events occurred during summer 2020 in certain cities, including this one in New York City, despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Source Image by Anne Hanavan)

The relationship between the closet and lockdowns may actually be closer than initially conceived. National and local lockdowns have been used to slow the transmission of COVID-19. Although the specifics vary, lockdowns usually involve restricting movements and activities (see Fig. 17.11). In extreme cases, people are



Fig. 17.11 In LGBTQ+ neighborhoods, residents and visitors complied with the safety precautions required by the COVID-19 pandemic (Source Image by Elizabeth R. June)



Fig. 17.12 Retail and commercial outlets in gay neighborhoods adapted to COVID-19-related regulations (Source Image by Rob Modzelewski)

locked down at home or in another domesticated space (e.g., a hotel room), with commercial premises closed and access to public places constricted. See Fig. 17.12. Evidently, lockdowns have a huge impact on the viability and vitality of most non-residential sites including, as noted above, gayborhoods. Most commentators may conclude that lockdowns are a temporary phenomenon, soon to be resigned to the annals of history as a peculiar feature of 2020. However, as lockdowns continued into 2021, and if they are reinstated in response to future pandemics, they likely will emerge as a new socio-spatial archetype in the collective consciousness. By this we mean that lockdowns might form a way of thinking about social and spatial relationships that transcends particular historical and geographical contexts, just as the term “ghetto” has left its origins in Venice to be applied to a variety of contexts (Ghaziani 2015; Coffin et al. 2016). Might young LGBTQ+ people grow up thinking of their dynamic coming out experiences as varying degrees of lockdown, rather than time spent in a closet?

Then again, those who have yet to disclose their non-heteronormative identity may be under increased scrutiny when they are sharing a small space with significant others for extended periods of time. Lockdown conditions may make the closet more claustrophobic than ever (see Fig. 17.13). Since the outset of the pandemic, acute mental distress and suicidal ideation has been alarmingly high for adolescents



Fig. 17.13 Even with safety precautions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTQ+ neighborhoods can provide a welcoming space for everyone (*Source* Image by Rob Modzelewski)

and young people, but for LGBTQ+ youth who are forced to move from the relative freedom that schools, colleges and houseshares offered back to their childhood homes, mental health is drastically affected. “Re-closeting” their sexuality—to transition from visibility to invisibility and silence once again—to their families, who may be conservative, unaccepting, vehemently opposed to the individual’s sexuality or indeed unaware of it, is incredibly distressing (Batty 2020a, b; Dasgupta 2020; LGBT Foundation 2020; Kneale and Bacares 2020). The conceptual upshot of this is that lockdown may need to be reconceptualized. It is not simply a temporary phenomenon but perhaps an emergent frame that shapes the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. As such it warrants further consideration as a complement to, if not evolution of, the closet concept.

Living alone may alleviate the claustrophobia of (re-)closeted lockdown, but brings with it the potential for isolation, loneliness, and withdrawal. One solution is to escape into online spaces, which leads to a second spatial metaphor that is commonplace in contemporary discussions. In material terms, the Internet is a complex network of cables, satellites, and mobile devices. Figuratively, however, it is a series of *sites* that one can visit, explore, and inhabit for a time. Consider terms like *internet forum*, *online marketplace*, and *virtual waiting room*. Space is the foundational, albeit often implicit, figure of thinking for digitally mediated subjectivity (Miles 2021). Might the over-spatialization of internet interactivity preclude alternative understandings of how electronic technologies enfold into physical realities (Coffin 2021)? For example, smartphones suggest that the internet is no longer a separate topology of virtual spaces but rather another layer of spatiality overlain unevenly onto physical topographies (Šimůnková 2019). Devices are tracked in real-time and also real space, with dating applications often organizing users by distance, and customer reviews allowing photographs and descriptions to be viewed before a physical place is encountered in the flesh.¹⁹ Thus, technology not only generates new spaces in the imagination (e.g., purely virtual fora), but it also distorts physical spatial experiences (i.e. decreasing the possibility of “direct” or unmediated experience of place). What term can replace the dichotomy between offline and online space? We propose the term *topology*, which invokes a sense of space defined by its dynamic relations rather than fixed physical or abstract features (Cresswell 2013).

Topologies link back to lockdowns, insofar as technology also allows people to communicate online and then meet in physical locations. During times of lockdown, people may meet at each other’s homes, but in less restrictive phases people may meet in public places or commercial premises. Technologies certainly facilitate clandestine practices such as cruising in public parks, which are affectively charged with a sense of danger during a pandemic, but also allow any commercial site to become a temporary LGBTQ+ meeting place. If socio-spatial relationships become more fluid, thanks to the interaction of technological affordances and lockdown restrictions, then perhaps topology is the most appropriate trope through which to think about the

¹⁹As one illustrative speculation: will gay bars and other LGBTQ+ commercial environments receive a crowd-sourced “cleanliness” or “hygiene” rating and, if so, how might the added business costs and consumer concerns shape the ongoing viability of those already struggling to survive?

future of LGBTQ+ cultures. Certainly the flexible and fleeting metaphor of topology should be complemented by other concepts. For instance, while many sites may be fleetingly “queered” the term “archipelago” remains apt to describe the more stable landscape of regularly used and explicitly identified LGBTQ+ sites (Ghaziani 2019a). Similarly, terms like circuit (Ghaziani and Cook 2005), scene (Ridge et al. 1997; Taylor 2010) and pop-up (Stillwagon and Ghaziani 2019) may be useful to describe particular topological formations for LGBTQ+ people. Indeed, we celebrate metaphorical multiplicity, as it may draw attention to a greater range of differences between non-heterosexual people. However, we propose that topology is particularly productive as an agnostic or umbrella term, insofar as it can also be transferred beyond the specific context of post-pandemic queer spatiality. In doing so, it can articulate the unique contingencies of *queer* topologies but also their connections to the shifting spatialities of *BAME* topologies, *feminist* topologies, *religious* topologies, and the like. Thus, it is apposite to conclude this chapter, and the edited volume, with a pregnant proposition: the life and afterlives of gayborhoods is the conception of plural queer topologies.

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