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Creating and Sustaining Community: An Analysis of LGBTQ Community in London, Ontario

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Women's Studies and Feminist Research

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Abstract

There has been an increase in literature over the last decade on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ) communities. However, aside from health-related studies, little has been published pertaining to LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. This dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions: what are the constitutive elements that make up London's LGBTQ communities? What forms of community-making prove to be viable and effective in a smaller urban setting? Does the practice of aesthetics/artistic performance lead to socio-political change among members of London's LGBTQ communities? This is a multidisciplinary research project that utilizes archival, theoretical, and ethnographic-informed qualitative research methods. I argue that LGBTQ community in London is based on four major tenets: they require social supports; there are common or shared visions or goals; they require physical spaces such as bars; and there must be LGBTQ-specific events in these spaces. While some argue that bars and events provide superficial or short-lived communities, London's LGBTQ history suggests that these spaces are a requirement for communities to flourish. I analyze the ways in which the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO) functioned historically as a community and both the promises and limitations of community in three contemporary London LGBTQ venues: The APK, Buckwild's, and Lavish. I examine the arts and community building of an event called Gen Pop, and argue that it is the most effective contemporary example of LGBTQ community. I discuss the aesthetics of Gen Pop poster advertisements and how this queer aesthetic, through a utilization of camp and raunch, contests normative categories and boundaries. I extend this analysis of a queer aesthetics in discussing how they function at Gen Pop events. I argue that drag performance and other forms of art at Gen Pop utilize a queer aesthetic to challenge social norms. These queer arts are important for community as they expand our understandings and practices of gender and sexuality. Through challenging norms, the arts at Gen Pop help to build a more inclusive and political community where they engage people in dialogue and practice that can lead to socio-political change. I conclude by highlighting the importance of queer arts events for community and the negative consequences for the closure of LGBTQ-specific spaces in London.

Keywords

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, London, Ontario, Community, History, Bars, Posters, Poster Advertisements, Public Art, Arts, Aesthetics, Interactive Arts, Events, Drag, Drag Performance, Social Change

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction to LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario

1.1 Preamble

It was sometime in the mid-to-late 1990s. I remember it vividly. My parents would drop me off in London, Ontario, and I would go record shopping and check out punk shows at an all-ages bar (I was a teenager at this time). On the walk between the record stores and the venue, I would always walk past this unknown space. You could not see in through the windows and I never saw anyone going in or out of it. I was not totally sure what its purpose was, but I knew that it was *something gay*. Painted on the wall of the building were rainbow colours and the name Sinnz written in all capital letters across it. This name was amusing to me, but I also wondered why on earth anyone would want to publicly advertise their space as a gay space.

Almost a decade later, I was living in London, Ontario, and doing my undergraduate degree in Women's Studies. At this point, I had participated in a handful of pride parades, taken courses on gender and sexuality, and would find myself out with my friends on a Friday night at the space formerly known as Sinnz. It seemed that the bar was a space where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) people would go to dance to electronic and pop music, meet other LGBTQ people, occasionally check out a drag performance, all in one space where people felt safe and free from judgement. It was like a celebration of diverse genders and sexualities every night. At this moment in time, I felt that I had a good grasp on what the LGBTQ community was like.

It was not until I accidentally attended an event in Toronto that I found my perceptions of LGBTQ community challenged. I travelled to Toronto to visit some friends and we decided to go dancing at a bar on Queen Street West – which at the time was a pretty hip place to be. We were supposed to go to a bar on the third floor of a building, but while we were traveling up the stairs, I took a wrong turn and accidentally walked into another venue on the second floor, where there was an aggressive punk/hardcore band playing to a room full of people dressed in leather and a mosh pit with naked men in it. I later found out that what I inadvertently stumbled upon was a queer event called Vazaleen and the band that was playing was a queer band from New York called Limp Wrist! I thought I had a lot of exposure to LGBTQ community until I walked into that bar. The idea of punk music meshing with LGBTQ culture was not something I had seen before, never mind naked people moshing at a show. My experience of music and dance within the LGBTQ community up until this point was mostly pop music or electronic music such as house or techno. In contrast to this, in my experiences going to punk shows, while I was aware of cross-dressing bands (such as 63 Monroe) and punk bands with lesbian or gay members, I never thought these worlds would collide as my experiences between these communities were immensely different. These experiences, challenged my knowledge and perceptions, which led to further questions and curiosities about my (mis)understandings of LGBTQ community. This highlights the push-pull forces of my insider-outsider identity, as discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

1.2 Introduction

My introduction to, and subsequent involvement in, the LGBTQ community started off slowly. I was raised in a small rural town in South-western Ontario, where anything LGBTQ was rendered invisible. While I knew that LGBTQ people existed through the ways in which they were represented on the television and in movies, I was under the impression that these people did not exist where I was from – that is, until my older sister came out as lesbian during her first year away at university. From this point on, I was drawn to learning more about LGBTQ people, communities, and experiences. As seen briefly in the preamble, I had an experience where I was questioning the visibility of a gay space, yet what occurred within that space was invisible to me in the sense that I had no idea what was happening inside the building. Once I thought I had an understanding of what LGBTQ community looked like – where mostly gay men and lesbian women would get together at a bar to socialize and dance to pop music with other sexual minorities – this was again challenged by my experience at the Limp Wrist show, which felt opposite to my previous experiences.

As I moved around the country and traveled to various cities, I came to learn that LGBTQ communities looked and functioned differently depending on the city and the social context. For example, when I lived in Montreal for a few years (from 2009-2011), it seemed that the punk aesthetics of the crowds that I had witnessed at the Limp Wrist show were the norm at certain LGBTQ bars and neighbourhoods in the city. There also appeared to be more engagement in community activism (such as protests and public art) than I had witnessed anywhere else. When I moved back to London in the fall of 2011, I

had a diversity of knowledges and experiences of LGBTQ community. During the first year of my PhD, I had come to witness LGBTQ community in London in ways that I had never experienced it before. It first started when I was asked to DJ for the launch of a queer and trans event in London. I was swept away by the diversity of people who attended this event (in terms of ages, gender identities and expressions, aesthetics, and so on). This piqued my interest in the ways in which LGBTQ community has functioned historically in London as well as how it is created and sustained in the present day.

In this dissertation, I draw on the various ways in which community is created, understood, sustained, and experienced by LGBTQ people in London. Drawing on both historical and current knowledges and experiences of LGBTQ community in London, I reflect on some of the valuable and promising features of the local community as well as some of the hardships and challenges with sustaining it. This research is important because learning about the knowledges, attitudes, and experiences of LGBTQ communities in the past, allows us to utilize this information to help shape the way we think about community today. Furthermore, it allows us to learn about problems that affect the creation and sustainability of LGBTQ community in London as ways to deal with issues of marginalization and exclusion toward creating better communities in the future.

1.3 Contextualizing the Research

In the Canadian context, LGBTQ people have been oppressed in a number of ways, ranging from violence and discrimination based on sexual/gender norms to outright

denial of basic human rights such as housing or employment, which have led to varying degrees of social isolation.¹ Over the last sixty years, LGBTQ communities have resisted these injustices at the local, provincial, and national levels and have made some gains in terms of social acceptance.² Further, positive legal changes have occurred such as the removal of homosexuality in 1969 from the Canadian Criminal Code and the recent changes to the Ontario Human Rights Code to protect transgender people from harassment and discrimination. Despite these legal changes, LGBTQ people still experience discrimination and social exclusion due to the heteronormativity embedded in our social institutions that privilege heterosexual people and marginalize non-normative genders and sexualities.³

Alongside social justice and legal victories for Canadian LGBTQ communities, the research focus on LGBTQ populations has shifted from pathologies and perversions⁴ towards more positive approaches that address socio-political issues that negatively impact and marginalize various LGBTQ communities.⁵ Canadian academic research has paid limited attention to current LGBTQ social and political issues⁶ and research on these issues overwhelmingly occurs in major cities (such as Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver), leaving smaller cities and towns under-researched.⁷ Aside from province-wide studies⁸ and the Health in Middlesex Men Matters project (HiMMM),⁹ academic research on London's LGBTQ population is nonexistent. This lack of research is important to acknowledge, as LGBTQ communities are different depending on the city and social context. Thus, research on larger cities cannot be applied to all LGBTQ communities.

This lack of research and knowledge contribute to an invisibility of some LGBTQ communities in LGBTQ histories in Canada. One of the only means of accessing LGBTQ communities in London is through attending LGBTQ-specific bars, artistic performances, and/or musical events, which, as this dissertation demonstrates, constitute important contexts for social identification, socializing, support, common goals, and the creation of community. This research project seeks to investigate their level of importance for LGBTQ communities in London. More specifically, I demonstrate the crucial role that physical spaces play in developing LGBTQ visibility, subjectivities, recognition, and political consciousness, which all work to develop and sustain community in London. Historically, the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO) operated as a club and social service for over thirty years. This space provided an avenue for LGBTQ people to develop a common vision for the community, to provide support groups and counseling, and to host LGBTQ-specific events that reached the diversity of people within the community such as hip hop nights, drag shows, and youth nights, to name a few. I also demonstrate the continued importance of LGBTQ spaces in recent years through an investigation of three LGBTQ bars in London. While they have their limitations in comparison to HALO, I show how these physical spaces continue to play an integral role for community in London. Due to the social fragmentation of community as a result of modernity, capitalism, and the neoliberal focus on the individual, having these spaces are increasingly important as places to develop community. Through LGBTQ-specific events, these bars provide varying degrees of entertainment, inclusion, support, and socialization.

Ultimately, I discuss how an event called Gen Pop was most able to provide the necessary requirements for community (common or shared vision/goals; social support; physical space; and events) that were accessible to a diversity of LGBTQ Londoners. I argue that the role of a queer aesthetic and the arts are pivotal to the community at Gen Pop in the ways in which they embody a politics of diversity and inclusion and transgress normative categories of gender and sexuality. This can be seen through Gen Pop's poster advertisements that rely on a queer aesthetic that utilizes camp and raunch to challenge norms. This queer aesthetic can also be seen through various arts at the events. For example, drag performances are linked to issues of safety and gender diversity. Gen Pop provides a safe and inclusive space for performers to explore ideas and experiences of gender. Drag is also a powerful means through which the naturalness of gender is exposed, and where both performers and the audience can learn to explore, negotiate, and accept their genders and sexualities. These events are positive alternatives to the discrimination or erasure that LGBTQ people face in other areas of their lives, where gender and sexual diversities are not always celebrated. This research project is the first of its kind to document these issues in London, moving research on LGBTQ communities in London beyond a health-focus (e.g. Trans PULSE and HiMMM) towards understanding the social dynamics and lived experience of LGBTQ people as they relate to an understanding of community support and spaces, shared visions or goals, aesthetics/artistic performances, and LGBTQ events.

1.4 Research Questions

This qualitative project has been informed by the following research questions: (1) what are the constitutive elements that make up London's LGBTQ communities?; (2) what forms of community-making prove to be viable and effective in a smaller urban setting?; and (3) does the practice of aesthetics/artistic performance lead to socio-political change among members of London's LGBTQ communities? My arrival at these three questions was influenced by a graduate course that I took as well as my observations of, and experience with, the LGBTQ community in London. The course I took was an anthropology course entitled, "Face-to-Faceness and the Construction of Community." In this course, we discussed a variety of texts that attempted to define the modern day community. Through my engagement with the readings, I started to think about how some communities do not align with the theories proposed by the various scholars. I was thinking, in particular, about how these ideas relate to the formation and sustainability of communities among LGBTQ people in London. Further, given my experience witnessing the ways in which art and performances were received at various LGBTQ events, I was intrigued to learn more about the role of the arts in community. While I could have undertaken a research project strictly from a theoretical standpoint, as a feminist, I felt that there was a requirement to engage with the diversity of perspectives of those who identify with an LGBTQ community in order to arrive at a richer understanding of how community can be experienced in London, Ontario. Given the lack of research on the topic of LGBTQ communities in London specifically, I felt it was also important to do this research to make visible the context, experiences, and stories of the lives of LGBTQ

people in London that have otherwise remained invisible in London's history as well as Canadian LGBTQ histories on a whole.

1.5 Chapter Outline

There are seven chapters in this dissertation, beginning with the present introduction, then the literature review and methodology chapter, followed by the four core findings chapters, and ending with the conclusion chapter. This chapter highlights my introduction and involvement in LGBTQ community; the context in which this research is based; the research questions; and an outline of the contents of this dissertation.

In the second chapter, I review the relevant literature and discuss the methodologies for this dissertation. I reviewed literature in three main areas: (1) LGBTQ bars; (2) queer art and aesthetics; and (3) defining community. The literature on LGBTQ bars shows how bars provided safe spaces for LGBTQ people to congregate. Non-normative genders and sexualities have historically been regulated in the public domain, so bars have provided a place that was mostly free from discrimination. Bars were physical places where LGBTQ people could work, develop an economy, and sustain their own spaces. These bars helped fuel the visibility and recognition of LGBTQ community. They provided opportunities for LGBTQ-specific support, socialization, leisure, and entertainment. There has been a diversity of events at LGBTQ bars, including drag shows, musical performances, and dances. These events, according to the literature, have helped to develop rich histories, memories, modes of empowerment, and social change through challenging gender and sexual norms.

In the literature on queer art and aesthetics, queer aesthetics are discussed as aesthetics that involve constant change. They work to transgress public culture and subvert ideals. LGBTQ experiences materialize in the aesthetics of advertisements, print culture, and facades where there is an ambiguity of identifying marks. LGBTQ posters, for example, have been used as ways to respond to normative genders and sexualities. They increase visibility and highlight LGBTQ community. Queer arts and aesthetics are also discussed in reference to drag shows. Drag has been used as a means to destabilize the gender binary and call into question the naturalness of normative categories. Aside from providing entertainment, drag performances have provided empowerment, support, and a home-like feeling for LGBTQ people.

Lastly, there is limited research defining LGBTQ-specific communities. The literature on defining community in general highlights the multiple and diverse ways in which community can be understood. For example, it has been defined as something that is imagined; a place to live; a way of life; or a social system. Community has also been theorized in terms of aesthetic communities. These theories are important to discuss, as LGBTQ community as defined herein, fall under this category. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that aesthetic communities do not possess positive attributes. He argues that these communities are short-lived where people create bonds without consequences and they should be best understood as a togetherness of loners. In contrast, French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, argues that aesthetic communities are positive. He argues that art in community is a means that brings people together who might normally be apart. Aesthetic communities contain a diversity of people with different senses and perceptions that engage with the art differently. This causes disagreements and

contradictions between community members. However, Rancière argues that these are productive to community.

In the methodology section of this chapter, I discuss the importance of including the lived experiences of marginalized communities in the research. I discuss the three approaches to data collection: (1) participant observation, where I interacted with the research subjects and played an active role in the research social setting (LGBTQ bars); (2) semi-structured interviews with twenty-five LGBTQ people in London; representing a diversity of genders, sexualities, races, ages, and other social demographics; and (3) archival research at two LGBTQ-specific archives in London and Toronto. In terms of the research methodology, I discuss my utilization of a feminist research methodology in taking into account the diversity of lived experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ people. I also discuss how the research was impacted by my own positionality as an insider/outsider. My involvement in the local LGBTQ community, particularly as a DJ and organizer for Gen Pop, impacted the questions I asked, my observations, as well as the ways in which I interpreted the data. The methods and methodology of this research project have been developed to take into account multiple local perspectives of LGBTQ community in London, including those of the author.

In the first findings chapter (Chapter 3), I unpack the key issues and experiences that make up LGBTQ community in my research setting. Based on themes from the interview data, I argue that LGBTQ community in London is based on four major tenets: (1) social supports; (2) common or shared visions/goals; (3) physical spaces; and (4) LGBTQ-specific events. These data depart from the normative conceptions of community as seen

in Bauman's theoretical developments on aesthetic communities (as discussed previously). I extend the definition of LGBTQ community retrospectively to an analysis of the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO), which operated from 1970-2001 and had a club and social service space for most of that time. Despite HALO's significance for the LGBTQ community in London, there is minimal mention of HALO in Canadian historical studies on LGBTQ communities. The lack of research on HALO is important to identify, as HALO was one of the most organized and persistent LGBTQ organizations in Canada. HALO showed LGBTQ people in London the possibility of creating and sustaining community through a physical space that provides a venue for supports, the development of common/shared visions or goals, and events that allowed for the growth of community through a variety of activities such as games nights and drag performances. While HALO was not without its problems, this chapter emphasizes its importance for thinking about the ways in which community can be developed and sustained in London.

In Chapter 4, I utilize the definition of LGBTQ community and apply it to three LGBTQ bars in London: (1) Buckwild's Bar; (2) Lavish; and (3) Gen Pop at the APK. I ask whether current LGBTQ bars play similar roles for community as previous spaces such as HALO. I argue that while each of these venues provide varying degrees of community, they all lack elements of certainty, continuity, and inclusion that a space like the HALO club provided to LGBTQ Londoners. Buckwild's Bar provided a physical space that hosted LGBTQ-specific events, but these events lack diversity and alienate some people. It was not identified as providing a supportive environment nor was there any common visions or goals. Buckwild's also has been stigmatized by some members of the

community due to its close proximity to the bathhouse and its location in the city. L lavish provided a safe and welcoming space for some LGBTQ people. They occasionally hosted events and participants generally enjoyed the bar when there were specific events. There were mixed reviews pertaining to the dance party atmosphere where it can be seen as positive for those wanting to dance with other LGBTQ people, but a negative for those wanting to engage in conversation with other patrons of the bar. Gen Pop at the APK provided a physical space for a diversity of forms of entertainment and activities from film screenings and trivia nights to bands, burlesque, and drag performances. This provided something for LGBTQ people of many ages and interests. People attended Gen Pop with common/shared visions or goals and an intentionality and choice for people to continuously attend Gen Pop and raise funds for LGBTQ youth. Some participants felt that Gen Pop provided a safe and supportive space for a diversity of LGBTQ people. However, Gen Pop occurred infrequently and left much waiting time between events. Gen Pop also ended its successful run after three years of community organizing. I ultimately argue that despite these downfalls, Gen Pop provides a working model for the future of LGBTQ community and bars in London.

In chapter five, I discuss the aesthetic of Gen Pop poster advertisements. I argue that this aesthetic is a queer aesthetic. I analyze data from both theories and qualitative interviews in arriving at a definition of queer and queer aesthetics. The queer aesthetic is difficult to define, as it contests categories and boundaries. I show how the posters utilize notions of camp and raunch to inform this queer aesthetic. Specifically, I discuss how this aesthetic uses irony to highlight incongruities and deviations and humour as a strategy to deal with hostile environments. Raunch aesthetics add to the queer aesthetic of Gen Pop posters by

transgressing norms through hyperbolic excess. Deviant sexual expressions are brought to the foreground through indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, and sexual explicitness to challenge the viewer's preconceived notions of bodies, gender, sexuality, and other norms. The embracement of this queer aesthetic by the Gen Pop posters highlights the offensive nature of queerness, against the backdrop of the a homonormative assimilationist logic of tolerance and acceptance. This aesthetic is also important in the creation and sustainability of community. The collision of social norms with this transgressive aesthetic creates an intertwining of contradictory relations, which, according to Rancière, are productive for community. The queer aesthetics of the Gen Pop posters play a pivotal role for LGBTQ community in London.

In Chapter 6, I analyze the role of art at Gen Pop events. I discuss how LGBTQ events function as the means through which active engagement and participation in community is fostered. I argue that drag performance and other forms of art at Gen Pop utilize a queer aesthetic to challenge social norms. The queer aesthetic at Gen Pop is one that is political in that it reconfigures fields of experience through the contestation and transgression of normative categories. This queer aesthetic not only challenges heteronormativity, but it also challenges homonormativity, and other bar cultural norms that pertain to dancing as well as other social/sexual interactions in bar spaces. It does this through the use of visual cues and interactive arts that rely on notions of camp and raunch. These queer arts are important for community as they expand our understandings and practices of gender and sexuality. Through challenging norms, the arts at Gen Pop help to build a more inclusive and political community where they engage people in dialogue and practice that can lead to socio-political change. While there are differences

of values, opinions, and experiences of gender, sexuality, and the arts at Gen Pop, it is through weaving together different sensory worlds and embracing dissensus that makes queer aesthetics so important for the development of LGBTQ community.

In the concluding chapter, I answer the three overarching research questions through a summary of the dissertation chapters. I discuss how this research is historically situated and written in a particular social context. Lastly, I discuss the future of LGBTQ communities in London and what future research in this area should look like in order to continue to positively impact LGBTQ communities in London.

1.6 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a few stories of the ways in which I started to question, learn about, and experience LGBTQ communities. I was challenged at various moments in my life to rethink what LGBTQ community looked like in comparison to my previous experiences of it. I learned that within Canada communities are created and function differently depending on the city and the social context. My experience with LGBTQ community has been an eye-opening experience where I have seen a diversity of ways that communities have come together that have challenged me to think differently about community. My more recent active involvement in community events and advocacy has changed how I have previously experienced community and I was fascinated by the ways in which I was yet again experiencing community in a way that was very different from my past experiences in this city. This ultimately led to the development of the research questions for this dissertation.

My experiences of community coupled with the challenges posed by some academic theories on community (e.g. Bauman's critique of aesthetic communities as short-lived and based on bonds without consequences), pushed me to venture into ethnography and qualitative research to investigate and illuminate the histories, knowledges, and experiences of community by LGBTQ people in London. I sought to understand the positive aspects of the creation and sustainability of LGBTQ community in London through various spaces, events, supports, and visions, and the role that the arts play in the development of community. With this, I also came to understand some of the negative aspects of community, including the exclusion of certain sub-groups of people from various LGBTQ spaces and the lack of certainty for contemporary LGBTQ communities.

Needless to say, while there are some challenges posed to the creation and sustainability of community, this dissertation research project was vital to undertake. Through learning about the traditions, knowledges, experiences, and histories of LGBTQ communities as well as some of the challenges, hardships, and politics, we can start to rethink the ways in which community is not only understood and created today, but also ways to build better LGBTQ communities in London in the future. As I have shown in this introduction, community is important for LGBTQ people in London. It provides a way for gender and sexual minorities to develop their own subjectivities through positive visibility and recognition and to participate in a variety of events that provide safety and support for the exploration of a diversity of genders and sexualities through drag performances and other arts. The arts and queer aesthetics of Gen Pop in particular provide a way for LGBTQ people in London to be political and feel a sense of empowerment through challenging

norms. This in itself engages LGBTQ people in dialogue to imagine and embrace a better community.

I started this chapter with a few anecdotes about my past experiences of community and so I will also end with one about my experience of LGBTQ community post-research. Throughout the research for this dissertation, and particularly during my fieldwork, I was amazed at the ways in which so many LGBTQ people spoke about the importance of community for them. Some came to London for school from small rural towns, some came from larger urban centres like Toronto, and the remainder have spent most of their lives in the London area. Through the interview process, I felt a connection with the ways in which people had experienced community differently through Gen Pop. It felt comforting that I was a part of an important piece of London's history. While Gen Pop came to an end after three years due to some organizers moving away and others having other commitments (like dissertations!) this experience of community that we had honed has shown me that a political LGBTQ community is possible in London and that I have a lot of exhilarating work ahead of me to continue my involvement collectively in this community for the future.

1.7 Endnotes

¹ Chris Shelley, *Transpeople: Repudiation, Trauma, Healing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008; Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

² For example, groups of gays and lesbians organized across Canada in the 1950s and 1960s for the decriminalization of homosexuality. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, groups like Comité Homosexuel Anti-repression fought against intolerance in Québec. See Tom Warner (2002) for further details.

³ Paisley Currah, Richard M. Juang, and Shannon Price Minter (eds.), *Transgender Rights*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

⁴ Elise Chenier, *Strangers in our Midst: Sexual Deviancy in Postwar Ontario*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008; Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1996; G.J.M. van den Aardweg, *Homosexuality and Hope: A Psychologist Talks About Treatment and Change*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1985.

⁵ Viviane Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2005; Barry Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*. Revised Edition. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

⁶ For example, see: Alex McClelland, Sarah Flicker, Denise Nepveux, Stephanie Nixon, Tess Vo, Ciann Wilson, Zack Marshall, Robb Travers, Devon Proudfoot. "Seeking Safer Sexual Spaces: Queer and Trans Young People Labeled with Intellectual Disabilities and the Paradoxical Risks of Restriction." *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, (2012), 808-819; Bev Lepischak, "Building Community for Toronto's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Transgender Youth." *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 16, 3-4 (2008), 81-98; Suzanne de Castell and Jennifer Jenson, "No Place Like Home: Sexuality, Community, and Identity Among Street-Involved 'Queer and Questioning' Youth." *McGill Journal of Education* 41, 3 (2006), 226-248; Viviane Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, to name a few.

⁷ This is likely due to the fact that there are larger LGBTQ populations in larger cities, designated LGBTQ neighbourhoods, and more social services and organizations that are specifically geared towards LGBTQ people.

⁸ See the various publications from the Trans PULSE Project. For example: Greta R. Bauer, Jake Pyne, Matt Caron Francino, and Rebecca Hammond, "Suicidality among Trans People in Ontario: Implications for Social Work and Social Justice," *Service Social* 59, 1 (2013): 35-62.

⁹ Health in Middlesex Men Matters! 2015, <<http://himmm.ca/>>, accessed 22 November 2015.

Chapter 2

2 Literature Review and Methodology

This chapter focuses on an extensive review of literature in the areas of LGBTQ bars; queer art and aesthetics; and theories of community. The latter section of this chapter focuses on the research methods; profiles of the research participants; and methodology and positionality.

2.1 Review of Literature

The experiences of LGBTQ people have been well documented in academic research from both historical and contemporary standpoints – so much so that many academic journals have been established for LGBTQ-specific topics (e.g. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay studies*; *Journal of Homosexuality*; *Journal of Lesbian Studies*; *LGBT Health*; and *Transgender Studies Quarterly*). In what follows, I detail the current literature as it relates to three main themes of this dissertation: LGBTQ bars; queer art and aesthetics; and community.

2.2 LGBTQ Bars

There is an array of academic research on LGBTQ bars. Most of it focuses on the roles that bars played in the beginnings of LGBTQ social movements in North America between the 1950s-1990s. In the Canadian context, the predominant focus has been on the experiences of lesbians and the bar scene, primarily in urban settings. While I have titled this section “LGBTQ Bars,” the majority of the literature on North American bars

focuses exclusively on lesbians and gays – leaving bisexual, queer, and trans people mostly on the margins of their histories.¹

In two canonical texts on LGBTQ histories in Canada – Gary Kinsman’s *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (1987) and Tom Warner’s *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (2002) – bars are discussed as important to community and movements, though they are not the sole focus of these texts. Gary Kinsman, for example, argues that bars are one of the places in which gay and lesbian cultures are produced and that the sense of community is strengthened in these social and sexual spaces.² Similarly, Tom Warner argues that gay and lesbian bars were formed to provide social activities. However, while these bars were seen as a good alternative to other heterosexual bars and social spaces, Warner also discusses how in the early 1970s, gay bars and other gay and lesbian establishments became ghettoized by having all of the bars in the same neighbourhood where it was the only acceptable place to be gay or lesbian. This was a concern for gay liberationists in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal, and so they worked to move lesbian and gay spaces beyond these ghettos, as they saw them as limiting for visibility and the gay and lesbian political agenda for social recognition.³

In Elise Chenier’s investigation of class in lesbian bar culture in Toronto 1955-1965, she argues that historians need to understand the post-WWII butch/fem lesbian culture as more complex than an explanation of these identities in relation to working class lesbians whereby the masculinity of butch lesbians, for example, are understood as coming from the working class.⁴ While more privileged lesbians in “uptown” Toronto lived a double life – where they were only out as lesbians on weekends, Chenier suggests that the

“downtowner” lesbians lived the gay life fulltime. Chenier responds to assumptions about the butchness of working class lesbians as something that is tied to the rough aspects of working class culture. Instead, she argues that these identities are more tied to survival strategies that lesbians employed in downtown bars through their involvement in criminalized activities. Chenier discusses how butch lesbians in downtown Toronto would hit on straight men in bars in order to get free drinks and to take advantage of them for their money through pickpocketing, theft, and even sex work. These lesbians were dependent on the street economy – which was tied to the bars – and saw these establishments as opportunities for sex, drugs, and money that working class butch lesbians required to survive.

Exploring a similar time period (1955-1975), Line Chamberland’s work focuses on lesbian bars in Montreal. She argues that working class lesbians played a key role in the development of lesbian bars and community in Montreal, as they were the first to appropriate spaces that were traditionally for heterosexual men and they were more outwardly visible in the public eye.⁵ Starting in the 1950s, lesbians were excluded from these male-dominated spaces in Montreal. They began infiltrating dive bars in the east end; an area associated with crime and sex work. These bars were low cost (to purchase or rent), and given their location, they were easier to afford and sustain as their own spaces. Similar to Chenier’s discussion of lesbians in downtown Toronto, working class lesbians in Montreal’s east end would participate in criminalized activities, namely sex work. By the late 1960s, as Chamberland outlines, a shift occurred within the lesbian bar culture from a focus on live entertainment venues to a focus on discotheques. Around this time, some bars also transitioned into mixed bars – attended by both lesbians and gay

men; however, there were also women-only discotheques that were dominated by the lesbian community in Montreal.

Since the 1950s, lesbian bars and spaces have transformed in Montreal. Julie Podmore documents the factors that led to the transitional character of lesbian commercial spaces since the 1950s up until the 1980s and 1990s in Montreal.⁶ She argues that lesbian bars have been “the most persistent geographical references for urban lesbian communities [...] and their role in shaping territoriality among lesbians.”⁷ Her research details the “Golden Age” of lesbian visibility in commercial spaces and bars in the 1980s. She calls this the Golden Age because it was a time when it was not difficult to know where to access lesbian spaces and there was also an abundance of lesbian-specific spaces in comparison to other decades. She identifies the decline in lesbian visibility and the challenges posed to maintaining lesbian spaces. In the 1990s, lesbian spaces were on the decline and from 1992-2003, Montreal lesbian bars dwindled from seven bars to one. Podmore argues that two factors impacted the decline of lesbian bar spaces, including gentrification, increased tourism, and increasing gay male commercial dominance of the Village Gai. Also at play were changes within the LGBTQ movement where there was more unification between diverse gender and sexual minorities and a shift to more fluid identities such as queer. These factors enabled the establishment of “melting pot” bars, and consequently, less women-only bar spaces.

In Liz Millward’s book, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84*, she documents the integral role that bars played for lesbians in major Canadian cities (e.g. Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto). Bars were the few places where

women could go and freely *be* lesbians. As mentioned previously, bars often had negative connotations associated with them, particularly as it relates to criminal behaviours. Most of the lesbian and gay bars that Millward discusses were dive bars. While there was criminal activity, fights, and dangers associated with attending and leaving these lesbian-designated spaces, Millward argues that these were spaces where women felt at home away from a world of homophobia. Bars were also seen as an avenue to keep the “gay money” in their own hands, thus illustrating the economic factors that contributed to the creation of a distinctly gay community. While bars played an important role for lesbian community, they were hard to find, as they usually were found in unmarked buildings. Millward discusses “Gay Guides” and “dimestore novels,” which were published beginning in the 1960s, as a way for lesbian women to see where the bars were across the country. Otherwise, lesbians only heard of these spaces through word-of-mouth. Millward ends her chapter on bars by discussing how discrimination by gay men in bars led lesbians to the creation of their own spaces where they were able to produce community on their own terms.⁸

The most contemporary publication on LGBTQ bars in the Canadian context is Ken Moffatt’s (2006) article on the now defunct Toronto queer monthly bar event: Vazaleen. In this article, Moffatt argues that the attendees developed a queer politic that is transformative in comparison to other homonormative bar spaces in Toronto. Vazaleen, which ran in Toronto between 1999-2009, was an event that had a diverse mixing of attendees that, as Moffatt argues, created more of a community between the multiplicities and marginal identities within the LGBTQ umbrella. Moffatt argues that the night was

more experimental and had art and performances that engaged the attendees to think more expansively about gender, sexuality, and community.⁹

The LGBTQ bar culture has been written about extensively in the United States, and I will discuss some of the seminal contributions that relate to my own work. In George Chauncey's book, *Gay New York*, he discusses the ways in which the state attempted to regulate and exclude homosexuality from the public sphere. In the late 1930s to early 1940s, the State Liquor Authority (SLA) of New York threatened the closure of bars that were patronized by gays and lesbians (as well as straight people). They had police officers inspect suspect bars and ultimately closed down a variety of bars. The closures were challenged in the courts and the court ruling said that bars were ultimately allowed to continue in operation but that no homosexual behaviour or gathering was allowed because this was considered disorderly. Bars continued to be shut down based on bylaws well into the 1950s. At one point in the 1950s there were over seventy gay bars; however, many only lasted a few months before police shut them down. According to Chauncey, this policing of bars that served gays and lesbians backfired, as organized crime syndicates started to protect and run gay bar businesses. Further, rather than excluding gays and lesbians from attending bars, the SLA regulations "ironically served to foster the creation of exclusively gay bars."¹⁰

Joan Nestle's research on New York in the 1950s focuses exclusively on lesbian bars and beaches. Similar to Chauncey, she discusses how lesbians gathered in allotted spaces away from societal homophobias, but that they were heavily policed not just by the city police, but also by the bar owners. Nestle recalls her experience attending the Sea Colony

– a lesbian bar that was controlled by the mafia. The Sea Colony was a space where women could dance together and dress in non-gender-conforming clothing. Nestle argues that through bars like the Sea Colony, lesbians found and established a powerful community. However, these spaces were still controlled spaces and so lesbians would often travel to the outskirts of Brooklyn to the beaches of Riis Park. While the beaches were still policed, there was more space and less control for women to be liberated and create “the semblance of communal permanence” that was lacking in other bars and spaces in the New York.¹¹

In the mid 1970s, Diane Taub studied the role that bars played in the lives of college-aged gay males (age 17-24) in a small south-eastern American city with a population of 40, 000. This analysis is interesting in that studies prior to this focused on older gay men in larger cities where there are numerous gay spaces, as seen in Chauncey’s research for example. Taub’s study concluded that most social activities among gay men in this small city occurred exclusively at the bar. Participants found that the bar was a space where gays could socialize freely without fears of stigmatization, a venue to meet future love interests or sexual partners, and a location to experience gay-related entertainment such as drag shows and other social events.¹²

Similar to Taub, Carlos Cáceres and Jorge Cortiñas (1997) also studied a population that is under-researched in studies of lesbian and gay bars and spaces, that of a Latino gay bar. Set in a large American city, this bar was frequented by a diversity of patrons, including gay Latinos, lesbian Latinas, straight couples, and “vestidas” – similar to drag queens in Anglo gay culture. Cáceres and Cortiñas argue that bars “constitute a key reference point

for important portions of the population in several communities, as they offer diverse options for the use of leisure time and provide opportunities for socialization.”¹³ While they see the bar as a positive aspect of gay Latina/o communities, due to the multiple marginalities that makeup the patrons (e.g. immigrant status, homosexuality, and taboo space), the people who frequent the bar are a hidden population that are disconnected from social action programs and AIDS prevention work. Cáceres and Cortiñas argue that the gay and lesbian Latina/o population are socially marginalized due to their experiences of racism, poverty, and violence, so they see the bar as a positive safety net away from the negative effects of their marginalization and vulnerability outside of the bar.

Participants in their study experienced the other bar patrons as their “surrogate family and community” and as a place for sexual and racial belonging. However, while the bar was experienced as a positive place, due to the role of alcohol and drugs, Cáceres and Cortiñas argue that there are greater risks for the contraction of STDs. Despite these negative implications of the bar space, they ultimately see it as an important social support for the community and also a place for further support around AIDS prevention.

Fiona Buckland’s book, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (2002), is the most extensive contemporary analysis of gay bars in New York City.

Through an examination of a variety of aspects of gay bars including buildings, bodies, memory, dancing, political agency, and cultural capital, Buckland’s research analyzes the ways in which worlds are made and spaces are claimed. She argues that through activities such as dance, queer communities are able to embody memory and political agency that defies heteronormativity. Queers develop a lifeworld based on movement, pleasure, individuality, and togetherness. Dancing in a club weaves together a diversity of gender

and sexual minorities in an improvised way where there are expressive, creative, and transformative possibilities that are formed from moment to moment and where the boundary between viewer and dancer is blurred. She also argues that dancing at a queer club is a mechanism that leads to queer world making where creativity and subjectivity enable social change. Queers find opportunities for social exchange and empowerment, which are contrary to their experiences in a homophobic world. Their memories, experiences, and imaginations of the dance club allowed them to redefine the pleasures that heteronormativity renders invisible.¹⁴

Lastly, Corey Johnson (2005) more recently studied dancing and the gender roles of gay men at a country-western gay bar. Johnson argues that gay men are active and creative agents in their gender performance where they are simultaneously resisting and reinforcing normative roles in terms of gender and sexuality through dance. He specifically analyzes the ways in which the two-step dance is performed between gay dance partners at the bar. In two-stepping each person has a functional role as either the lead or the follower. The lead has control over the movements of the entire dance. Normally in heterosexual contexts, the men are the leads and the women are the followers. However, Johnson argues that these gendered roles are not so clear-cut in the gay bar. The gay two-step, he argues, challenges hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality, which both require men to take the lead and distance each other from intimate contact. Not only are men able to take the lead or follow, but many switch roles and do both, which effectively challenges normative expectations between dance partners where one is active and the other is passive.¹⁵

2.3 Queer Arts and Aesthetics

There is a plethora of literature on the variations of queer arts and aesthetics. A summary of such would be a book on its own. Many academic texts on queer aesthetics are based on poetry and literature (e.g. McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011; Bruhm 2001; Wittig, 1992; Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990; and de Lauretis, 1987); however, that is not the focus in this section. Instead, the emphasis for the purpose of this dissertation is specific to visual arts including, but not limited to, installations, posters, and performing arts (such as drag performances). These texts range from theoretical discussions of queer art and aesthetics to qualitative and ethnographic studies on queer arts.

Turning first to theoretical texts on queer art and aesthetics, Whitney Davis' text, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond*, is a comprehensive examination of various philosophies throughout the history of art. In the first chapter, in particular, she proposes a rereading of a variety of ancient Greek images and statues to suggest that these normative masculine statues and paintings also represent homosexual identities and homoerotic desires. Davis utilizes theoretical developments from the works of Kant and Winckelmann to highlight some important considerations when arriving at a theory of queer aesthetics.

Winckelmann's understanding of the historicity of *Nachahmung* (trans. imitation, mimicking, and emulation) is a key component to Davis' reading of queer art. According to Davis, art that comes after an Ideal of the past need not always be imagined as a progression or improvement toward a supreme ideality. Rather than a straightforward

sequence, it is a cycle with complex rhythms moving toward *and* away from “aesthetic formalizations that temporarily stabilize a community's sense of the ideal.”¹⁶ Queer aesthetics are part of a cycle of constant becoming, reshaping, and fluidity of sexual identities. This *Nachahmung* of art is never completed; the ideal is something that is continually detached from itself. In the Kantian sense, however, cycles of *Nachahmung* can potentially advance the universalization of the Ideal.¹⁷ Through a reading of Forberg's *Manual of Classical Erotology*, Davis understands these “pornographic” images as representations of immoral acts that are intended to transgress public culture and subvert its ideals. This is beauty queered, which “constitute(s) the possibility of an alternate visual culture.”¹⁸ Davis sees instances such as these within the history of art as having artistic and political value, but they do not create queer beauty. Beauty, for Davis, is working toward an ideal whereas beauty queered works to subvert ideals.

What at times are complicated in LGBTQ research are the differences between queer and trans identities and experiences. Historically, there have been tensions between trans and queer communities. For example, some trans people do not see their gender experiences as being the same as, nor tied to, the experiences of sexual minorities. Further, some argue that the T in LGBTQ is often added to gay and lesbian organizations, but it is often ignored and seen by some trans people as mere tokenism. These tensions have been discussed at length (e.g. Devor and Matte, 2004; Elliot, 2009; Halberstam, 1998; Stryker, 2008). The relationship between trans and queer communities as they relate to aesthetics has been explored by Quinn Miller though he sees tensions as positive and relatable. Miller expands Jack Halberstam's “transgender aesthetic” as that which simultaneously inhabits both the abstract and the figural. Self-understanding, sex, and trans aesthetics

come together in queer times and queer places in very complex ways. Miller's research is based on trans aesthetics as found on building facades, photographs, and advertisements for queer places and spaces in the 1960s-80s. These, Miller claims, “produce a powerful aura around ‘queer exteriors’ – representations of places and bodies that endow their surfaces, or their relative absence or ambiguity of identifying marks, with meaning conducive to gender transition and complexity.”¹⁹ Sex changes and gender transition are individual experiences, but they also resonate through trans people's interpersonal relationships and public culture in general. Encounters between trans people and their communities often yield new reflections, self-perceptions, erotic imaginaries, and gendering habits of everyday experience. For Miller, these experiences are situated in “the living archive of geography around sex and its impact on built environments.”²⁰ Yet queer and trans cultural memory is not just found in experience, but also in intertextual networks of media production and the transformations of physical spaces. Queer sex and gender transition materialize in a variety of printed signs and building facades. The aesthetics of many facades are both abstract and figural. The images represent possibilities of social encounters and sex exchanges. Miller states:

Through combinations of figural and abstract aesthetics, queer exteriors conveyed intangible elements about a neighbourhood's inhabitants at the same time as the visual information they relayed rendered the community's actual participants accessible in everyday life. The trans aesthetic in queer exteriors worked not only by representing shifts across the abstract and the figural, but also by overlaying the figural and the abstract as one and the same. Queer exteriors produced a transgender aesthetic by complicating distinctions between abstract and figural representations of space in relation to people's bodies and their reception...Queer exteriors' trans aesthetics projected a space of possibility for the interaction of internal and external manifestations of a place. The abstract dimensions of the graphics' figurative imagery meshed people and places, allowing building facades and bodies to resonate with shifts between the relationship of insides and outsides along a current intertwined with trans identification and practices.²¹

Miller suggests that the aesthetics of alternative print cultures “generate different possible forms of gender and gender transition. The connection between queer and trans representation may appear to be at once highly metaphoric and too literal, yet it is something else altogether, something that captures crucial material aspects of trans history as a long-standing collaborative process that is equally abstract and figural.”²² He further argues that “the trans aesthetics of the queer exterior...suggests a different history, a system of collective exchange in which the implicit creativity of queer and trans practices are as inseparable as the abstract and figural features of their cultural production.”²³

In Claire Colebrook's research on queer aesthetics, she questions “becoming” as a normative standard that underlies the ethical, the political, and the aesthetic. Becoming is normative, according to Colebrook for two reasons: first, it is presented as a self-evident good rather than one norm or good among many others and it is an a priori condition that allows ‘good’ to follow; and second, “if we accept that there is becoming, then we are impelled to be self-normativizing...if the subject were not to give itself to itself, not affect itself and realize itself, then it would have abandoned its proper potentiality *to act and become*.”²⁴ In contrast to this normative becoming, however, is a queer becoming in a Deleuzian sense: “here, becoming does not realize and actualize itself, does not flourish into presence, but bears a capacity to annihilate itself, to refuse its *ownness* in order to attach, transversally, to becomings whose trajectories are external and unmasterable.”²⁵ What is most relevant to queer aesthetics is the localization of becoming. Colebrook writes: “it is a force of a particular quantity, in relation to another quantity, producing a point of relative stability, or a field. In terms of ‘the aesthetic,’ then, it is not a question of

art practice returning the subject or creative potentiality to the sense of its own forming power. Rather, the art object would be the result of a collision not intended or reducible to any single life.”²⁶

Aside from theoretical discussions of queer art and aesthetics, there are also other approaches to the topic from historical, sociological, and qualitative perspectives. Turning more specifically to LGBTQ poster adverts, there is a very small body of literature in this area and most of it focuses on marketing practices aimed at LGBTQ communities (e.g. Wardlow, 1996; Clift, Luongo, and Callister, 2002).²⁷ However, from more of an artistic investigation, Betti-Sue Hertz, Ed Eisenberg, and Lisa Maya Knauer (1997), analyzed the significance of a public art exhibition in the mid-90s in New York entitled REPOhistory. These poster installations were located at former queer landmarks throughout the city. The purpose of the exhibition was to validate LGBTQ histories and cultural memory in everyday spaces. This poster exhibition was a way to increase queer visibility and highlight past political activism through a diversity of imagery. Hertz et al. argue that these poster signs were an assertive intervention in the routine of the everyday in New York and sparked dialogue not only within the gay community but also between a diversity of urban communities. These signs “called attention to themselves first, in order to encourage the viewer to think about the meanings of the space around them. They educated by using small bits of history and became a metaphor for the larger picture in scattered increments.”²⁸

While there is less literature on LGBTQ poster adverts, the opposite is true for literature on the aesthetics of drag performance. From a Canadian historical perspective, for

example, Laurel Halladay (2004) explores cross-dressing in Canadian military entertainment during World War II (WWII). She discusses the Dumbbells drag troupe that toured army bases to increase the morale of the soldiers. These performances were a representation of femininity and womanhood – both the positive and negative representations. Halladay argues that this was needed due to the absence of women in the army. Rather than bending gender, as seen in more contemporary drag performances, Halladay further argues that female impersonator performers portrayed stereotypes of women that reinforced gender norms. Near the end of WWII, women started to have roles in the military, so this type of entertainment was not needed as much and thus diminished in its importance for the Canadian military.²⁹

In the United States a few decades post-WWII, Esther Newton (1972) completed an in-depth qualitative study of drag performers. Entitled *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, this book is considered an iconic text within the study of drag performance. Through ethnographic methods, Newton investigates what she calls transvestism in American gay culture. She distinguishes between what she sees as the two different types of female impersonators: street performers versus stage performers. There is a major class difference between the two types of impersonators. “Street fairies,” according to Newton, are a lower class in the gay world; they resort to drugs, sex work, and a whole different lifestyle than those who are stage performers. Stage performers limit their impersonator identities to the stage and are not involved in the drug and sex work world. Street fairies, according to Newton, instigated the Stonewall riots and did so because they had nothing to lose and did not have any long-term goals. They were more prone to anarchy, violence, and other forms of front-line activism while stage performers

did not participate in any of these actions. Newton argues that because of this social and class divide between the two types of female impersonators within the gay community that there was a lack of unity in the community.³⁰

Similar to Newton's analysis, but in a more contemporary context, Dana Berkowitz, Linda Belgrave, and Robert Halberstein (2007) discuss how the level of professionalization of drag queens impacts how the performers interact with gay men and other bar patrons. On amateur drag night, for example, the authors found that there was less of a separation between the performers and the audience. Two main factors impacted the interaction between performers and patrons: the type of venue and the seriousness of the event. They found that amateur nights often occurred in spaces where there was not a physical barrier, such as a tall stage, separating the performers from the patrons and these types of events tended to have an atmosphere that was more friendly and humorous. Outside of the performances, drag queens on amateur nights had close contact – including conversations and sometimes sexual contact – with the bar patrons. At dance clubs, where drag queens were professionally hired, they had limited interaction and contact with the audience before, during, and after the performances. The space difference was in stark contrast to amateur night. The authors concluded that the lack of interaction by professional drag queens led to more segregated communities versus that of amateur nights.³¹ The distinction between different types of drag performers will be taken up in Chapter Six, where I discuss the role of drag and the arts for LGBTQ community in London.

Andrea Davis (2013) discusses the ways in which the space of a (sometimes) gay bar is transformed based on the performances of drag queens. Through her ethnography, she concluded that the bar space moved between a stable and an unstable space at various times. According to the study participants, the bar space has been interpreted as a home space, a recreation space, as well as a constant negotiation between a safe and a risky space. Feelings of being at home were established by recognition and a welcoming atmosphere created by interactions with bar staff and patrons. Home has its associations with family, and while this may be a negative association for some, through the drag nights, chosen families were established among performers and patrons. The bar space was also interpreted as a recreation space because its design allowed and encouraged a wide array of activities from playing pool and games in one room, socializing in the bar room, and dancing on the dance floor. Finally, the bar was interpreted as a safe space. There were visible LGBTQ posters and information booklets, as well as drag queens throughout the bar space. This visibility made participants feel like it was a safe place to be. While the space was generally considered a safe space for drag queens to perform and bar patrons to enjoy the show, there were issues with consent, objectification, drug use, and power structures between bar staff and the patrons that challenged the perceived safety of the bar space.³²

Drag has also been analyzed in terms of what it means to be a drag performer and the incentives gained through performance. For example, in taking up questions posed by queer theorist Judith Butler (to be discussed later), Taylor and Rupp (2004) ask whether drag performances destabilize gender and sexual categories or reinforce dominant binaries. Through a series of case studies of drag queens, Taylor and Rupp argue that

performers use drag not to portray a strict binary of masculinity and femininity, but rather as a way to develop their own complex genders. Costumes, for example, allowed the performers to play with their identities and reject authenticity. Through self-presentation and drag performance, according to Taylor and Rupp, performers were able to highlight the artificial nature of gender.³³

In terms of incentives gained through performance, Steven J. Hopkins (2004) discusses the motivating factors behind drag performances including contextual power and status, self-affirmation, and empowerment. Drag performance, he argues, is a way for individuals to create their own drag identity and is like a second coming out for many performers. Through contests at amateur nights, for example, performers are able to show off their self-developed drag identities. Not only do drag performers have support from audiences in a club, but they also gain support through their drag families who often provide creative, emotional, and sometimes financial support. These positives for many drag performers outweigh the negatives that some experience such as bruised egos, rejection from family and friends, or discrimination. Drag, as Hopkins argues, enriches the lives of performers in ways that they may not experience in other aspects of their lives.³⁴

A literature review on drag performance would not be complete without the inclusion of the works from a prominent feminist theorist. Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) work is perhaps the most cited theory when it comes to research on gender and drag performance. Central to her earlier work in *Gender Trouble* is the idea that gender is constructed through the repetitive performance of gender. Gender is not a stable identity in which acts

of gender follow; rather, it is something that is fluid and created through performance. Butler discusses drag as a medium that parodies and subverts gender; it imitates dominant conventions of gender.³⁵

She expands her discussion of drag in *Bodies that Matter* and suggests that drag is a subversive medium in the sense that it is reflective of the “imitative structures” of hegemonic gender and calls into question the claim that heterosexuality is natural and original. However, Butler is quick to point out that drag is also a site of ambivalence whereby it can be used to both denaturalize and re-idealize heterosexual gender norms. While the performativity of gender may not ever be based on an element of freedom, drag performance is a medium through which the naturalness of normative categories of sex, gender, and sexuality can be contested and reconfigured.³⁶

While Butler’s theoretical discussions of both gender and drag have changed the ways in which feminist researchers have studied these topics, they are not without their issues. Perhaps the most comprehensive opposition to Butler’s work comes from the work of feminist scholar Viviane Namaste. Namaste (2000; 2005; 2009) is critical of the ways in which Anglo-American feminist theory has used the lives and bodies of transgender people to advance the theory of gender as performative. Namaste’s work is mainly based in Montreal where drag queens are seen as part of the transgender community and historically have had ties to sex work in trans communities. In her most recent article on this subject, Namaste is critical of the ways in which theorists, namely Butler, use transgender people to advance their theories, but their work does not, according to Namaste, improve the lives of transsexuals and transvestites. Namaste is critical of the

separation between transgender theory and practice and proposes some central principles that ought to be included in feminist research on transgender experiences in order to transform the production of knowledge to benefit transgender communities. Transgender communities disproportionately experience higher rates of HIV, suicide, drug overdose, and instances of violence. These realities of transgender people are, according to Namaste, absent from most feminist theory on the lives of transgender people. Namaste is calling for a reframing of the ways in which feminist scholars engage in transgender research to better serve transgender communities.³⁷ While these are important criticisms to consider, similar to the work of Taylor and Rupp, this dissertation will ask whether more contemporary studies of drag performance bear out or disavow Butler's analysis and if an analysis of drag performance in London can benefit local LGBTQ communities.

2.4 Defining (LGBTQ) Community

Turning to the academic research on LGBTQ community, there is limited literature that discusses the defining elements of LGBTQ communities. LGBTQ academic literature has tended to focus on issues of belonging (e.g. Probyn, 1996; Atkins, 2003; Fortier, 2003; Dryden and Lenon, 2015), issues of sexual citizenship (e.g. Provencher, 2007; Ryan-Flood, 2009; Lewis, 2010; Josephson, 2016), or, aside from the LGBTQ bar literature as discussed previously, issues of queer spaces (e.g. Valentine, 1995; Betsky, 1997; Désert, 1997; Rushbrook, 2002; Ahmed, 2006). Aside from a book chapter by Gordon Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, studies defining LGBTQ community remain largely invisible from much of LGBTQ research.

In their concluding chapter in a collection of essays on queer space, Ingram et al., propose a common vision for imagining, planning, and sustaining forms of queer community. They succinctly define queer community as “a full collection of a select subset of queer networks for a particular territory, with relatively stable relationships that enhance interdependence, mutual support, and protection.”³⁸ Physical space is required for queer communities, ones that recognize the differences within community and the need for a queer place. Ingram et al., argue that it is increasingly important to defend spaces for queer community, as there is an increasing social fragmentation that limits the inhabitation of community spaces by gender and sexual minorities.

With the exception of LGBTQ studies, research on the defining characteristics of community is plentiful, especially in philosophy and the social sciences. As French philosopher Jacques Rancière suggests, “Theorizing about community and its purpose has been going on ever since [the Western] philosophical tradition kicked off.”³⁹ Indeed, there is an abundance of literature that defines and discusses the purpose of community in general. Here, I briefly summarize some of these works before I turn to a theoretical discussion of aesthetic communities.

Mary Rousseau (1991) turns to the word “community” through an etymological analysis to understand its meaning. Community is the conjoining of two Latin words: *com*, meaning together or with, and *unus*, the number one. She argues that therefore “a community, it seems is both one and many – a unified multitude or a multiple unity of some sort...Community is a ‘many turned into one without ceasing to be many.’ Such a concept is a paradox. But it is a necessary one, for a single individual is not a community,

nor is just any multitude.”⁴⁰ According to Raymond Plant (1974), community is best understood as a social and political ideal, one that is also an elusive concept. Despite its elusive nature, he argues that community is something that people cherish. However, the decline of the traditional community (through liberalism’s focus on the individual) “frees people from what they do not like, but it [also] leaves them on their own.”⁴¹

While Rousseau argues that community as a concept is paradoxical and Plant argues that community is an elusive concept, others have worked to define community based on social scientific research. Jessie Bernard (1949), for example, discusses three types of behaviours that are components of community. These are organization, competition, and conflict and there is interplay amongst them. Bernard understands organization as a pattern of rules – whether customary, legal, or moral rules – that regulate behaviour. Second, competition within a community is understood as a function of scarcity. Third, conflict is behaviour of incompatibilities and differences.⁴² Irwin Sanders (1966) has an alternative understanding of community. He argues that there are four different ways to understand community: community as a place to live; community as a spatial unit; community as a way of life; and community as a social system. While Sanders sees all of these as different ways that community is understood, he suggests that it is best understood as a social system, one that is investigated through observation and fieldwork.⁴³ Amitai Etzioni (1993) understands community through a communitarian lens. He argues that community requires foundations in the family; schools and education; social webs, such as clubs and neighbourhoods; and a national society to ensure cooperation between local communities.⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson (1983) understands community as imagined political communities. He argues that nations can be understood

as communities without its citizens having face-to-face contact with one another. He sees the nation as a deep sense of camaraderie imbedded in the lives and day-to-day practices of a people. This is what constitutes them as a community.⁴⁵

This short summary of the ways in which community has been defined is not meant to provide a comprehensive list of the definitions of community over the history of philosophy and social sciences; rather, it is to highlight the diversity of the ways in which community has been discussed and understood. It is clear that there is an abundance of research on the topic of community. For the purpose of this dissertation, there must also be a discussion of the ways in which aesthetic communities are understood. I provide two main theoretical approaches to aesthetic communities through the works of sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and philosopher Jacques Rancière.

Community, according to Bauman, is a word that feels good – or it is always seen as a positive thing with promises of pleasure. Of course, there might be conflict within our communities, but the community is supposedly forgiving; we can apologize, repent, and people will forgive/forget and not hold grudges. For Bauman: “Our duty, purely and simply, is to help each other, and so our *right*, purely and simply, is to expect that the help we need will be forthcoming”.⁴⁶ Community is a great sounding word, and more importantly, something many people long to have in their lives.⁴⁷

Community, while having its positive, feel good aspects, is not without its problems. In fact, Bauman is quick to remind us that this so-called community is not actually available to us. He claims: “Community is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to

which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there.”⁴⁸ Certainly, given the quick changing liquidity of modern Western society,⁴⁹ this community as a warm circle or a utopian ideal may never actually be acquired.

Nevertheless, while there may not currently be a community in the ways in which Bauman understands it, we can still attempt to acquire such a community. For Bauman, there undoubtedly is a community that is part of a dream, yet this is much different from how community currently exists in modernity. He suggests that there is an inherent problem with the privilege of being in the current state of community: a balance of security and freedom as well as a balance of community and the individual is never fully acquired. Instead, there is always a friction between them. According to Bauman, we cannot have both freedom and security in the quantities that we supposedly want; however, again, Bauman suggests that this is not enough reason to give up in our quest for community.⁵⁰

The creation of a community and any changes made to it ought to be determined solely by the decisions made by the individuals who comprise it.⁵¹ The allegiance created in a community should never become immutable. Bauman suggests that community, instead, should be understood in the Weberian sense as “a light cloak, not a steel casing, that is sought.”⁵² For Bauman, the aesthetic community as identified by Immanuel Kant, meets these requirements. Here, identity, like beauty, “has no other foundation to rest on but widely shared agreement...expressed in a consensual approval of judgement or in uniform conduct. Just as beauty boils down to artistic experience, the community in question is brought forth and consumed in the 'warm circle' of experience.”⁵³ However, there is a

paradox of this aesthetic community: it would betray the freedom of those who compose it—that is, if it claimed non-negotiable qualities. Bauman elaborates on this and suggests that an aesthetic community is based on judgement and passion as holding together an aesthetic community, but he says that the shelf life for this type of community is short, as he claims that passions are notoriously volatile.⁵⁴ While Bauman does not provide a specific example of this type of community, he suggests that it occurs frequently in the entertainment industry. A specific example is a concert where there is a shared focus of attention and passion among a crowd of spectators toward a particular artist. While in the moment of the concert there appears to be a shared passion, this community is short-lived because the attendees leave the concert and go their separate individual ways and their passions or judgement for this particular musical act may also change over time (thus making them negotiable). For Bauman, aesthetic communities are thus problematic. He argues, “The need for aesthetic community, notably the variety of aesthetic community, which services the construction/dismantling of identity, tends for those reasons to be as much self-perpetuating as it is self-defeating. That need is never to be gratified, and neither will it ever stop prompting the search for satisfaction.”⁵⁵ Spectators in aesthetic communities are rewarded with a feeling of belonging; however, members of this so-called community are actually part of a community of non-belonging: “a togetherness of loners.”⁵⁶ These individuals are, “listening to the stories of unhappy childhoods, bouts of depression and broken marriages; they are reassured that being alone means being in a big company and that fighting it all alone is what makes them all into a community.”⁵⁷

Here, there are no real relationships – or if there appear to be some, they are superficial, as long-lasting attachments are short-lived in the aesthetic community. There is only the

illusion of a real community experience.⁵⁸ Bauman argues that aesthetic communities “are ready-made, instant communities for on-the-spot consumption – they are also fully disposable after use. These are communities, which do not require a long history of slow and painstaking construction, do not need laborious effort to secure their future.”⁵⁹

Bauman suggests that events are perfect examples of these types of communities and that they are especially problematic based solely on their specific temporal dimension: these communities are always short-lived. They come together for specific durations and then dissolve “having reassured [their] members that tackling individual problems individually while using individual wits and skills is the right thing to do and a thing that all other individuals do with some success and never an ultimate defeat.”⁶⁰ While there are a variety of aesthetic communities, Bauman argues that they all possess common characteristics: they are superficial and perfunctory, transient, and produce short-lived bonds. Most important to aesthetic communities, however, is the fact that they do not base themselves on ethical responsibilities or long-term commitments. The bonds created are bonds *without* consequences.⁶¹

Aesthetic communities, according to Bauman, are experienced in the moment, on the spot, and they therefore do not resolve problems of community. He suggests that there is a need for ethics in community, which is not available in aesthetic communities. For Bauman, there is a need for individuals to “seek a kind of community which could, collectively, make good what they, individually, lack and miss. The community they seek would be an ethical community, in almost every respect *the opposite of the 'aesthetic' variety*.”⁶² According to Bauman, there are three qualities that are warranted in order for a community to be ethical: certainty, security, and safety. The majority of people,

however, cannot access these qualities, when “they are going alone” in aesthetic communities.⁶³

Rancière has a more positive understanding and approach to understanding aesthetics and community in comparison to the criticisms posed by Bauman. He also has a different definition of what constitutes a community. In terms of the role of art in community, Rancière sees the utilization of art (including dance, performance, music, etc.) as a mechanism that brings people together in a community. Rancière discusses the importance of artistic interventions in creating communities and the utilization of art in bringing people together who might normally be apart. Rancière suggests that:

The link between the solitude of the artwork and human community is a matter of transformed ‘sensation.’ What the artist does is to weave together a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience. Weaving this new fabric means creating a form of common expression or a form of expression of the community... What is common is ‘sensation.’ Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together.’⁶⁴

The sensory transformation of being together, according to Rancière, “undergoes a complex set of connections and disconnections.”⁶⁵ The interaction with the artwork is a dialectical one that seizes and rends. For Rancière,

The result of this dialectic is a ‘vibration’ whose power is transmitted to the human community – that is, to a community of human beings whose activity is itself defined in terms of seizing and rending: suffering, resistance, cries. However, in order for the complex of sensations to communicate its vibration, it has to be solidified in the form of a monument... This monument transmits the suffering, protest and struggle of human beings.⁶⁶

An aesthetic community is a community of sense, which includes a combination of different sense data: spaces, forms, words, visuals, and rhythms, and so on.⁶⁷ While there are a diversity of sense data and people who may have varying interpretations of art, Rancière suggests that this tension between different people or the “intertwining of contradictory relations” produces community.⁶⁸ Rancière calls this the “dissensus” of community and sees disagreements as productive to community.

Disagreement is an integral concept for Rancière’s understanding of community and politics. According to Rancière, politics is at the very basis of community and the basis of politics is disagreement. He defines disagreement as:

a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness.⁶⁹

Here, both parties understand and do not understand the same thing by the same words.

Rancière is critical of those who suggest that everything is political. For if everything were political then nothing is political.⁷⁰ Politics is that which reconfigures fields of experience. It is a relationship between different worlds. Through subjectification, politics invents worlds of community, which are also by default, worlds of dissension.⁷¹

Rancière also discusses how politics are in opposition to the police. The police are in charge of distributing the sensible.⁷² They are a mechanism for the law that works to keep the order and enforce norms. They define and allocate ways of doing, being, and saying.

The police assign tasks and places to particular bodies in a community.⁷³ Politics runs in opposition to the police. Politics reconfigures a space for the visibility of a people rather than the circulation of people in a space like the ways in which the police operate. The police work to configure its space to where dissensus is manifested.⁷⁴

Dissensus is the manifestation of a gap in the sensible.⁷⁵ It is an inevitable conflict between the sensory worlds of multiple people in a community. These contradictory relations are what produce community.⁷⁶ The dissensual community produces the realities of a more diverse community. It is the opposite to consensus. Consensus would mean that the sensory experience of art in a community is univocal. However, what is seen and experienced through art in a community are multiple possibilities and trajectories.⁷⁷ Dissensus is the inevitable condition of community that will not go away “after the revolution.” Instead, Rancière’s understanding of an emancipated community is one where the capacities of all are collectively investing in dissensus.⁷⁸ These ideas will be elaborated upon in the following chapters where I discuss the variety of sensory experiences and artistic interventions in London’s LGBTQ communities.

2.5 Methods

This dissertation is a multidisciplinary qualitative research project that employed several different data gathering techniques, which were informed by ethnographic methods.⁷⁹ These types of approaches are often used with marginalized populations as a way to include community members more actively in the research process and to ensure a transparent dialogue with the participants. Ethnography is important in illuminating

aspects of LGBTQ culture that may not be captured in standard qualitative interview approaches.⁸⁰ The research was conducted using three different approaches – participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival research.

The first approach involved participant observation and note-taking while attending LGBTQ community events in London (many of which took place in bars and nightclubs).⁸¹ This involved not only observing the ways in which event attendees interact with others, but also being an active participant in the events (e.g. dancing and conversing). I took notes of my observations of these interactions (e.g. how people respond to the music or performers at the venues or if there are certain distinct characteristics about sub-group dynamics at the events), which originally were recorded in a notebook. However, given my active participation in various events, I chose to take notes on my cellphone instead, as this allowed me to blend in with the crowds, as I was likely interpreted by onlookers to be typing text messages. This was an important phase for research, as I was able to witness the ways in which LGBTQ people engage in community activities, which would have been more difficult to capture in a standard interview. Not only was I able to further understand the lives of some of the interview participants, but this also provided me with the opportunity to observe and understand social dynamics of other LGBTQ people who were not interviewed.

In the second data gathering technique employed in this study, I conducted twenty (plus five key informant) semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ people who lived in London in order to gain knowledge of their individual experiences and understandings of local LGBTQ communities. Participants were between the ages of 19 and 71 and made up a

diversity of genders and sexualities, including: cis men and women, trans men and women, genderqueers, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, straights, queers, and other self-defined identities. Potential interview participants were recruited in three main ways. First, I recruited participants in person by visiting LGBTQ-specific venues (e.g. Lavish Nightclub), where I introduced myself as a researcher, briefly described the research project, and provided cards with my contact information as well as the requirements for eligibility.⁸² Second, I recruited potential participants at venues, events, and social services throughout the city through the placement of posters on their walls or bulletin boards.⁸³ Third, I relied on the insights and expertise of LGBTQ community groups and service agencies through advertising my research project on their emailing lists and different social media websites.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations including my apartment, participants' homes, libraries, and other public venues.⁸⁴ Three overarching research questions guided these discussions: What are the constitutive elements that make up London's LGBTQ communities? What forms of community-making prove to be viable and effective in a smaller urban setting? Does the practice of aesthetics/artistic performance lead to socio-political change among members of London's LGBTQ communities? I utilized an interview guide (see Appendix D) for all of the interviews to ensure that I asked the same core questions to each participant, which was essential to ensure consistency among my data and that I gathered information that would enable me to answer my primary research questions. I left space in each interview for probing questions that followed the unique trajectories of participants' narratives.

The sample of twenty participants made up a diverse representation of LGBTQ people in London. The sample size is large enough to provide both breadth and depth of a diversity of LGBTQ lived experiences while also remaining manageable for a dissertation project.⁸⁵ I practiced purposive sampling techniques to select a diverse sample that captures the range of experiences within London's LGBTQ community.⁸⁶ Utilizing this technique did not involve seeking out particular respondents; rather, in my dialogue with potential participants I asked general questions to ensure that they represent the diversity of the community (e.g. sexual or gender identity).

In addition to the twenty interviews, I also conducted separate interviews with five key informants. These individuals had to be LGBTQ people who have lived in London for at least twenty years. This twenty-year timeframe was important because I wanted to interview participants who were in London during key historical moments (such as the growth and demise of the Homophile Association of London Ontario, the development of pride festivities, and the mayor's refusal to allow a gay pride parade). The nature of the questions for the key informants was not substantially different from the questions asked to the other twenty participants. Rather, the questions were more retrospective and were intended to provide in-depth perspectives and contextualize the political and social histories of London's LGBTQ communities (e.g. the growth and demise of HALO).

Through conversations with bar owners, friends, and other active LGBTQ community members in conjunction with my own knowledge of various LGBTQ people in London, I developed a list of six potential key informants. Five of them agreed to participate. They were chosen on the basis of their various levels of involvement in the community and to

ensure a diversity of participants.⁸⁷ They include: Blake,⁸⁸ a gay man in his mid 30s who has performed as a drag queen/female impersonator for close to fifteen years; Jones, a queer/lesbian in her mid 60s, who has owned a variety of LGBTQ businesses; Chef, a queer/gay man in his mid 40s, who is a self-identified punk and was involved in a lot of LGBTQ activism in the 1990s; Richard, a gay man in his early 70s, who used to work in the field of health and social services and was an LGBTQ activist during the 1980s and 1990s; and Dawn, a lesbian in her mid 40s, who, since the mid-1980s, has been active in the lesbian scene and has attended a variety of bars and community events ever since. While all of the key informants had some similar experiences participating in many of the same bars, events, and other social activities, their perspectives and experiences overall were diverse. They provide rich accounts of the evolution of London's LGBTQ community as well as the struggles in sustaining community in London.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours depending on the responses. Every interview was audio-recorded with the participant's permission. After each of the interviews was completed – for both the general interviews and the key informant interviews – they were transcribed verbatim (by myself). A copy of the interview was sent to the participant via e-mail. This was done as part of a member-checking process to allow each participant to review the contents of the interview and add any forgotten details.⁸⁹ During my e-mail exchange with all of the participants, I also asked follow-up questions and probed some of the data for more clarity.

The third data collection technique involved archival research. This was completed at two locations: the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto and the Hudler

Archives at Western University Libraries. For both of these archival collections, I created a list of the key concepts and terms generated by my research questions (e.g. LGBTQ community groups in London; events in London, Ontario; drag performances in London; bar advertisements in London), and I used that list to investigate the archival collections, comparing the archival collection descriptions with this list to determine what might be pertinent to retrieve from the archival stacks. Documents that were of relevance to my research project were photocopied, scanned, or photographed and organized in sections based on the key concepts of my research project.

2.6 Coding and Analysis

After the data were gathered through participation observation, interviews, and archival research, the data was printed out into hard copies and organized according to typology or source (i.e. all of the data from the CLGA was in one pile, data from the key informant interviews were in another pile, and so forth) in preparation for thematic coding. To do this, I initially read over every interview transcript and made a list of preliminary thematic codes. After this was completed for all twenty-five interviews, I reviewed the list for repetition and commonalities and combined some codes together (e.g. trans discrimination and trans exclusion were integrated into one code). After these thematic documents were complete, I then reorganized the datasets into documents based on each theme. There were a total of eleven master themes that were used including: art, drag, community, spaces, and events, to name a few. Master themes were determined based on the repetition of general ideas in the interview. All of the interview data was organized into word files based on these master themes. Each of these documents were then

organized and coded based on sub-themes. For example, for the theme of “community,” a list of subthemes was developed including, but not limited to: support, spaces, bars, events, common goals, visibility, and diversity.

During this iterative analytic process, I read all of the data with a special interest in those that corresponded to the study aims. However, I was also cognizant of the emerging themes from the data that were outside of the original research aims (e.g. the “punk” theme). These were added to the preliminary lists of both themes and subthemes. I then went through each thematic document and created separate documents based on the subthemes. I made decisions about which subthemes to combine based on similarities in definition (e.g. goals, common goals, shared goals, shared visions were all combined to one subtheme). Subthemes that were not included in the analysis were removed on the basis that they were not mentioned very frequently by other participants (for example, HIV, homelessness, and racism were rarely spoken about by most interview participants). Once this process was completed for the interview data, the archival research materials were organized based on each of the themes (e.g. events, bars, adverts, politics, drag). I was aware of the necessity to make connections across all datasets with regard to the coding scheme that I was developing.

2.7 Social Profile of the Participants

All interview participants were asked a variety of demographic questions, including questions about their ages, highest level of education completed, sexualities or sexual identities, gender, employment, cultural background, residence, and other identities the

participants thought would be important to include in this research project.⁹⁰ The ages of the interview participants ranged from 19 to 71, with one participant as 19, ten in their 20s, eight in their 30s, three in their 40s, one in their 50s, one in their 60s, and one in their 70s. In terms of highest level of education completed, eight participants were either undergraduate or college students; three were graduate students; five had college diplomas; four had completed master's degrees; three had completed high school diplomas; and two had not finished high school. When participants were asked about their sexualities or sexual identities, many provided more than one: fourteen identified as queer; nine identified as gay; seven as lesbian; four as bisexual; four as pansexual; two as straight; one as omnivorous; and one who was not sure of her sexuality or sexual identity. In terms of gender, nine identified as men; six as women; four as transmen; four as genderqueer or fluid; three as transwomen, with one participant identifying as more than one gender. Employment for the participants ranged from the trades, the restaurant industry, and the educational sector to the non-profit sector, self-employed, and unemployed, including three on social assistance.

With regard to cultural background, most identified as Caucasian or white and as being of either Canadian or European descent. Six of the participants identified as being from racialized communities, including East Asian, Southeast Asian, Afro-Caribbean, and First Nations. The residency for each of the participants was diverse: nine lived in the downtown area; six in east London; four in west London; four in the Fanshawe area; and three in south London. When participants were asked about any other identities they thought would be important for this study, two identified as being from a small town; two identified mental health difficulties; and the rest were identified by individual

participants: geek, nerd, gamer, masculine centre, butch, HIV positive, drag queen, and female impersonator.⁹¹

2.8 Methodology

This research project emerged as a result of my feminist orientation and education. I utilize an understanding of a trans-inclusive⁹² feminist research methodology as taking a critical approach to the diversity of perspectives of marginalized communities and working toward inclusion and social change in addressing structural inequalities that negatively affect non-normative genders (e.g., genderqueer and transgender people) and sexualities (e.g., queer and bisexual). The research framework for this dissertation involves taking into account the experiences of community members (in this case, LGBTQ community members in London) in the development of histories, theories, and representations of their communities in inclusive ways.⁹³ In taking into account the experiences of LGBTQ community members in London, there is also a reliance on the meanings, intentions, and actions of the participants in playing a strong role in the construction of the theories and results of the research project through an inductive approach.⁹⁴ This is not a grounded theory approach; however, my data coding and analysis of the interview data were informed by operational inductive precepts.⁹⁵ The overarching research questions and the direction of the dissertation were heavily informed by both my feminist training as well as my observations and experiences of LGBTQ community in London.

It is also important to discuss positionality and reflexivity for this project. Here, I unpack some of these ideas through a discussion of my position as a researcher, which aligns with the literature about insider/outsider status. I then follow this with personal reflections of my experiences and how they impacted the research process.

I do not approach this research claiming an objective eye; rather, I am reflexive about my own positionality in relation to the research and the ways in which this positionality can have positive effects on the research project.⁹⁶ My positionality as a researcher is one of an insider/outsider (which will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter).

Positionality is important to consider for this research project, as it plays a central role in all aspects of the research.⁹⁷ According to Sandra Kirby, Lorraine Greaves, and Colleen Reid, positionality can be understood as “the way that one’s position in the social hierarchy vis-à-vis that of other groups potentially ‘limits or broadens’ one’s understanding of others.”⁹⁸ Some researchers suggest that researchers should be insiders in the communities that are being studied.⁹⁹ This creates less distorted and fragmented accounts of the experiences of those within a particular community.¹⁰⁰

There are, however, challenges associated with having an insider position when doing research. These have been discussed at length by a variety of researchers in the social sciences.¹⁰¹ For example, according to Valli Kalei Kanuha, “For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied.”¹⁰²

Regardless of one's position in relation to the research subject(s), it is integral as a researcher to be open and reflexive about this positionality.

According to Sonya Dwyer and Jennifer Buckle, in their discussion of the insider versus outsider debates, some have argued that because of one's insider status, research participants are generally more honest and open when discussing their experiences, which can lead to a greater depth of understanding for the researcher – though this is not always the case.¹⁰³ However, while there are positive and negative outcomes associated with doing research as either an insider or an outsider, Dwyer and Buckle, note that discussing insider and outsider positions as a duality is over-simplistic. They state: “It is restrictive to lock into a notion that emphasizes either/or, one or the other, you are in or you are out. Rather, a dialectical approach allows the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences.”¹⁰⁴ While one's research and knowledge is always based on one's positionality,¹⁰⁵ Dwyer and Buckle suggest that,

As qualitative researchers we have an appreciation for the fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience. Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. It seems paradoxical, then, that we would endorse binary alternatives that unduly narrow the range of understanding and experience.¹⁰⁶

For example, when looking at LGBTQ communities specifically, it would be inaccurate to say that a lesbian researcher is a complete insider when studying a particular lesbian community. The researcher may identify with the community based on her sexual identity, but lesbians are not a homogenous group. There likely would be subgroups and different experiences within the community (e.g. experiences of race or class) that would differ from the researcher, making her connection to the community not completely one

of an insider. Thus, while it is important for researchers to be close to the communities in which they are researching, situating researchers as insider or outsider ignores the complexities of communities. It is more realistic to situate some researchers as both insiders and outsiders. According to Oksana Yakushko et al., and their discussion of doing research in one's own community, they suggest that the positive aspects of being an insider/outsider include: "greater ease of access to communities traditionally closed to 'outsider' scholars, awareness of the nuances of language and culture, and an ability to become involved with these communities while honouring cultural norms and values. Shared experiences of discrimination or marginalization can also add to significantly more open dialogue with individuals within these communities."¹⁰⁷ Even if experiences are not completely shared, those with an insider/outsider status may have a greater empathetic understanding given their closeness with the community, rather than an outsider with no ties, similar experiences, nor awareness of the community or culture under consideration.

Again, my role as a researcher for this project is one of an insider/outsider. This positionality is something that I constantly was reflecting on at all stages of the research project. Throughout my PhD degree, I have been a part of London's LGBTQ community in a variety of ways. These had an effect on the ways in which I completed my research. They impacted the types of questions that I asked, the means by which I interpreted data, the professional relationships I developed, and the ways in which I observed and participated in various community events.

The various community roles that I have held during my doctoral studies are multiple. Firstly, I worked for Rainbow Health Ontario as a community outreach worker in the London area. During this time, I organized a local trans health forum and drafted a report; I developed policy recommendations for an emergency shelter on being more inclusive to trans residents; and I attended a variety of community meetings and events for various community groups including, but not limited to, London Trans Coffee Social Club, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) London, Trans Youth London, and the Homophobia Biphobia Transphobia Working Group. This undoubtedly influenced my research, as through this position, I became very aware of specific issues that impacted different groups and I built relationships, developed trust, and participated in an open dialogue with LGBTQ people in London, some of whom also participated in the interview segment of my research. Secondly, I volunteered as a DJ, and through this role, eventually became an organizer and a performer for Gen Pop – a local trans and queer fundraiser event. Through my various roles in Gen Pop I developed an increased awareness of how LGBTQ people interact with each other at bars, particularly the ways in which people were affected by the various arts that were present at each of the events. During events where I was wearing my “researcher hat” as well as my “DJing hat,” for example, I was constantly trying to negotiate if I was looking at the crowds of people as a DJ and responding to them through changes in song, or if this was something I was witnessing as a researcher. Given my dual roles at multiple LGBTQ events, this insider/outsider position created a positive tension where I felt like I was a part of the community, yet I was also always reminded that I was engaging in research. My roles at

Gen Pop ultimately influenced the ways in which I understood the importance of the event for LGBTQ community from multiple perspectives.

Lastly, outside of LGBTQ-specific roles, I have held various positions in the health/social services sector during my graduate studies. I volunteered for a harm reduction and needle exchange program at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) and then I eventually sat on the Board of Directors for RHAC. During this time, I also worked as a housing stability worker and as a street outreach worker with people experiencing chronic homelessness and the effects of poverty. These roles were important to acknowledge during my research, as they affected the ways in which I interpreted the outcomes of the data. For example, once all of the interviews were complete and the interview transcripts were coded into themes, I started to reflect on what was invisible in many of the interviews. In my reflections, I was alarmed that there was very little discussion of LGBTQ homelessness and HIV/AIDS when participants were asked about social issues that were affecting LGBTQ community in London. It was not the case that no participants discussed these issues – mostly older participants discussed HIV/AIDS and trans participants exclusively discussed issues of housing and homelessness. However, I was shocked that given the prevalence of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the history and connection of HIV/AIDS to the LGBTQ community, these issues were not addressed by the majority of participants. Having said that, had I not worked so closely with people affected by poverty, HIV/AIDS, and homelessness, would I have had the same reaction to the invisibility of these issues to most of the interview participants? To put it another way: had I worked more closely with sport, recreation, and community development

programs, would I have been shocked about the lack of discussion of physical activity in LGBTQ community? Absolutely.

Of course, as a researcher, I was undoubtedly influenced by the ways in which my various roles in the community had an impact on the various stages of the research.¹⁰⁸ That being said, while I acknowledge these roles and how they shaped my positionality as a researcher, I do not see this as having a negative implication for the research. If anything, it allows for a richer dialogue with the data, rather than assuming some sort of an objective eye or a clear separation with the research subjects.

Throughout my analysis of the data, my positionality influenced my approach and interpretation of the data. While I began with overarching research questions that were informed by theories and my positionality, I remained flexible to the ways in which the interview data changed the overall themes for the research rather than focusing on a strictly deductive research approach.¹⁰⁹ This allowed for more reflexivity between the data and me. The final themes and subthemes for this dissertation, while influenced by my research questions, the interview guide, my positionality, and research in the area, came from coding categories that were present in the majority of the interviews.¹¹⁰

2.9 (In)visibility in Research

In doing feminist research, which entails working with marginalized and oppressed research subjects, one is often attempting to address particular social issues for some sort of change. However, in doing this research, I am also cognizant of the ways in which some experiences can be rendered invisible. My coding scheme was based on themes and

sub-themes that emerged most frequently from the interview data. This can have negative consequences for experiences that were not as prevalent in the data. While I see the importance of partaking in this approach, I am also thinking about how my research may marginalize views or experiences that were not major themes or subthemes. This is why I have tried to reflect on the research data in terms of not just what is mostly visible, but also in terms of what is invisible.

In the history of Western philosophy and thought, there is an “epistemology of seeing.” In her analysis of the sociological category of visibility, Andrea Brighenti states: “It has often been observed that the epistemology of modern science and modern philosophy at large do attribute a fundamental role to the sense of sight, in the forms of vision and evidence. Vision is an alias for intellectual apprehension.”¹¹¹ While visibility is important for evidence in data, this has had problematic effects in the history of philosophy, science, and the social sciences on what is being constructed as “truths.” For example, by solely focusing on the male body in studies of biology and applying a generalization to all human bodies, this renders invisible the knowledge of women’s bodies.¹¹² Asking questions of visibility and invisibility are thus integral to this project. My training in feminist research methods and methodologies by Viviane Namaste – whose career as a feminist researcher has been built by asking these very questions¹¹³ – entailed a constant critical reflection on visibility and invisibility in research and this training ultimately influenced the ways in which I have reflected on the data in this project and many others.¹¹⁴

In this dissertation, I focused on the themes that most of the participants discussed; however, as a feminist and as a point of principle, I am aware of how my research may marginalize or render invisible those experiences that lack within the major themes. According to Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, in her research on Palestinian women and the development of a critical feminist methodology, paying attention to the invisible is a counter-practice in feminist research methodologies, one that engages with multiple knowledges, experiences, and ways of knowing, while also being inclusive to the unheard and silenced voices in research. She argues that acknowledging effects of oppressions such as suffering is a necessity and a political obligation for feminist researchers.¹¹⁵ She states that, “This obligation takes us away from the positivist approach, which typically poses questions about the legitimacy of the study relating to the ‘size’ of the sample, its representativeness etc. Instead it leads us to a different approach, one that situates [marginalized] people...as the source of knowledge.”¹¹⁶ In taking into account the invisible subjects, as feminist researchers we are able to expand our understanding of the world and our utilization of a methodology to include these marginalized positions as both political and epistemological in their resistance to subjugation.¹¹⁷ For example, by taking into consideration negative experiences of LGBTQ people at Gen Pop from the research data, these issues expand an understanding of LGBTQ community in London in ways that might otherwise be ignored. Highlighting issues of marginalization and invisibility in the research allows for a richer dialogue with the research data by challenging the epistemology of seeing.¹¹⁸ Thus, in developing understandings of LGBTQ communities in London, marginalized, invisible positions are situated throughout this dissertation as ways to counter the “majority rules” effect of the research

methodology and overall narrative.¹¹⁹ In a way, this is queering dominant research conventions. This is similar to Alison Rooke's critical discussion of ethnography in queer studies. She suggests that doing queer ethnography should not simply entail research that focuses on the lives of queer people. Rather, it should also question the research conventions and "bend the established orientation of ethnography."¹²⁰

2.10 Conclusion

This dissertation project was designed to explore the experiences of LGBTQ people in London as they relate to community formation and the role of the arts. This project utilized a qualitative, ethnographic-informed feminist approach to the research subject. The literature reviewed in this chapter focused on LGBTQ bars, queer art and aesthetics and defining community.

In the literature review on LGBTQ bars, bars provided safe spaces for LGBTQ people to congregate. Non-normative genders and sexualities have been negatively regulated in the public domain, thus bars provided a place that was (mostly) free from stigma, violence, and discrimination. While there were laws that attempted to regulate LGBTQ bar spaces, ultimately these barriers were overcome. Bars were places where LGBTQ people could work, develop an economy, and sustain their own spaces. While there were issues with ghettoization, LGBTQ bars and spaces helped fuel the visibility and recognition of LGBTQ community. Whether they were "straight" bars attended by lesbians and gays, women-only bars, or "melting pot" bars made up of LGBTQ patrons, these spaces provided opportunities for support, socialization, leisure, and entertainment. There has

been a diversity of events historically at LGBTQ bars, including art shows, drag shows, musical performances, and dances. These events have helped to develop rich histories, memories, modes of empowerment, and social change through challenging gender and sexual norms.

In the literature on queer art and aesthetics, queer aesthetics are discussed as aesthetics that involve a constant reshaping and they are never fully complete. They work to transgress public culture and subvert ideals. Queer art is unmasterable; it cannot be reduced to the singular. Turning to trans aesthetics, these inhabit both the abstract and figural. Trans and queer experiences materialize in the aesthetics of advertisements, print culture, and facades where there is an ambiguity of identifying marks. LGBTQ posters, for example, have been used as ways to respond to normative genders and sexualities. They are an intervention into the everyday and they increase visibility and highlight political activism. Queer arts and aesthetics were also discussed as they relate to drag performances. Drag has been used as entertainment to represent ideals of womanhood, but it also has been used as a way to destabilize the gender binary and call into question the naturalness of heterosexual gender norms. Aside from entertainment purposes, drag shows have provided empowerment, support, and a home-like feeling for LGBTQ people. Lastly, as discussed by Namaste, in studying drag in LGBTQ communities, it is important to ensure that the research has relevance to the lives of those in the community.

Finally, in the literature on community, it is clear that there are various ways in which it can be understood. In terms of LGBTQ community specifically, it has been argued that community is a subset of networks with stable relationships, support, interdependence,

and protection. LGBTQ community requires a physical space for people to congregate to lessen the effects of an increased social fragmentation. In terms of defining community more generally, it has been defined as something that is imagined; a unified multitude; interplay between organization, competition, and conflict; a place to live; a way of life; and a social system. Community has also been discussed in terms of aesthetic communities. Bauman, on the one hand, sees these types of communities as negative. They are short-lived and people create bonds without consequences as a “togetherness of loners.” Rancière, on the other hand, sees these types of communities as positive where art is a medium that brings people together who might normally be apart. Aesthetic communities contain a diversity of people with different senses and perceptions. Due to the differences between people, there are disagreements and contradictions. However, these are productive to community. Conflict is inevitable and it is also integral for a political and emancipated community.

In the methods section of this chapter, I discuss the importance of including the lived experiences of marginalized communities in the research. I discuss the three approaches to data collection. First, I engaged in participant observation where I interacted with the research subjects and played an active role in the research social setting. Second, I carried out semi-structured interviews with twenty-five LGBTQ people in London representing a diversity of genders, sexualities, races, ages, and other social demographics. Third, I did archival research at two LGBTQ-specific archives where I documented relevant historical information pertaining to the key concepts. I completed an iterative research process and developed master themes and subthemes that emerged from the data.

In terms of the research methodology and developing the histories and theories in this dissertation, I utilized a feminist research methodology in taking into account the diversity of lived experiences and perspectives of marginalized people in addressing issues of gender and sexual inequalities. The research was impacted by my own positionality as an insider/outsider. My involvement in the local LGBTQ community impacted the questions I asked, my observations, as well as the ways in which I interpreted the data. I was also cognizant of the ways in which research can marginalize minority experiences in the research.

The methods and methodology of this research project have been developed to take into account multiple local perspectives of LGBTQ community in London, including those of the author. The research in this dissertation builds on the literature discussed in this chapter on LGBTQ bars, queer art and aesthetics, and theories of community, bringing these discussions together in a contemporary analysis of LGBTQ community in London.

2.11 Endnotes

¹ Notable exceptions include: Viviane Namaste's *C'était du spectacle! L'histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal, 1855-1985*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005; however, this text is written in French only, and thus not accessible to wider English academic readerships, and Ken Moffatt's "Dancing Without a Floor: The Artists' Politic of Queer Club Space," *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education* 2, 1 (2006), which I will discuss later.

<<http://jqstudies.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/jqstudies/article/view/3279/1407>>. Accessed January 18, 2013.

² Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987, 185.

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- ³ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 84-91.
- ⁴ Elise Chenier, "Rethinking Class in Lesbian Bar Culture Living 'The Gay Life' in Toronto, 1955-1965," *Left History* 9, 2 (Spring/Summer 2004): 85-118.
- ⁵ Line Chamberland, "Remembering Lesbian Bars: Montreal, 1955-1975," in *Gay Studies from the French Cultures: Voices from France, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, and the Netherlands*, edited by Rommel Mendès-Leite and Pierre-Olivier de Busscher, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1993.
- ⁶ Julie A. Podmore, "Gone 'underground'? Lesbian Visibility and the Consolidation of Queer Space in Montréal," *Social & Cultural Geography* 7, 4 (August 2006): 595-621.
- ⁷ Podmore, 598.
- ⁸ Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015.
- ⁹ Ken Moffat, "Dancing Without a Floor: The Artists' Politic of Queer Club Space," *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education* 2, 1 (2006), NP, <http://jqstudies.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/jqstudies/article/view/3279/1407>, accessed January 18, 2013.
- ¹⁰ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- ¹¹ Joan Nestle, "Restriction and Reclamation: Lesbian Bars and Beaches of the 1950s," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997.
- ¹² Diane E. Taub, "Public Sociability of College-aged Male Homosexuals: The Gay Bar and Cruise Block," *Sociological Spectrum* 2, 1982, 291-305.
- ¹³ Carlos F. Cáceres and Jorge I. Cortiñas, "Fantasy Island: An Ethnography of Alcohol and Gender Roles in a Latino Gay Bar," *Journal of Drug Issues* 26, 1 (1996): 245-260.
- ¹⁴ Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002.
- ¹⁵ Corey W. Johnson, "'The First Step is the Two-Step': Hegemonic Masculinity and Dancing in a Country-Western Gay Bar," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 18, 4 (July-August 2005): 445-464.
- ¹⁶ Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 33.
- ¹⁷ Davis, 36.
- ¹⁸ Davis, 48.
- ¹⁹ Quinn Miller, "Queer Exteriors: Transgender Aesthetics in Early Gay and Lesbian Advertising," in *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition*, Ed. Trystan Colten, New York: Routledge, 2012, 77.
- ²⁰ Miller, 77.
- ²¹ Miller, 81.
- ²² Miller, 90.
- ²³ Miller, 91.

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- ²⁴ Claire Colebrook, "Queer Aesthetics," *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, Eds. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, Albany: SUNY Press, 2011, 31.
- ²⁵ Colebrook, 31.
- ²⁶ Colebrook, 31.
- ²⁷ There has also been research completed on posters in response to the AIDS epidemic. For example, Jeff O'Malley (1992) interrogates the representation of AIDS in discourses of the "third world" whereby moral healthiness was defined in comparison to sexual deviants; through advertisements AIDS was used to reinforce homophobia and construct otherness in the third world. O'Malley discusses posters from the Visual AIDS Exhibition in London, UK, 1988 that were a response to the "third world" advertisements. The exhibition's role was to increase public awareness and change attitudes toward people living with AIDS.
- ²⁸ Betti-Sue Hertz, Ed Eisenberg, and Lisa Maya Knauer, "Queer Spaces in New York City: Places of Struggle/Places of Strength," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter. Seattle: Bay Press, 1997, 366.
- ²⁹ Laurel Halladay, "A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment in World War II," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, 3/4 (2004): 19-34.
- ³⁰ Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- ³¹ Dana Berkowitz, Linda Belgrave, and Robert Halberstein, "The interaction of Drag Queens and Gay Men in Public and Private Spaces," *Journal of Homosexuality* 52, 3/4 (2007): 11-32.
- ³² Andrea M. Davis, "(Un)Stable Space(s): An Ethnography of a (Sometimes) Gay Bar," *The Qualitative Report* 18, 61 (2013): 1-14.
- ³³ Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, 3/4 (2004): 113-133.
- ³⁴ Steven J. Hopkins, "'Let the Drag Race Begin': The Rewards of Becoming a Queen," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, 3/4 (2004): 135-149.
- ³⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990.
- ³⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex,'* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- ³⁷ Viviane Namaste, "Undoing Theory: The 'Transgender Question' and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 24, 3 (Summer 2009): 11-32.
- ³⁸ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, "Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Place, Sites of Resistance*, Edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997, 449.
- ³⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

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- ⁴⁰ Mary Rousseau, *Community: The Tie That Binds*, New York: University Press of America, 1991.
- ⁴¹ Raymond Plant, *Community and Ideology: An Essay in Applied Social Philosophy* London: Routledge, 1974, 32.
- ⁴² Jessie Bernard, *American Community Behavior*, New York: Dryden Press, 1949.
- ⁴³ Irwin T. Sanders, *The Community: An Introduction to a Social System*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966.
- ⁴⁴ Amitai Etzioni, *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1993.
- ⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.
- ⁴⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001, 2.
- ⁴⁷ Bauman, 2.
- ⁴⁸ Bauman, 3.
- ⁴⁹ See Emma Palese, “Zygmunt Bauman: Individual and Society in the Liquid Modernity,” 2013 < <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3786078/>>. Accessed 14 October 2015.
- ⁵⁰ Bauman, 5.
- ⁵¹ Bauman, 64.
- ⁵² Bauman, 65.
- ⁵³ Bauman, 65.
- ⁵⁴ Bauman, 66.
- ⁵⁵ Bauman, 66.
- ⁵⁶ Bauman, 68.
- ⁵⁷ Bauman, 68.
- ⁵⁸ Bauman, 69.
- ⁵⁹ Bauman, 70.
- ⁶⁰ Bauman, 71.
- ⁶¹ Bauman, 71.
- ⁶² Bauman, 72, emphasis added.
- ⁶³ Bauman, 72.
- ⁶⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot, London: Verso, 2009, 56.
- ⁶⁵ Rancière, 2009, 56.
- ⁶⁶ Rancière, 2009, 56.
- ⁶⁷ Rancière, 2009, 58.
- ⁶⁸ Rancière, 2009, 59.
- ⁶⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, x.
- ⁷⁰ Rancière, 1999, 32.
- ⁷¹ Rancière, 1999, 58.

⁷² Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran, New York: Continuum, 2010, 36.

⁷³ Rancière, 1999, 29.

⁷⁴ Rancière, 2010, 36-37.

⁷⁵ Rancière, 2010, 38.

⁷⁶ Rancière, 2009, 60.

⁷⁷ Rancière, 2010, 149.

⁷⁸ Rancière, 2009, 49.

⁷⁹ Western University's Research Ethics Board approved this research project. Please see Appendix A.

⁸⁰ Kath Browne and Cathy Nash (eds.), *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010; Sandra Kirby, Lorraine Greaves, and Colleen Reid, *Experience, Research, Social Change: Methods Beyond the Mainstream*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2006.

⁸¹ The owners of the venues were informed of the research activity prior to any participation observation.

⁸² To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to meet all three of the following criteria: be 19 years of age or older; identify on the LGBTQ spectrum; and have lived in London for a minimum of one month.

⁸³ Please see Appendix B.

⁸⁴ All participants were provided with a Letter of Information/Consent Form to sign prior to the interviews. Please see Appendix C. Participants were also provided with a \$20 honorarium to cover costs associated with the time spent at the interview as well as any transportation costs.

⁸⁵ Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996.

⁸⁶ Sandra Kirby et al., 2006.

⁸⁷ By involvement, I do not mean that these key informants simply identified as LGBTQ and lived in London for at least twenty years. Rather, I knew that they played an active role in either entertainment, social activism, or LGBTQ organizations in London.

⁸⁸ All participants – both the general participants and the key informants – were asked to provide a pseudonym to protect anonymity. Twenty-three participants chose a pseudonym; while two others said that they wanted to use their real names as their pseudonyms.

⁸⁹ It was interesting that many participants requested that I remove the “umms,” “ahhs,” and “likes,” from the interview transcripts.

⁹⁰ See the end of Appendix D.

⁹¹ Due to the diversity of identities among all participants, especially their multiple sexual identities, participants are represented together rather than in discrete groups (e.g., gay men, bisexual women, transmen, etc.). Each participant has multiple identities which would make it difficult to place in discrete groups.

⁹² This approach is more akin to third-wave feminisms, which are inclusive of queer and trans identities and experiences as opposed to earlier radical feminist approaches that have been discussed as “trans exclusionary radical feminists” (TERFs).

⁹³ Sandra Kirby et al., 2006, 34.

⁹⁴ Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory,” *Approaches to Qualitative Research*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 496-521; Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

⁹⁵ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2009; and Pranee Liamputtong Rice and Douglas Ezzy, *Qualitative Research Methods: A Health Focus*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002.

⁹⁶ Colleen Reid, *The Wounds of Exclusion: Poverty, Women’s Health, and Social Justice*, Edmonton, AB: Qualitative Instituted Press, 2004.

⁹⁷ Kim V.L. England, “Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research,” *The Professional Geographer* 46, 1 (1994): 80-89.

⁹⁸ Sandra Kirby et al., 2006, 37.

⁹⁹ For example, see Patricia Caplan, “Engendering Knowledge: The Politics of Ethnography (Part 2),” *Anthropology Today* 4, 6 (1988): 14-17.

¹⁰⁰ Sandra Harding, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is ‘Strong Objectivity’?” *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology*, Ann E. Cudd and Robin O. Andreasen (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, 218-236; Ann Oakley, *Essays on Women, Medicine, and Health*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993.

¹⁰¹ For examples, see: Sharan Merriam, Gabo Ntseane, Ming-Yeh Lee, Youngwha Kee, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, and Mazanah Muhamad, “Power and Positionality: Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status in Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Research,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20, (2001): 405-416; Valli Kalei Kanuha, “‘Being’ Native versus ‘Going Native’: Conducting Social Work Research as an Insider,” *Social Work* 45 (2000): 439-447; Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, “The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8 (2009): 54-63; Sandra Acker, “In/out/side: Positioning the researcher in feminist qualitative research,” *Resources for Feminist Research* 28, 1/2 (2000): 189-208.

¹⁰² Valli Kalei Kanuha, 2000, 444.

¹⁰³ Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Beverley Mullings, “Insider or Outsider, Both or Neither: Some Dilemmas of Interviewing in a Cross-Cultural Setting,” *Geoforum* 30 (1999): 337-350.

¹⁰⁶ Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Oksana Yakushko, Manijeh Badiie, Anitra Mallory, and Sherry Wang, “Insider Outsider: Reflections on Working with One’s Own Communities,” *Women & Therapy* 34 (2011): 280.

¹⁰⁸ I should note that I spent seven months away from my research. While this break had more to do with reasons of employment, it allowed me to return to analyzing the data with a “fresh” set of eyes.

¹⁰⁹ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995, 42-46; Cynthia Weston, Terry Gandell, Jacinthe Beauchamp, Lynn McAlpine, Carol Wiseman, and Cathy Beauchamp, “Analyzing Interview Data: The Development and Evolution of a Coding System,” *Qualitative Sociology* 24, 3 (2001): 381-400.

¹¹⁰ Rubin and Rubin, 1995, 251-254.

¹¹¹ Andrea Brighenti, “Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences,” *Current Sociology* 55, 3 (2007): 327.

¹¹² Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004; Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *The Anatomy of Prejudices*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

¹¹³ Viviane Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

¹¹⁴ Issues of visibility/invisibility are not just research issues. They are also practical day-to-day lived experiences of LGBTQ people in particular. This is discussed at lengths in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. For other examples, see Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003; Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993; Viviane Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000; Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity*, New York: New York University Press, 2001.

¹¹⁵ Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Palestinian Women and the Politics of Invisibility: Towards a Feminist Methodology,” *Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 3, 1 (Spring 2010): 1-21.

¹¹⁶ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 7.

¹¹⁷ Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 16.

¹¹⁸ The invisibility of research is not just limited to the interview data. This is also an issue for archival research, particularly for queer archives where materials may not have been preserved in traditional libraries. Queer archives, like the ones studied in this dissertation, are often made up of private donations of people’s histories. However, in doing archival research, it is important to consider what is there, what is missing, what has been lost, what is hidden, how much of what remains is accidental rather than the result of conscious retention of a particular history, and so on. See Cvetkovich (2003).

¹¹⁹ For example, in Chapter Three, some participants spoke about positive aspects of a bar where most of the other participants had negative experiences. Further, in Chapter Five, I include the ways in which some participants spoke positively about stereotypical drag performances, which was in the minority.

¹²⁰ Alison Rooke, "Queer in the Field: On Emotions, Temporality, and Performativity in Ethnography," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13 (2009): 149.

Chapter 3

3 Defining (LGBTQ) Community: The Integral Role of the Homophile Association of London Ontario in Sustaining Community, 1970-2001

Through a qualitative analysis, this chapter defines LGBTQ community and provides a retrospective examination of a significant LGBTQ venue in London that provided and sustained community for three decades.

3.1 Introduction

What are the constitutive elements that make up London's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) community? What forms of community-making have proven to be viable and effective in a smaller urban setting? These are the questions that this chapter seeks to answer. Community is a word that people often use to describe a plethora of experiences. As seen in the literature review, there are a variety of definitions for community. It can be understood as a social system; the interplay between organization, competition, and conflict; an imagined entity; or a paradise lost, to name a few. While community is something that is often hard to define (e.g. Plant, 1974), community is also something that people seek out due to the positive meanings often attached to it.¹ Social service organizations often talk about doing work for “the community” rather than doing work for individuals. When trying to understand how LGBTQ community is defined, one could propose that community is defined by one’s identity, and therefore, everyone in London who identifies as lesbian, for instance, is part of a lesbian community. However,

there is something more to community than simply identifying yourself as part of a group or having a shared sexual/gender identity.

In this chapter, I argue that LGBTQ community in London is based on four major tenets: supports (such as information, advice, or a helping hand); common or shared visions/goals; physical spaces; and host LGBTQ-specific events. The definition of LGBTQ community in London for this chapter in particular is based on the knowledges and histories of twenty-five LGBTQ people who live in London and the ways in which they have experienced and understood community in their local context.² This chapter reflects on the ways in which community functioned through an analysis of the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO), which operated from 1970-2005 and which had a club space up until 2001. Despite HALO's significance for the LGBTQ community in London, there is minimal to no mention in the two major texts on LGBTQ history in Canada: Gary Kinsman's *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (1987) and Tom Warner's *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (2002). The lack of research on HALO is important to identify, as HALO was one of the most organized and persistent LGBTQ organizations in Canada. While many of the interview participants either did not live in London at the time of HALO's operations, or they were too young to have attended the HALO club, it is compelling to see how the history of HALO mirrored their definitions and experiences of LGBTQ community in London.

3.2 LGBTQ Community in London, Ontario

When I asked LGBTQ people in London what defines community, most had something to say, but many had difficulty pinpointing exactly what community means, and further, there was not a clear consensus on what community entails amongst the twenty-five participants interviewed in this study. However, there were common themes that are worth exploring here that I will argue are the basis for LGBTQ community in London. These include: social supports, common or shared visions/goals, physical spaces, and events.³ Here, I will discuss each of these themes as they pertained to the interviewees' defining characteristics of community.

3.3 Support

Support was discussed in a variety of ways when people were discussing what makes a community for LGBTQ people in London. It was discussed in terms of providing information/advice to others within a group, accepting people for who they are, and people helping others who have similar lived experiences related to a diversity of genders and sexualities. Dawn, a lesbian in her mid-40s, had a lot to say about community in London. Having lived in London for over two decades, Dawn was able to reflect on LGBTQ community and how, while there have been some changes over the years, there are some defining characteristics that are consistent. She said, "Community is part of recognizing people and understanding who they are and putting a hand out and helping one another... Ya, community is something that supports itself in essence... There will be a person or a group of people that are a constant there, and just through communicating,

you get to know and share and support one another.”⁴ This was also echoed by Blake, a gay man in his mid 30s. Blake saw support in terms of feeling accepted as crucial to his years of performing as a drag queen in London. Whether it was among his “drag family” or at a drag competition with strangers, Blake felt that support was needed in order to feel accepted and appreciated. He said:

Community. Some of the things that I attach with that word would be inter-supports, organizations within our own community supporting one another. Acceptance. You find that acceptance within the community and then appreciation as well. You’d hope that within your own community, there’s people that within that group, would appreciate your contributions – not necessarily give you a ribbon or an award for it, but at least acknowledge your contributions in that way.⁵

Blake saw this acknowledgement – particularly as it related to his drag organization – as integral for different LGBTQ groups to come together. Thus, supports as a defining characteristic of LGBTQ community are not just supports between all of the same people.

According to Chef, a gay/queer man in his late 40s, “community [is] a sense of belonging to a group that supports and upholds all within the community and celebrates the diversity within.”⁶ This is integral for the LGBTQ community in London. Chef acknowledged a diversity of identities within the community, and saw that while there were many who identify with a particular subgroup (e.g. queer transmen), the community is still supportive of others regardless of whether an identity is shared. Chef’s perspective is similar to Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter’s (1997) understanding of queer communities, as discussed in the literature review, one that is made up of relationships that positively impact interdependence, mutual support, and community safety.⁷ London, while being a mid-sized city, has a relatively small number of LGBTQ organizations and

networks in comparison to other similar sized cities. Thus, having avenues for support is crucial for LGBTQ people in London.

3.4 Common or Shared Visions/Goals

The second major theme present within the interviews pertained to common or shared visions/goals of those within the LGBTQ community. This aspect of community was discussed as something where like-minded people came together in an intentional way to articulate their shared interests, sometimes with more of a political investment.⁸ Adam, a gay/queer trans man in his late 20s, has lived in both London and Toronto, and thus was able to reflect on how LGBTQ community operated differently in London compared to Toronto. Adam discussed the idea of community as a chosen affiliation. He said, “we are a community because we actually have a shared vision of what we want our lives and our world to look like and we choose to be together, which I think is more and more what I'm interested in and what I sort of try to create in my life.”⁹ He provided an example of what that has looked for him. He said:

there has to be some kind of intentionality on both sides. It's not just, oh we live in the same neighbourhood and we go to the same space and therefore, but it's like we're choosing to do – so for example in some of the activist work I've done, that's sort of an idea like an intentional community, right? I mean we haven't just ended up being in the same room, but making a conscious decision to do work on a specific project together, but then also to support each other and to hang out together outside of that and to be supportive and to support each other and kind of have each others' backs in a way, I guess.¹⁰

This support that is required of community is not based on identity exclusively, but also on shared values and conscious (and sometimes political) actions between a group of people. For example, Stanley, a gay/queer man in his early 30s, has spent most of his life

in London, but similar to Adam, also had experiences of communities elsewhere. Stanley discussed issues with identity-based community from his experience of gay community in Montréal. He said: “I realized that there were differences between the gay community and the queer community, where the queer community was a bit kind of less identity focused and often more politically active. I just kind of fit more with how people felt in that community.”¹¹ Stanley, while still sometimes identifying as gay, did not feel that being gay alone was enough for being part of a community. He felt that there needed to be some sort of common and intentional political goals to achieve as a community. Intentionality, for example, can be seen in London where a diversity of LGBTQ people come together in a space for a drag show with the intention of raising money and awareness for a particular LGBTQ group.¹²

3.5 Physical Spaces

The third major theme that informs the study participants’ ideas about community is that of space. The idea of community as requiring spaces was discussed in a variety of ways. These were often discussed as physical spaces¹³ that are designated meeting locations such as a community hub or a bar. These spaces were identified as mutual spaces that allow for the visible recognition of others and also allows for intentional conversation and engagement in discourse to take place. LGBTQ spaces in London provide a specific location where LGBTQ people know they can go to participate in functions that allow for the creation of shared visions or goals. For example, people can attend a fundraiser event at a bar where the goal is to raise money for a particular LGBTQ cause. LGBTQ spaces can also be places where people can go to receive LGBTQ-specific support, such as

London's PFLAG group that meets monthly to provide support to London's trans community. LGBTQ spaces can also provide an opportunity as a meeting place for LGBTQ people that may have similar interests and develop other activities such as the gay guy's book club, which is coordinated through the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

Lunar, a gay man in his late 30s, richly highlights the ways in which community is fostered through spaces which generate a sense of culture and tradition. Having a physical space allows people to have some place to engage. Even where there are smaller numbers of people, a physical space is a centralized location for the congregation of community. While Lunar did not have an LGBTQ community growing up, he was able to identify how spaces are important for other communities in his youth. He said:

I think of places to go when I think of community; if there isn't an actual physical place to congregate, like in my hometown we had a community hall. There's only one thousand people that live there, but we had a community hall and that's where people went to gather. That's what I think community brings up for me. And then when you have a space to gather, tradition happens, and culture happens, and things like that just cultivate themselves when you have a place to get together I think.¹⁴

This idea that a physical space creates community was also echoed by Dawn. Dawn has always been active in LGBTQ community since moving to London and sees group activities as habitual when provided a space: "through having a community space, you inevitably gain one thing: community groups. Because when given a space, groups occur, whether they're pottery groups or woodworking groups, or people with book clubs, or whatever. People who are interested in planting gardens or anything, but if you give them the space, they'll go there."¹⁵ A space is required for community members to come together and continue as a community.

In this congregation within a physical space, community members discussed the importance of visibly identifying with others. According to Sam, a pansexual/queer genderqueer in their mid 30s, this visibility is important, particularly in London where they feel community is less visible and accessible compared to their experience living in larger cities. LGBTQ community, for Sam, consists of being in a space among other LGBTQ people. Space and visibility tie together to produce a sense of community. Sam said:

Queer community means that I can go outside of my house and visibly be able to identify other queer people around me in the world, and be surrounded by queer people in places that I go to, or social things that I go to. It feels really important and valuable to me to be in a space where, for example, if I said, ‘my pronoun is they,’ people would be like, ‘Okay!’ and switch. And I wouldn’t have to explain gender to people.¹⁶

This visibility is not just being seen as a person by other LGBTQ people, but there is the added component of being recognized as LGBTQ within the community space. Cohen, a queer/pansexual trans man in his late 20s, has experienced LGBTQ community in London both as a lesbian youth and later as a transman. Being recognized in a space is important to him, especially since him and his partner can be read as being in a heterosexual relationship, which can render his queer experiences as invisible. He said:

community for me is a space, I mean when I think community in all honesty, I think Gen Pop¹⁷ and I think those events and that – community for me is a space in which me and my opposite gender partner can go in and be recognized as a couple together, but also recognized by our own queer identities separately. You know, we can walk into a space and people can recognize that they're a couple and they're together, but that doesn't make them straight. And to me the people that I consider allies and close friends are the folks that recognize how complex my identity is and don't base that off of who they happen to see me with.¹⁸

While Cohen has been read as straight with his opposite gendered partner in many aspects of his life, like Sam, having a space where queerness can be recognized among other queers, such as an LGBTQ bar, is essential for his experience of LGBTQ community. Invisibility can have its advantages. For example, when a transman uses a male gendered washroom and is read as male, the invisibility of his trans identity protects him from potential violence or harassment. However, invisibility also has its perils when one is seeking acceptance and recognition in an LGBTQ space and they are not being read as such.

Having an LGBTQ physical space not only allows for the visibility and recognition of others, but spaces also foster community through conversation and exchanges between community members. Graham, a bisexual man in his mid 30s, highlighted this. He said that community “would require a kind of shared space to enable the articulation of shared interest... There needs to be shared space for communities to engage in meaningful discourse.”¹⁹ What constitutes meaningful discourse for LGBTQ community, however, is up for debate. Conversation was also discussed by participants as engaging in dialogue with members of the community where the emphasis of the conversations is not always on the shared interests of the community members. Sometimes the very idea of socializing is important for the community. For example, Cohen rarely goes out in London, so when he does, he wants to feel and create community. He said, “I think I’m just at a place in my life where a good time for me isn’t going out and dancing to music and screaming at the top of my lungs to talk to somebody. I want to go to a space where I can actually have that sense of community, talk to people, socialize, dance, and have more than just a really loud bass line.”²⁰ While dancing to a really loud bass line has its

merits in LGBTQ community (as seen in a later chapter), Cohen wants an LGBTQ space to offer more. Not only should there be the visibility and recognition among LGBTQ people in a physical space, but they also need to be engaging in conversations – from politics and identity to fashion and art. These are integral to engaging LGBTQ people in community.

3.6 LGBTQ Events

Events are the last major theme of community that were discussed most frequently by interview participants and events that occurred in LGBTQ bars were discussed most often. While events could be included as a subtheme under physical spaces, they were discussed so often that they warranted a theme on their own. When participants were asked about the defining characteristics of community, bars and their events were often discussed. Many made connections to the history of bars and events in London as activity and/or political hubs for LGBTQ community. Others discussed bars as essentials that connect individuals to the community – particularly for those who are just coming out – or places that provide continuity to the community.

Bars and their events play an integral role in London's LGBTQ community history. In the 1980s-2000s, there were multiple bars that have come and gone and that have hosted a variety of events for the community. Blake, who has been a drag performer for over two decades, spent a lot of his time performing and socializing at many LGBTQ bars. He felt that these bar spaces provided community for LGBTQ people in London. He said, "I would say the late 90s/early 2000s, there was a great sense of community. You know, we

had here in London, we had three bars. The community itself had very strong members and very prominent people within them. That was back in the day when our community was so big that we could support three bars that identified as gay.”²¹ Jones, a queer lesbian in her mid 60s, echoed this sentiment on the sheer number of establishments: “Ahh, as far as the community went, there was Lacey’s and HALO and Upstairs/Downstairs ummm is that all? There tended to be two bars and HALO. One bar would close, another bar would open up.”²² Both Blake and Jones spent their fair share of time working at various LGBTQ bars in London over the last couple of decades, and they found that because of these bars, there was always something for LGBTQ people to do every night of the week. Bars, while being more plentiful twenty to thirty years ago, were also identified by younger participants when discussing LGBTQ community today. Graham who was born, raised, and came out in London, loves the bar aspect of the community. He said, “I like nightlife; that’s generally one of the things I like to go do. In terms of like nightclubs or in terms of bars, and those are in many ways a major lynchpin – not a lynchpin, but a major nexus for shall we say communities as a whole, especially the gay community.”²³ It is important to point out that Graham did not just say that he liked going to bars for the sake of going out and experiencing the nightlife, but rather he identified clearly their central importance to LGBTQ community. As seen in the literature review, LGBTQ bars have historically been places where people could go and “be themselves” in a positive and safer environment. These were spaces that lacked the homophobia and harassment that LGBTQ people experienced in other aspects of their lives.

Events at bars play a prominent role in the development of community because they encourage engagement and participation in the particular medium, such as drag shows. Many participants spoke at length about performance events, both past and present, as being integral for community development (as discussed in a later chapter). For example, Naomi, a straight trans woman in her early 30s, identified the bars as her main entry into the LGBTQ community where she was encouraged to be herself and was first introduced to drag performances, which she said helped her with her transition.²⁴ Nicole, a trans woman in her mid 30s, said she had a community feeling when she first participated in a performance event in London after living in a variety of other cities and not feeling a connection anywhere else. She stated: “it was kind of like one of those things that’s like ‘ohhhh community!’ – like you feel the community from being a part of all these performances and then I come here and it’s like a small, small spot in the world and it’s like, wow, this is ten times better, you know?”²⁵ Similar to Lunar’s childhood experience of community in a small town, no matter how small the crowd, performance events and the bars that host them help to facilitate a sense of community and foster traditions for LGBTQ folks in London.

Rose, a queer lesbian in her early 20s, moved to London for school where she accessed more community events in comparison to her hometown, which was significantly smaller than London. She suggested that without events, community members are separated from each other: “yes you’re there [when separate from each other], but it’s not as close and comforting to be a part of. So I think the events and everything really help to build and foster and keep the community strong.”²⁶ This connectedness is especially important for people who are coming out of the closet. For example, Su-Lee, a

bisexual/pansexual/queer woman in her early 20s, said that events are important for community in terms of how they impact identity formation. She said: “especially for people that are just starting to navigate their identity as well as for people who have already, not that this is like a finished thing, but who have been navigating their identity for a long time. I do think it’s important to keep community going.”²⁷ Bar events were identified by all interview participants as pivotal for the community. They provide hubs where, through conversations, dance, and performances, the diversity of LGBTQ community members in London can claim and foster community as their own.

According to Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, “the social fragmentation unleashed with globalizing capital tends to limit the sites of minority sexual cultures to redefined ghettos and a few corners of cyberspace.”²⁸ Due to these fragmentation effects, aesthetic communities become increasingly important. Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter argue that we must inhabit and defend physical queer spaces for self-protection, pleasure, and refuges for community healing.²⁹ As seen in the ways in which the interview participants defined LGBTQ community, these types of communities are important for their lives. While there are a variety of spaces in which LGBTQ communities have developed and sustained in London, in what follows, I provide an analysis of how the HALO club functioned as community for LGBTQ people in London from 1970-2001.

3.7 The HALO Club as Community

As discussed in the literature review, bars have been well documented as important venues for LGBTQ communities in major cities across Canada.³⁰ Kinsman argues that

gay and lesbian cultures are produced in bars and other physical spaces. He states: “Bars, baths, and clubs are not only businesses; as cultural and erotic institutions they are also moulded by their patrons.”³¹ He quotes Christine Riddiough’s 1979 essay on gay and lesbian liberation as being applicable to LGBTQ bars:

[They are] the focal point of the gay and lesbian community. They are the most stable institution in a frequently unstable world. As such, they shape the culture of gay life, even as they are shaped and changed themselves... They are our territory even with all the control that the outside world exerts. They are the main places where gay people can be gay.³²

Similar to the concerns that Bauman raised on the unstable “liquid” modern world and its threat to community, physical spaces allow sexual minorities to have a place to go that is more inclusive than the everyday world. According to Kinsman, “the sense of gay community has been strengthened by our defence of our social and sexual gathering places.”³³ Thus, when asking questions to LGBTQ people in London, it was no surprise that bars were a focal point for community. Particularly, when asking questions about the LGBTQ community in London to the participants who had lived in London between 1970 and 2001, many spoke about their involvement with the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO) club, as well as the void created in our community since its demise in the early 2000s. It even had lasting intra-generational effects on younger LGBTQ people. Lunar, a gay man in his late 30s did not get to experience HALO. However, he said: “I hear stories about when I didn't live here and I hear about HALO and people have amazing things to say about what that did for community, what a space like that did. And I hear all that, I hear great stories from folks. I didn't get to experience that.”³⁴ When I attend various LGBTQ events in London, I frequently hear people referencing HALO – including those like Lunar who never experienced it. Despite the

numerous experiences and stories that I was told about HALO, and the number of times people reminisce about its importance at current community socials, meetings, and events, little has been published on it, particularly from a historical perspective. In Kinsman's limited documentation of homophile organizing in Canada, there is no mention of London, and he argues that homophile organizations were fragmented and did not last.³⁵ Warner, on the other hand, mentions HALO briefly, but argues that most homophile organizing was short-lived and the movement quickly became outdated and conservative by the mid-to-late 1970s. Warner also suggests "few mourned [the movement's] passing."³⁶ There is a stark contrast between the historical accounts of homophile organizing in Canada and the experiences of HALO by LGBTQ people in London. While many homophile organizations in Canada may have been fragmented, short-lived, and conservative, the opposite is true of HALO. Further, many mourned and still are mourning the passing of HALO. In what follows, I discuss the formation of HALO, the creation of a community space, the services that it offered, as well as the impact that it has had on the lives of LGBTQ people in London, Ontario.

HALO began at the University of Western Ontario in 1970, following a wave of LGBTQ awareness campaigns and organizations that spawned from the publicity and political ramifications of the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969.³⁷ While HALO began in 1970, the earliest documentation I was able to find in the HALO Fonds Archives were meeting minutes from February 2, 1971. They document opinions from the group on the formation of HALO as an association. Starting the association at the university was considered a safe space due to its composition of "liberal, educated people [whose] change of attitude will filter down to the lower classes."³⁸ There were concerns by some

members who stated that there was not a need to expose one's homosexuality, as this may cause threats to one's wellbeing or career. However, the pros outweighed the cons, with ideas of unity to fight oppression, the creation of a non-cruising meeting place, a platform to educate the public, and a space for those afraid to come out to attend the organization.³⁹

Over the years, HALO began to grow as an organization, hosting bi-weekly dances and events at the university with as many as two hundred people at a dance in March of 1973.⁴⁰ HALO grew in size and eventually expanded into the greater London community. According to one participant, Richard, a gay man in his 70s, “[HALO] realized that the money they got was all going into the student association and that they were making quite a bit of money by having these dances and stuff, so they started holding back some of the money and rented the building at 649 Colborne Street.”⁴¹ The lease for this building was signed on December 2, 1974⁴² and the building was eventually purchased by HALO through fundraising initiatives in 1987.⁴³

For the sake of this chapter, I am particularly interested in the ways in which the HALO space at 649 Colborne Street functioned as a community – both a nightclub and a social service – and the ways in which it was understood and experienced as an integral community space for LGBTQ people in London. This development of a physical space that was designated specifically for the LGBTQ community is one of the tenets required for community (as discussed previously). HALO worked to provide safety and security for LGBTQ people in London, two necessary components of Bauman's ethical community – though the community space was a work-in-progress.

When HALO first occupied the space at 649 Colborne, it was an unidentifiable building. Located beside the train tracks at Colborne Street and Pall Mall Street, HALO was situated in a mostly residential area, close to two kilometres from the downtown core of Dundas Street and Richmond Street. On the front-page of a fundraiser pamphlet from 1986 it reads: “the windows on the main floor at HALO are covered over. People who do not know us, fear us. Sometimes they want to do us harm. Our goal is to be able to put glass in all our windows at HALO.”⁴⁴ According to Toby, a lesbian genderqueer in per⁴⁵ 50s, who had spent many days and nights at HALO – both as a patron and as a staff person, HALO was originally a club that you had to have a membership to attend or show out of town identification. The reason for this, according to Toby, “was because it wasn't safe just to let anybody in. I mean, I had a friend who was run over in the parking lot of the HALO club by frat boys on a dare – she had a permanent disability to her leg. Ya, people would open the door and throw in stink bombs or whatever – like there are many places where we had to defend our space.”⁴⁶ While there were constant threats, Toby still attended HALO, and like many other LGBTQ people in London, it was a space for people to come together and build strength in numbers to support one another from the homophobia in the rest of Western society. The HALO fundraiser pamphlet states: “We try to be accessible (sic). The anonymity of the building helps reduce the fear that some have of being identified by friends, loved ones, employers, acquaintances, and tormentors who may not understand.”⁴⁷ This anonymity also increased the level of security that LGBTQ people required to feel safe in community.⁴⁸

While there were fears of violence and discriminatory acts toward both the building and the clientele, the HALO club was successful in its operation for over two decades. For

some, it is hard to describe what exactly HALO was – whether it was a nightclub, social service, coffee house, or event space. An embroidered sign for HALO that used to hang in the building reads: “Homophile Assn. of London Ont. Entertainment, Social Services, Licensed Disco, Incorporated 1974.”⁴⁹ The HALO club seemed to be mostly everything for the community under one roof; a one-stop shop, so to speak.



Figure 1: HALO Sign

When discussing many experiences at HALO, Toby summarized the space: “HALO was ... you've got to remember, a club, right? Even though they had dances and they served booze, it wasn't only a bar. That's why the other places that were bars, came and went – because they were only based on making money, but the HALO was based on a dream

and a vision and a mission statement.”⁵⁰ Common/shared visions or goals are another tenet for LGBTQ community in London where there is an intentionality and investment in the community. People saw this space as a commitment to LGBTQ people in London. It offered a variety of supports, common visions, and events that kept LGBTQ people attending while other bars came and left.

The HALO club was understood by many people as a community hub that facilitated a diversity of activities, including support groups. Supports are a main tenet for LGBTQ community in London, particularly in the 1970s-80s when LGBTQ people felt less safe to be out publicly in comparison to today. HALO was not just a space for adults of drinking age. Toby discussed the diversity of the HALO club:

Everything was there. And even though it was hard to afford the space like to heat it and stuff, there were smaller aspects of it that kept running. They started having a martini bar open in the small part of it, and then just open the big part for other events. And actually I'm wrong to say there wasn't counselling because I know there were youth groups and things that operated out of there. I just meant I don't think there were any personal counselling sessions. It was an awesome place!⁵¹

HALO catered to a diversity of genders, ages, and sexualities. This, in effect, helped with the successes in comparison to other LGBTQ spaces that required attendees to be of legal drinking age. Stanley, a gay/queer man in his early 30s reflected on his experience at HALO as a youth where he identified the space as one of his two main social supports around the time that he came out of the closet. He said,

There were a couple. At the time HALO was still in London, Homophile Association of London Ontario, and they had youth nights actually that they ran I think once a week; maybe every couple of weeks? Something like that. So I would go to that with people. That was actually where I met my first boyfriend. And also there was a group called PAYSO, let's see if I can remember the

acronym for that. Positive Attitudes about Youth Sexual Orientation⁵² – that might be it? I might be getting some of that wrong - and they were a support group for queer youth, so I would go to that fairly regularly as well. Those were the two main ones – the main social support networks that I was a part of.⁵³

When I asked Stanley to describe the space, and how it functioned for him as a youth, he stated:

I was like sixteen or seventeen when I went to HALO and it was more like a community space like downstairs there was a bar and some pool tables and then there was another room upstairs and that is where we had the youth nights and I don't even remember what we did, like I'm trying to remember if there were organized activities and someone running them? I don't think so. I think we all just went and like... it was just a place to go and hang out, which was fine. That was, you know, that was great, but it was like... what was great was that it was a place to go and hang out. Like we weren't at a bar, like you know, at that age going to a bar, I wouldn't have known how to act, but here I was like OK. I'm in a living room or something like that, so... so ya, they offered a chance for a type of sociability that would've been recognizable to me as a sixteen or seventeen year old.⁵⁴

It is clear from Stanley's reflections that the HALO space facilitated a variety of activities for a diversity of members of the LGBTQ community in London. Not only was a physical space provided for youth, but this was an LGBTQ space that was separate from the bar space – where youth could feel supported and welcome in London. Youth groups, in particular, operated at HALO from as far back as February of 1982, under the name of Gay Youth London and later it became the London Gay Youth Association (see Figure 2).⁵⁵ HALO provided a space to bring people together as a way to strengthen community and create an element of certainty for the future.

LGBTQ community. Not only did a diversity of people attend the HALO club in terms of gender and sexual identities, but there were also a diversity of interests, particularly as it relates to the types of performances and the music that was played in the bar. Dawn, a lesbian in her mid 40s, describes her times attending the HALO club. She stated that,

[t]here'd be ladies dances once or twice a month and just - there'd always been a good dance or great drag show, or really - it was awesome because it was really a mixed community event. All events there seemed to be really good mixed community events in regards to age mixings, which I like a lot, I like to not just be with one age group, I like to be with all age groups. They'd have everything from polka, country/western, hip hop, you know, just all those genres of music, which makes it fun because you'd be out there, the line dancers would be out there, and then someone would throw on a polka, and someone would ask you to polka and as long as they knew how to lead, I was okay. *laughs* It was fun.⁵⁷

This idea of having a variety of types of genres of music seemed to be a good idea to draw in a diversity of LGBTQ with different interests all together under one roof. This is in contrast to mainstream clubs that tend to cater to specific demographics and musical and/or aesthetic tastes.

Through my archival examination of the various posters, newsletters, and advertisements in the HALO Fonds, it was clear that the HALO club organized a great diversity of events for the community. From as early as the mid-1970s, HALO hosted Coffee House events on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and dance events on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, giving LGBTQ people in London and the surrounding area something to do six out of seven days a week.⁵⁸ Coffee House events usually consisted of discussion groups and casual conversations, table tennis, pool, pinball, as well as other games.⁵⁹ It is quite apparent from the HALO Newsletters spanning over two decades that an effort was made to ensure that a diversity of music was played (as mentioned earlier by Dawn).

There were advertisements for disco, line dancing, country, and rap music nights. The HALO Executive went as far as creating a music survey, asking people how often they attend the club, their main reason for attending, and what types of music attendees would enjoy at a dance night.⁶⁰ This also shows that HALO was truly committed to having their music reflect the interest of the diversity of LGBTQ people in London. There was an investment in the future and that the dances and other events were not created solely for the purpose of developing superficial relationships. Not only did HALO try to be as diverse as the attendees through musical selections, but they also did this through a variety of types of events, from drag shows, plays, and pageants, to theme nights (e.g. bondage or leather/denim nights), musical performances, and even sober dances.⁶¹ By having all of these types of events, the HALO club was creating an inclusive and supportive environment for the LGBTQ community that provided recognition and visibility to the diversity of the community members.

HALO committed to serving all LGBTQ people in London, including those who did not drink or had substance use issues. According to Richard, who worked at HALO for a number of years, other community groups and services would use the HALO space. He said,

AA came to me once and said, 'we want to set up AA meetings,' and I thought, 'well that's great!' I said, 'well this is a bar, you don't want to meet in a bar;' 'oh no, that's alright!' So we let them. They used the space for years. That became one of the most popular AAs! I don't know, I imagine the gay AA is still running because they weren't comfortable in the straight AA meetings. And a lot of straights would come to it because they liked it better than the straight AA, so it was a very big popular thing. It met sometimes in churches and things, and also at HALO. We always made sure there was space for it at HALO. We didn't charge them for it.⁶²

The HALO club did not want to discriminate against nor alienate LGBTQ people, so they hosted social services, meetings, and events for just about everyone. HALO's strength was in providing more than a bar for the community.⁶³

HALO played an integral role in the lives of many LGBTQ people in the London area. Despite criticism from some about it being a bar, many look past the negative connotations associated with bars toward the positive implications a space like HALO had for the LGBTQ community. Richard commented that,

there were all these people who were very critical of even HALO, who said, 'oh you shouldn't be funding social services through serving alcohol.' Well bars I think served a very important role for the gay community. It was a place to come together and to socialize. They could have things like the drag shows and other things going on there, but it was what brought people together, to meet other gay people. And so they provided a social service. That is a social service in itself!⁶⁴

The idea of a bar being a social service in itself is an interesting concept. It brought the community together for peer supports and a place to go that was a positive contrast to the heterosexist world LGBTQ Londoners otherwise would have to navigate. It was a safe haven for many in London. And it was not just HALO that was offering spaces for the community. There were a plethora of other bars that came and left during HALO's tenure in London. Names of these bars included: 52nd Street, The Apartment, Bannisters, H2O, Lacey's, Studio 812, Sinnz, Upstairs/Downstairs, Club 181, to name a few. Many of these establishments were advertised in the HALO newsletters. Richard felt that since HALO was a community social service that it should advertise all events and spaces that were occurring throughout the city. In reference to HALO, Richard said, "if you run it as a business, then you compete with the other places...but I said no, it's a community group, so you try to help others, you try to work with the other groups, and the other

places.”⁶⁵ This positive communication and support for other LGBTQ bars and spaces helped the community to grow and flourish. Blake, a gay man in his mid 30s, shared similar sentiments. He had only attended HALO a handful of times, but in reference to the LGBTQ community and bars in the mid to late 1990s he felt that there was always something to do on any given day, and these activities and events were all communicated through the HALO newsletter. Blake said:

So around that time, that would've been – HALO would've been in full swing and starting to come to its last curtain call and I believe, I want to say it was SINNZ or 52nd Street – I can't remember which it was at the time, but other than HALO there was the Apartment, which was the lounge bar, and then you had SINNZ, which was the dance bar and then it was only opened on Friday and Saturday nights, and so if you're out and about downtown between Sunday and Thursday you would go to the Apartment. And then there were specific nights for HALO. It was really weird how each bar worked together to provide the community with something to do that was gay-positive every night of the week.⁶⁶

This community cohesion and communication amongst bar owners and the HALO club was something that really highlighted a positive LGBTQ community during HALOs time. This community cohesion showed a long-term commitment, an intentionality, and a shared vision to make a better community for LGBTQ people in London.

3.8 Conclusions: HALO...Goodbye

The HALO club successfully operated as a community for LGBTQ people in London for close to three decades. As discussed earlier in this chapter, four major themes pertaining to community were developed based on the knowledge and experiences of the interview participants. Thinking about LGBTQ community in London retrospectively, these tenets of community were provided by the HALO club. HALO had a membership with a

common vision and investment in the future for the development of shared interests and goals. It provided *support* groups and counselling for a variety of LGBTQ people in London who needed information, education, advice, or help with dealing with the discrimination LGBTQ people faced in the greater London area. Having an LGBTQ-specific *physical space* provided the recognition and visibility needed for the development of community discourse and traditions. Finally, the HALO club provided a multiplicity of LGBTQ-specific *events* for people to attend based on their specific interests, such as drag nights, hip hop nights, leather/BDSM nights, and youth nights – to name a few.

The HALO club operated in many ways like an aesthetic community – though not with the negative connotations that Bauman suggests they entail. It hosted LGBTQ events that may have only existed for short time frames, but the community did not see these as short-lived, nor as a togetherness of loners developing superficial relationships. The HALO club as a community provided long-term certainty for the future of LGBTQ community in London and it also worked to ensure safety and security in an alternative space much different from the rest of the heteronormative society.

Bauman is right in highlighting concerns for the state of community, particularly given the negative implications of capitalist modern society with the neoliberal focus on the individual. Having alternative spaces for communities to develop are even more crucial than ever before. According to Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, “the social fragmentation unleashed with globalizing capital tends to limit the sites of minority sexual cultures to redefined ghettos and a few corners of cyberspace.”⁶⁷ Due to these fragmentation effects,

aesthetic communities become increasingly important for LGBTQ communities. Ingram Bouthillette, and Retter argue that we must inhabit and defend physical queer spaces for self-protection, pleasure, and refuges for community healing.⁶⁸ As seen in the ways in which the interview participants defined LGBTQ community, these types of communities are important for their lives. The HALO club provided the necessary components to develop and sustain a community for LGBTQ people in London.

Unfortunately, due to a string of major events that caused significant financial burdens on HALO, the HALO club came to a close in 1999. While all of the details are not clear regarding the demise of HALO, there were two major issues that started the financial downward spiral. The first issue had to do with the infamous London police investigation called Project Guardian, which began in November 1993.⁶⁹ In short, in response to a teenager who came across a bag of pornographic videos along a river in London, the police used what Warner cites as “Canada’s draconian child pornography laws”⁷⁰ to launch an investigation against members of the LGBTQ community in London under the guise of capturing pedophiles.⁷¹ Two men were eventually charged with child pornography offences during the trial; however, the investigation included eleven search warrants and thirty men arrested under 1, 252 charges – none of which ever came to fruition.⁷² This investigation lasted for three years and both the police chief, Julian Fantino, and the news sensationalized the investigation – calling it a child porn ring or children being abused by predatory older men.⁷³ A September 1996 document entitled, “On Guard: A Critique of Project Guardian,” which was drafted by both HALO and the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (CLGRO), highlights the ways in which this investigation did damage to the LGBTQ community in London. The document calls

this investigation a witch-hunt that is full of distortions and misrepresentations of gay culture and one that has put the community in an even more vulnerable position.⁷⁴ At this time, not only were LGBTQ people experiencing discrimination, but the Liberal government had shown reluctance to include sexual orientation in the Charter, there were a string of important court cases regarding pension/survivor benefits that were defeated, and there was also still a lot of hysteria in the media around the AIDS crisis and the LGBTQ community. These all affected the high levels of marginalization and vulnerability of the LGBTQ community in London.

The Crown Attorney for Project Guardian suggested that, “the legacy left for the youth by the men was homosexuality.”⁷⁵ One of the men charged was in his early twenties and he was having consensual sex with his 17-year-old boyfriend. However, the media continued to refer to this case as an exploitation of children. The individual in his early 20s was referred to by a judge as “a homosexual pedophile.”⁷⁶ During this investigation, HALO tried to point out the flaws, double standards, and inaccuracies by the police and media, but it was hard as they were seen as defending child pornography and supporting a “child porn ring” in London. In the end, most charges were dropped and while Fantino used almost two million public tax dollars for the investigation, Fantino’s rationale for starting Project Guardian proved not to have ever existed. Of the 800 videotapes that were seized by police – the very tapes that were the centre of attention at Fantino’s first press conference – none of them were found to contain any child pornography. It was all fabricated.⁷⁷ While this was the case, this did not mend the irreparable damage to the LGBTQ community – one that divided some, and closeted others – ultimately having negative impacts on HALO and the community it tried to foster.

Second, in 1995, London's then mayor, Dianne Haskett, was publicly vocal against a proclamation for London's gay pride celebrations. HALO then embarked on a long, arduous (and expensive) legal battle with the mayor. At the Ontario Human Rights tribunal, Haskett exclaimed that homosexuality was "against God's will...it's not the way God intended and I believe people should be set free from that."⁷⁸ The Ontario Human Rights Commission eventually found Haskett guilty of discrimination in 1997 and she was ordered to issue a pride proclamation for LGBTQ people in London.⁷⁹ This legal battle, and a variety of other financial strains ultimately saw HALO selling its building in 2001 and renting another space to strictly operate a social service. Without the consistent revenue from the club space, HALO's finances started to dwindle because of the rent for the new space. HALO closed down quietly in 2005, with the remaining money donated to the Pride Library at Western University, a library dedicated to LGBTQ culture and literature.⁸⁰

While the demise of HALO had a negative impact on the LGBTQ community in London, HALO showed LGBTQ people (among others) in London the possibility of creating and sustaining community through a physical space that provides a venue for supports, the development of common/shared visions or goals, and bar events that allowed for the growth of community through a variety of activities. Despite suggestions by other Canadian historians that homophile associations in Canada were short-lived, fragmented, out-dated, and conservative, the opposite was true for HALO, which had a long run and significance for over three decades. While not without its problems, this history of HALO gives knowledge and hope to current and future LGBTQ people in London on the ways

in which community can be developed and sustained in a smaller city like London, Ontario.

3.9 Endnotes

¹ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001.

² While twenty-five participants were interviewed for this study, not all participants are quoted in this chapter. Part of this has to do with the avoidance of repetition of participants' quotations. Some participants were also more vocal about certain questions than others. For example, some participants provided a lot of one-word answers or very short responses to some of the questions. Their responses were captured when counting the descriptors of definitions of community, but not necessarily as quotations. This chapter includes quotations from sixteen of the twenty-five participants.

³ These were the descriptors that were used the most frequently (more than five times) by each participant. Words that were used less than three times when describing LGBTQ community include: volunteering, acceptance, communication, socialize, recognition, shared experience, friendship, safety, visibility, resources, inclusion, networks, diversity, or online. Many of these words also overlap with the general themes as well.

⁴ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.

⁵ Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.

⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.

⁷ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, "Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities. In *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997: 449.

⁸ Common is not meant to delineate sameness in experience, as it is evident in the demographics of the participants that there are multiple intersecting identities that have varying power effects on some participants more than others. However, what is considered common in the LGBTQ community in London is the marginalization experienced by all participants (either in relation to sexual or gender normativity), which is diverse. However, participants drew on their experiences of sexual and gender minorities to come together with common goals that are shaped by their intersecting experiences.

⁹ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.

¹⁰ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.

¹¹ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

¹² There are often various fundraising events that are for Open Closet: a trans and queer youth social support in London.

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- ¹³ It should be noted that two participants discussed online spaces as also important for community. While it would be interesting to explore what online spaces mean to LGBTQ people in London, this is beyond the scope of this chapter. The rise of virtual communities has been discussed by some scholars. For example, see Ghaziani (2014).
- ¹⁴ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.
- ¹⁶ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ¹⁷ Gen Pop, short for General Population, is a trans and queer event that occurred in London from 2012-2015. It will be discussed at length in the next chapter.
- ¹⁸ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ¹⁹ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.
- ²⁰ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ²¹ Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.
- ²² Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.
- ²³ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.
- ²⁴ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.
- ²⁵ Nicole. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 23, 2014.
- ²⁶ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ²⁷ Su-Lee. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 9, 2013.
- ²⁸ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, "Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities, in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997: 453.
- ²⁹ Ingram et al., 454.
- ³⁰ See Kinsman, 1987; Warner, 2002; Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Communities across Canada, 1964-1984*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015.
- ³¹ Kinsman, 185.
- ³² Quoted in Kinsman, 185.
- ³³ Kinsman, 185.
- ³⁴ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ³⁵ Kinsman, 181.
- ³⁶ Warner, 70.
- ³⁷ HALO Fundraiser Pamphlet, April 1986, Box 30, Advertising Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.
- ³⁸ University of Western Ontario Homophile Association Organizational Meeting Minutes, 2 February 1971, Box 19, Minutes Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.
- ³⁹ University of Western Ontario Homophile Association Organizational Meeting Minutes, 2 February 1971, Box 19, Minutes Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁴⁰ No Author. "A Private Journal."

<<http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/microsites/HALO/pic/history/journal.jpg>>. Accessed 10 September 2015.

⁴¹ Richard. Interview by Author. Audio recording. Toronto, March 27, 2014.

⁴² HALO. "HALO Lease."

<<http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/microsites/HALO/pic/building/lease.jpg>>. Accessed 10 September 2015.

⁴³ HALO. "HALO Invitation."

<<http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/microsites/HALO/pic/building/build12.jpg>>. Accessed 10 September 2015.

⁴⁴ No Author, "HALO Fundraiser Pamphlet," April 1986, Box 30, Advertising Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁴⁵ For the purpose of this dissertation, Toby wishes to be identified with the pronouns ze and per.

⁴⁶ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

⁴⁷ No Author "HALO Fundraiser Pamphlet," April 1986, Box 30, Advertising Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁴⁸ Bauman, 2001.

⁴⁹ HALO, "HALO Sign," no year, Box 73, Photo Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada. Please see Figure 1 for details.

⁵⁰ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

⁵¹ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

⁵² The group was actually called Positively About Youth Sexual Orientation, and operated out of the AIDS Committee of London location beginning in 1996. See No Author, "Positively About Youth Sexual Orientation Newsletter," summer 1996, Box 20, Newsletter Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁵³ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

⁵⁴ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

⁵⁵ No Author, "HALO Newsletter," (London, ON: Homophile Association of London Ontario): February 1982; No Author, "London Gay Youth Association Newsletter," March 1984, Box 20, Newsletter Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁵⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.

⁵⁷ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.

⁵⁸ No Author, "HALO Newsletter," (London, ON: Homophile Association of London Ontario): May 1977.

⁵⁹ No Author, "HALO Newsletter," (London, ON: Homophile Association of London Ontario): December 1979.

⁶⁰ No Author, "HALO Music Survey," 1989, Box 21, Music Survey Folder, HALO Fonds, Hudler Archives, Archives and Research Collections Centre, Western Libraries, London, Canada.

⁶¹ No Author, "HALO Newsletters" (London, ON: Homophile Association of London Ontario): August 1981–1991.

⁶² Richard. Interview by Author. Audio recording. Toronto, March 27, 2014.

⁶³ Of course, this does not mean that the space was completely inclusive or accessible, but that was part of the vision of HALO. It is likely, like any space, that there are those who were not able to access the space for either physical or social barriers. However, these were not discussed as issues by any interview participants.

⁶⁴ Richard. Interview by Author. Audio recording. Toronto, March 27, 2014.

⁶⁵ K Richard. Interview by Author. Audio recording. Toronto, March 27, 2014.

⁶⁶ Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.

⁶⁷ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, "Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities, in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolander Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997: 453.

⁶⁸ Ingram et al., 454.

⁶⁹ While this was a major investigation, specific details in terms of the numbers of people who actually went to trial that were LGBTQ did not appear in the sources cited herein.

⁷⁰ Warner, 284.

⁷¹ Warner, 284.

⁷² Warner, 285.

⁷³ Warner, 286.

⁷⁴ HALO and CLGRO, *On Guard: A Critique of Project Guardian*, London: HALO, 1996, 6.

⁷⁵ HALO and CLGRO, 15.

⁷⁶ HALO and CLGRO, 20.

⁷⁷ Warner, 287.

⁷⁸ Warner, 350.

⁷⁹ Patrick Maloney, "Our Mayor, He'll March, Get Over It." *London Free Press*, July 6, 2011. <<http://www.lfpress.com/news/london/2011/07/05/18376856.html>>. Accessed 17 September 2015.

⁸⁰ Richard. Interview by Author. Audio recording. Toronto, March 27, 2014; Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.

Chapter 4

4 “It’s Not Just Because Of The Space, It’s What People Are Doing”: Sustaining Community Through LGBTQ Bars In London, Ontario

This chapter extends the four tenets of LGBTQ community, as developed in the previous chapter, and analyzes their presence in three current LGBTQ bars in London.

4.1 Introduction

The LGBTQ community in London, Ontario, has a unique history. Given London’s smaller size in comparison to major cities (e.g. Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver), it does not have a gay neighbourhood or village like larger metropolitan cities. Thus, the LGBTQ community has carved out specific spaces that they deem as safe spaces to congregate and develop the LGBTQ community in London. As seen in the previous chapter, bars were commonplace for the community and the HALO club space provided many opportunities – spanning three decades – for the sustainability of the LGBTQ community. This club space not only provided a venue for a variety of events to occur, but it also had social support groups, including group counselling, discussion nights, and youth-specific nights. The HALO club operated as a community hub for LGBTQ people in London and it is important to acknowledge, as it was a successful model for creating and sustaining community.

Since the demise of HALO in 2005, LGBTQ folks have found other opportunities to create community – though none to the extent of HALO. As argued in the previous chapter, LGBTQ community consists of four major tenets. It requires a physical space,

there are social supports, the membership has common/shared visions or goals, and it consists of LGBTQ-specific events.¹ I have previously argued that the HALO club operated as an LGBTQ community in London. In this chapter, I expand on this analysis of community in London through an investigation of three spaces that are overwhelmingly attended by LGBTQ people. These include Buckwild's, Lavish, and The APK. I further argue that while each of these venues provide varying degrees of community and have potential for improvement, they all lack elements of certainty, continuity, and inclusion that a space like the HALO club provided to LGBTQ Londoners. Nevertheless, I argue that Gen Pop (an event at The APK) provides a working model for the future of LGBTQ community in London.

4.2 LGBTQ Bars

Bars have always played a major role for the LGBTQ community in a variety of cities in North America.² As discussed in the last chapter, Gary Kinsman argues that LGBTQ culture is produced in bars and that a sense of community is strengthened in LGBTQ gathering places.³ In Liz Millward's recent historical research on lesbian communities across Canada, she argues that taverns and bars are prominent for community as they act as territories that encourage the development of lesbian subject positions.⁴ Julie Podmore, in her examination of lesbian community in Montréal, argues that while other community spaces are important, bars are central in building visibility and expanding the community.⁵ In Dereka Rushbrook's investigation of queer spaces in European and North American cities, she argues that not only do LGBTQ bars play an integral role in creating a social community, but they also provide space for the development of political

consciousness.⁶ Lastly, in reflection on his experiences attending a variety of LGBTQ bars in London over the last forty years, Richard, a gay man in his early 70s, said: “Well bars I think served a very important role for the gay community. It was a place to come together and to socialize. They could have things like the drag shows and other things going on there, but it was what brought people together, to meet other gay people. And so they provided a social service. That is a social service in itself!” It is clear, and well documented, as seen in the literature review, that bars have played a central role in bringing people together to develop a sense of community, subjectivity, visibility, political consciousness, and social supports.

While much of the research in this area has focused historically on the roles of bars for LGBTQ communities, the question still remains if current LGBTQ bars play similar roles for community in London. Similar to Richard’s quotation above regarding bars as social services, and in reflecting on the current bars in London, according to Adam, a gay/queer transman in his late 20s, bars provide a form of support to LGBTQ people – though he says it’s a different kind of support than what formal support groups provide at an agency. He said, “there’s something you get from being in a queer space, especially somewhere where there aren’t that many of them, that is sort of nourishing, and so that’s a form of support I suppose.”⁷ Given its size, London does not have that many queer spaces, so LGBTQ people find the ones that currently exist important for community. According to Sparklebottom, a pansexual/queer/omnivorous⁸ man in his mid 20s, London’s queer community is different from the queer community he had experienced living in Halifax. He said, “The queer scene in London is more bar-oriented than music-oriented. You know, it is more about going to these nightclub style queer bars or queer

communities than it was about, you know, having a show where all the acts are queer.”⁹ London is indeed bar-oriented for the LGBTQ community – though all LGBTQ bars have opened and closed over time and there is no institutional longstanding LGBTQ bar in the city. When asked about the coming and going of gay bars in London, Chef, a gay/queer man in his late 40s, said it was just a reality of bars: “That’s always how it’s been ever since I’ve come out. Bars would be around for a couple of years. They’d close up, another one would open up... I just want, I just appreciate a space where I can go in and be myself.”¹⁰ While it is unfortunate for any LGBTQ space to close its doors in London, the reality for Chef was that there would always be another space and having that space was much appreciated by LGBTQ people to feel at ease knowing that there was some place to go. London has had a handful of LGBTQ bars and spaces since the demise of the HALO club. While many of the participants I interviewed had many stories and experiences to share in a variety of the past LGBTQ bars, most of the conversations focused on the three current bars in London. At the time of the interviews, there were three LGBTQ bars in London (depending on who you ask, of course):¹¹ Buckwild’s, Lavish Night Club, and the APK/Brennan’s Beer Bistro.¹² While these were the current LGBTQ bars in London, only one was discussed in a way that meets the four components of LGBTQ community in London according to the interview participants of this study.

4.3 Buckwild’s Bar

Buckwild’s is the bar that was spoken about the least amount of times in the interviews, and it was mostly discussed with a negative connotation. Out of the twenty-five participants that I had interviewed, only seven had ever been there, and many of the

others had never even heard of the space.¹³ The lack of knowledge and experience of Buckwild's as well as the negative connotations of the space can be linked to four characteristics of it that are discussed in this section: the average age of the attendees, the part of the city that it is in, the stigma attached to it for being in the same building as a bath house, and the exclusionary type of events.

The age and characteristics of attendees was described by multiple participants as being older and more mature. This was seen as a positive for some participants who did not always want to attend spaces that were frequented by college or university students.

Graham, a bisexual man in his mid 30s, recalls: "Well what I like about that crowd is it was an older and more mature crowd basically. I mean it was on the one hand, older queens in the front, well what I recall that one time, and then the other one was a big huge bear event. Hanging out with bears is fun. There was also good techno music."¹⁴

Having a space that caters to older and mature people can be a positive for LGBTQ folks who do not want to attend the most popular LGBTQ space – Lavish. The older crowds at Buckwild's was not just seen as a positive for older LGBTQ people in London. For example, Sparklebottom, first attended the space when he was under the legal drinking age and considered it an older crowd:

For me, well I was also 18 when I first went to Buckwild's, like you know, probably - well definitely too young to be there, so it was like - so to me everyone was old. Now it's probably, looking back, it's probably people between 25 and 30 that were there...so my age now, but at the time, I was like, my god, everyone is so old; 30 year olds are talking to me, what's going on?! Also, being really young in the queer scene, I thought it was really cool that these older guys were talking to me. I was really flattered by it.¹⁵

Being accepted in a space by older folks is not only a form of flattery, but it also can be seen as support from older generations to the next, with the possibility of the development of mentorship and the passing down of traditions. While Sparklebottom spoke highly of his experiences at Buckwild's, he only attended the space five or six times.

Likely a reason why multiple participants did not speak of, or frequently attend Buckwild's is its location in London. Historically speaking, the area of London referred to as "East of Adelaide" or EOA for short, has had associations with the working class, poverty, crime, and a general perception of a scary, unsafe place to be. Not only is Buckwild's located East of Adelaide, but it is also on a strip of a mostly desolate street that consists of abandoned spaces, railroad tracks, a strip club, an adult massage parlour, and the bath house. All of these characteristics of the surrounding landscapes help to fuel the negative stereotypes associated with the bar. Most bars in London, particularly popular bars, are located in the downtown core, close to a variety of amenities. Bars that exist outside of the downtown core, generally consist of patrons that live in the neighbourhood. They are not usually sought after destinations. Buckwild's is far enough away from the downtown core that it would not be considered a bar to attend by most Londoners. Having a bar in the "wrong end of town" meant having cheap drinks, which was a pro according to Stanley, but he also felt that the price of a taxi from his apartment cost him a significant amount of money making him less likely to attend.¹⁶ Graham also had issues with Buckwild's as being in the "wrong end of town." When asked for clarification on this, he stated: "Well to get to and from. Like not that I don't want to go to that part of town, It's more I just don't want to go that distance."¹⁷ He had thus only

attended the space on two occasions. While there were some experiences and aspects of Buckwild's that were positive to those who did attend, its location impacted the frequency and likelihood of people attending.

Aside from the distance that Buckwild's is from the downtown core, it also is not inclusive of everyone on the LGBTQ spectrum. Carlos, a queer trans man in his early 20s, has never attended Buckwild's but he has heard of a lot of negative connotations with the space.¹⁸ Likewise, Cohen, a queer/pansexual trans man in his late 20s, had a similar perception, though he views the bar and the baths as interconnected. He said, "If I was in a position to want to go and cruise, I don't know as a trans person that I would feel welcome or safe there. In theory would I go to a bath house? Yes. If I knew that it was a safe place for people like me."¹⁹ Trans people often have a heightened level of safety concerns, even in spaces that advertise as being LGBTQ inclusive. In terms of the bar and men only nights, he added: "I know that they do men-specific nights there – they have a monthly underwear party and that sort of thing, but again, perhaps it's just where I'm at in my transition or where I'm at in my identity, with certain men's only spaces, I question my safety or how welcome I would be there."²⁰ While Buckwild's is said by some to be an LGBTQ space, it tends to be mostly a GB-MSM space. This was discussed by Lunar, a gay man in his late 30s, who has attended the baths and Buckwild's both for his outreach work and for his personal life. He shared a similar sentiment:

these functions tend to be men only, which is very exclusionary – it doesn't necessarily foster LGBTQ community. It's really for gay men and is very highly sexualized, the whole environment. And just because you're gay doesn't mean you're always highly sexualized or into those environments, so it caters to a very specific demographic in LGBTQ community. It caters to a need, but having one of the only spaces that exists for people to go be mostly men only and really

highly sexualized is not attractive to a lot of people, so I can see why it doesn't get patronized a lot.²¹

Men only events, particularly ones that are highly sexualized can be difficult spaces for trans guys to navigate, folks with body image issues, and may exclude others who identify in various ways on the LGBTQ spectrum but do not feel comfortable in highly sexualized spaces.

Lunar identified that the mostly men only crowd is problematic given the shortage of LGBTQ spaces in London. Naomi, a straight trans woman in her early 30s, felt similarly of the space. She has never attended Buckwild's, but thinks that it should be more responsive to the community:

Buckwild's? I've never actually been in. All I've heard was stories about it and you know, the stories were all negative stories. I've never heard a positive from there. Whatever the establishment is and whoever the people who own it, I think they should really ask these people, ask the GLBT community for more ideas and, you know, questions – because when you bring up that name, the first thing somebody thinks is nastiness; they think of dirty sex, like free sex, unsafe sex.²²

Whether these stories are true or not, they reflect poorly on the bar due to its association with, and close proximity to, the bathhouse. Naomi's response is representative of part of the LGBTQ community that stigmatizes the baths; however, bathhouses historically have been important institutions for LGBTQ resistance and the drive for human rights.²³ These can impact and stigmatize people who choose to attend the bar, even if they are not attending the baths. This was addressed by Lunar. He said:

gay guys even within our own community can get stigmatized for going there, which I think is a crock of shit and as far as Buckwild's goes, I think it sometimes falls guilty by association. It's attached to Central Spa, therefore it's a victim of the same kind of stigma—unnecessarily—and people make the decision to not go

there because of that connection. And to be honest, it's another bar that I wish we would learn to get over that and patronize because it's actually a very suitable place for a lot of things that we could be doing and using it for. It sits there empty all the time. I think people have tried with really good intentions to use that space and I think the stigma of the bathhouse hurts it and it doesn't attract as many people as it should. I think lately there has been more success in events that are held there - only because of a lack of other spaces.²⁴

More LGBTQ spaces are needed in London, and this one is unfortunately under-utilized due to its reputation. Despite the stigma associated with the space, Lunar sees a potential in Buckwild's for certain members of the community. However, as suggested by Naomi, it would benefit from feedback from the LGBTQ community in order to make the space more inclusive to a diversity of community members.

In terms of the four tenets of community, as highlighted at the start of this chapter, Buckwild's does not meet all of them. It does provide a physical space with events such as underwear parties and the occasional drag shows that allow for the development of community and the visibility and recognition of some LGBTQ people. However, it mostly only caters to, and is attended by, men who have sex with men, which makes it less diverse and inclusive to everyone on the LGBTQ spectrum. Interview participants did not discuss the ways in which support is received at Buckwild's, nor did they mention anything about common/shared visions or goals. This does not mean that people do not receive support when they attend Buckwild's, nor does it mean that some attendees may not develop common/shared visions or goals. That being said, the space is not inclusive of multiple LGBTQ people and thus if there were, for example, common goals, these would not be for the LGBTQ community as a whole.

There is something more to a bar space that makes it a community space for the LGBTQ community, as I have suggested at the beginning of this chapter. In comparison to Buckwild's, the two other bars, the APK, and Lavish, were discussed at great lengths, often in opposition to each other. Depending on whom you talk to, neither bar is necessarily considered an LGBTQ bar per se; however, LGBTQ events do occur in both. Both of these bars are located in the downtown core within three blocks of each other. Both spaces provide something different, with one space, the APK, being more community-oriented than the other and more comparable to the ways in which the HALO club was described and experienced.

4.4 Lavish Nightclub

Lavish Nightclub opened as a bar in London sometime in 2008. According to its website,

LAVISH is housed in a century old building located in the heart of downtown London, Canada. LAVISH possesses the appeal of both a quintessential ultra lounge and a high-energy nightspot. Evoking diversity and unity, the club strives to provide a comfortable atmosphere for all people. This is a place where you can celebrate being you. Since opening in 2008, the popularity of LAVISH reflects a commitment to providing a diverse environment with the utmost superiority in all aspects of hospitality; from the upscale lofty design to the attention to service to the friendly and experienced staff. During the summer of 2012 LAVISH opened ELEVATE Rooftop Patio. ELEVATE serves as the perfect space for enjoying a cocktail with friends or dancing the night away under the stars. LAVISH plans to imprint an enduring mark in the London night scene.²⁵

While a description like this makes Lavish sound promising for a community bar, it is not without its problems. Some major themes arose out of the twenty-five interviews with LGBTQ people in London, which are discussed in this section. These include: Lavish not being an LGBTQ bar; the lack of diversity amongst the attendees in terms of age, gender

identity, and other characteristics; the cliquy culture and judgmental attitudes of exclusion felt by some community members; and the overall dance club environment of the bar.

When reading through the description of Lavish Nightclub, it makes subtle hints that it is an LGBTQ venue (e.g. “evoking diversity” and “a place where you can celebrate being you”) without every mentioning anything related to gender or sexuality. Chef, who has attended gay bars since the 1980s, said: “I don’t think of [Lavish] as a gay bar really. I think it more is a gay-friendly bar, you know? They do have gay events and stuff, but I mean the people that go there, they’re not always identifying as gay.”²⁶ Chef, while attending Lavish on occasion, sees a stark contrast between Lavish and LGBTQ spaces from the 80s and 90s (such as HALO), where people attending Lavish are not exclusively on the LGBTQ spectrum. This was echoed by Graham, a bisexual man in his mid 30s. He suggested that while Lavish is seen as a gay bar by some, he considers it more of a pansexual nightclub that is comprised of LGBTQ people as well as straight “tourists.” He said, “Lavish is a contradiction in many ways. One of the things I actually really really like about there is the tourist culture that goes and visits. Cuz that really undermines the aspects of the kind of gay circuit party they want to be selling, right?”²⁷ By tourist, Graham is referring to the straight women that attend the bar as part of, for example, a bachelorette party to feel safe and free from being hit on by straight men.²⁸

Lavish, while known to many of its patrons as an LGBTQ bar with a gay owner, does not explicitly identify as such. Some LGBTQ people prefer spaces having explicit words or symbols that identify them as LGBTQ spaces. This was discussed by Morgan, a lesbian

in her early 20s. She stated: “Lavish doesn’t have a sign saying gay, it doesn’t have a rainbow, it doesn’t have the colours, it doesn’t say gay club, it just says Lavish, which is an alternative bar.”²⁹ This lack of recognition of LGBTQ culture by Lavish can be seen as a negative for LGBTQ people who want that community visibility in London. However, similar to the HALO club, there are possible negative outcomes for publicly identifying as an LGBTQ space. Naomi identified the possibility of hate crimes directed at Lavish if it were so public with its LGBTQ space: “[the owner] protects his establishment by not advertising that it’s a gay bar because of the ignorant population out there who could just pass, see a gay flag, and fly a brick in his window or something like that. So it’s kind of concealed, which is kind of a good thing.”³⁰ Keeping anonymity of a place is important if there is a fear of an unsafe environment, but some people require more explicit LGBTQ signifiers to feel safe in a space or to even know what spaces are LGBTQ-inclusive.

While it may not be clear to some that Lavish is an LGBTQ bar, the reality is that it is identified as such by others – though it has its limitations in catering to the diversity of people on the LGBTQ spectrum. Interview participants also discussed the demographics of the space, particularly as they relate to age. When I asked participants who attended Lavish, most said that it was mainly college and university kids, with the occasional spotting of older folks in attendance. Adam said that this was the reality of a college/university town:

clubs like that are aiming at the market who is going to go there most, which is undergrads, right? I don't think it's unique to Lavish that that's what happens, but you can't have a bar that both attracts undergrads and attracts older people because undergrads don't want to be around older people apparently and older people definitely don't want to be at a party where the average age is 20. So I mean, I

think that's just what it is. It's not a problem. I don't want it to be something else, but it's just not a space where I'm like, 'oh, I want to go there'.³¹

It is true; London is in many ways a college/university town, with 15, 000 students at the largest college campus,³² and close to 23, 000 undergraduate students at the university.³³ These students make up just over ten percent of the total population of London.³⁴ If, as Adam suggests, older LGBTQ folks do not want to attend Lavish due to the average age of the club-goer, what spaces are left for the non-college or university people?

While it makes sense to cater a bar to a particular demographic, given the lack of LGBTQ options in London, this can be alienating for other community members. While in his mid 30s, Lunar attends Lavish on occasion, but he does not feel an inclusive community vibe:

It serves to cater to another stereotype that may not necessarily be that inclusive. And I'm [in my mid 30s] and I feel old there. Often almost every single time I go. I still tend to go maybe once a month ... And I still feel old, but I'm cool with that, so I still go. I go because it is one of the only places to feel like you're in a gay space even though it doesn't necessarily identify full-on as a gay bar. It's like cool to be gay there, it's fine. And you probably will meet other gay folks there and if that's what you need for a comfy space, then that's there. I think that, again, it caters to one particular demographic by the kinds of music and atmosphere that it provides. It strictly caters to younger more pop culture-oriented folks, which does not attract so many other people. You know, the diversity in gay culture.³⁵

While Lunar does not feel completely comfortable in the bar due to being older than the typical demographic, he does acknowledge that the space can provide that comfortable feeling knowing that there will be other LGBTQ people. However, this is not the case for everyone. Blake, a gay man in his mid 30s, does not feel comfortable attending Lavish and says that you do not find the older generations attending Lavish. He said,

That scene itself is very juvenile; it's very high school, but we were all like that between 18 and 25. I remember being like that; being so vapid and shallow. Not

saying that everybody is like that, but the general feel of it, if you were an over-30 something or an over-40 something, it's annoying as hell to go into one of those bars and being bombarded with these primadonna, post-pubescent attitudes and you just want to sit there and smack them!³⁶

While the scene at Lavish is a younger demographic, and may not be for all older generations, Blake was able to acknowledge being that age and needing an inclusive space. Lavish still provides a space that some LGBTQ folks can attend and feel accepted in.

One of the issues, aside from the specific demographic that Lavish caters to, is the fact that it lacks diversity in other ways besides the ages of attendees. Class differences, or perceived class differences, were discussed when comparing Lavish to Buckwild's.

Stanley, a gay/queer man in his early 30s, summarized his experiences at Lavish in terms of how patrons dress and present themselves. He said:

the expectations of the crowd or the way the crowd feels tends to be somewhat homogenous and in a lot of ways... even if you have, even if there are a lot of different types of people there, in reality, in practice the group that's valorized the most are male students mostly white, though not totally, but mostly white who are dressing with kind of a very current sense of style that takes some degree of money to be able to pull off.³⁷

In a way, this makes sense given the name of the club *is* Lavish, meaning, to be sumptuously rich, elaborate, or luxurious. Though it can obviously also evoke a sense of exclusion for those who cannot afford particular dress codes, or choose to present themselves in non-normative ways. LGBTQ people living in poverty, in particular, would likely not attend due to these social and economic barriers.

This leads into the next major theme discussed by the interview participants: the cliquy culture³⁸ and judgmental attitudes of exclusion felt by some community members. For example, Emily, a gay/lesbian/queer woman in her early 20s, said that Lavish is: “just a very cliquy...like if you don't go with a large group of friends, it's going to be awkward. So ya, so it's hard to meet new people at Lavish and talk at least.”³⁹ Attending Lavish on your own may be difficult if you are not social or if you are not familiar to others who attend it. For example, Alex, a bisexual/gay man in his early 30s, had only been living in London for just over a month when he was interviewed. He attended Lavish once on his own and echoed much of what Emily describes. He felt the crowd to be a tad cliquy, where everyone had a group that they were associated with, and he did not feel like he was in the position to go and approach the different groups of people.⁴⁰ This closed-off feeling is problematic, as it can be alienating for newcomers who may already feel excluded from other aspects of their lives and are seeking support and connection to an LGBTQ community.

Coupled with the cliquy feeling of Lavish, and related to the homogeneity of the demographics at Lavish, there have also been experiences of negative judgement toward attendees, particularly as it relates to gender identity and expression. Cohen described Lavish as having “a real cattiness - there's a real judgment of anybody who doesn't have a six pack and is white. If you don't fit the really typical standards of what a gay man should look like, I find it's not so much of a welcoming space.”⁴¹ Cohen has had issues with other spaces in terms of transphobia, so he has concerns about the lack of inclusion in a so-called LGBTQ space. Morgan had a similar experience the first time she attended Lavish. She recalled: “the first time I went was Halloween, and I knew that I got a lot of

stares because people were trying to figure out my gender. And it was very uncomfortable; especially among my equals like I was like, this is the community, why are you doing this? that was very startling as a first experience.”⁴² Having a negative first experience, like Alex did, not only evokes a sense of exclusion, but it also can alienate the marginalized people who need community the most. Given the mostly white gay male student demographic that is associated with Lavish, it is not surprising that those whose gender identities or expressions might not match with the stereotype would feel judged or excluded by the cliques in the space.

This exclusion is particularly true for trans people. Cohen recounted, “I just think of the times that I've been outed without my consent at Lavish by someone who knows and then someone else hits on me and someone feels the need to fill them in, ‘oh, but he's trans’.”⁴³ Other trans community members have faced judgement from not only attendees, but also staff at Lavish. According to Toby, a lesbian genderqueer trans man in her early 50s, “there was a trans person whose packing device fell out accidentally and they were thrown out of the bar into minus 40 degree weather, somewhat like we're having now, and almost died.”⁴⁴ Verbally outing someone as trans or kicking out trans people, further marginalizes the most vulnerable people on the LGBTQ spectrum. Naomi also has had similar experiences at Lavish, but she believes that it is just a lack of awareness by the staff. When asked about experiences of transphobia, she stated: “Ummm I would say more of an educational thing. It would be like some of the staff, prior staff, weren't trained enough. They didn't know really how to handle situations where they came to treating trans people, but I think definitely if they were to train all of the staff in advance, and let them know, it's not fun, it's not cool to make fun of trans

people.”⁴⁵ While training would be useful for staff at Lavish, ultimately there also needs to be changes to the culture of the space in order to make it more inclusive to multiple members of the LGBTQ community.

Aside from the people who attend Lavish, the environment and what occurs within a space is also important to discuss when thinking about community. This leads to the final major theme for Lavish that was discussed by the participants: the dance club environment of the space. According to multiple participants, Lavish is a bar where people go to dance and party. The physical set-up of the space does not facilitate interactions between different groups of people, which also make the space more conducive to cliques, as discussed previously. Morgan discussed the space and her inability to interact with people at Lavish:

I find it's almost – like where the set-up is what makes it difficult. Having to go through the crowd to get to go upstairs or go here and then everyone is sectioned off into little areas and it's almost like little bubbles where you can't get into the conversation or upstairs where there's only a couple of seats and the moment you have those seats you're basically not talkable – like you're unapproachable, pardon me. It's almost just awkward if you don't know someone there or you can't create conversations with someone or they don't want to, you're kind of just standing stagnant, waiting, to see if you can talk to someone. And that's not very interesting. That doesn't make me want to go. It doesn't create conversation and make me feel comfortable enough to sit – I find that's harder to talk with a group of people if there's not that chance to sit down at one point and congregate.⁴⁶

Morgan’s experience of the space is similar to other participants who feel that they cannot be approached by anyone outside of their friend circle. When you walk into Lavish, there are the washrooms and a few seats followed by a long hall with the bar on one side and chairs/dancing area on the other. In order to go to the upstairs patio or the coat check, you have to walk through the back dance floor/stage area in order to access

the stairs. The layout requires you to buy a drink and move as there is little space for congregating at the bar. To access other areas of the bar (e.g. washrooms or coat check) one is constantly required to move through the bar space. Aside from staying on the dance floor, the set-up is not conducive to being in one place. You are always required to be on the move. So unless you are one of the few groups able to get the seats that are available, the bar can limit one's ability to congregate with friends or to meet someone new.

Another issue that may relate to approachability or congregation with multiple people at Lavish is the fact that the music is very loud. Toby likes the socializing aspects of bars, but does not experience this at Lavish: "Lavish, it's a different kind of place. You're not going to sit down over a beer and have a discussion. Maybe you're going to dance or I don't know, it's noisier; it's a different vibe."⁴⁷ Chef echoed this. He attends Lavish on occasion, but he more so enjoys attending live music and punk shows with his partner at other venues. He summarized his time at Lavish succinctly: "Friday and Saturday nights, it's more about going out and dancing and being on the dance floor."⁴⁸ While there is not anything particularly wrong with dancing to loud music, this is not an environment that allows for much conversation. Cohen does not find this type of bar atmosphere appealing. He said: "I'm just at a place in my life where a good time for me isn't going out and dancing to music and screaming at the top of my lungs to talk to somebody. I want to go to a space where I can actually have that sense of community, talk to people, socialize, dance, and have more than just a really loud bassline."⁴⁹ Many people enjoy the loud dance music aspect of Lavish and there is something to be said about a large group of LGBTQ folks congregating en masse on the dance floor. As discussed in the literature

review, dancing can be a form of social exchange and empowerment for LGBTQ people who may not be able to otherwise experience dancing with other LGBTQ people in a bar space. The loud music at Lavish, however, does not leave much room for networking and engaging in conversations with other LGBTQ people at the bar.

The music that they play at Lavish is mostly top 40 remixes and dance music. This does not go well for LGBTQ people who like a diversity of music. Dawn, a lesbian in her mid 40s, has been very active in the LGBTQ bar scene since her late teens and she has always appreciated a wide diversity of music and art. When I asked her to describe Lavish, she immediately said:

Their music sucks. It's only techno. It drives me crazy. I want to give [the owner] the biggest noogy ever. And just say, 'come on, give me of R&B, give me something else to dance to.' I can't do the 'uhns ah uhns ah uhns ah' all night long. But ya, so [the owner's] definitely got a techno bar. None of the other bars have ever been just techno bar. HALO as I've said earlier, was fairly diverse in its music; I think 181 was fairly diverse in its music as well; as well as Lacey's and all those other bars. They have been pretty diverse – well not as diverse as the HALO's country, western, and polka, but it was more of a community centre. But the rest of the bars are just a little bit of disco, a little bit of R&B, a little bit of pop, you know, you could actually go up to the DJ and make a request, whereas you can't do that at Lavish.⁵⁰

A diversity of music is necessary to try to be more inclusive to the music tastes of the community, as seen in the previous LGBTQ bars in London in the 80s and 90s. However, it seems that Lavish sticks to one genre, which aids in the creation of an environment that best suits their demographic focus.

Within many dance clubs, not just LGBTQ bars, there is a prominent element of drug use (such as alcohol, cocaine, and MDMA), which often goes hand-in-hand with a dance

party. Multiple participants spoke about usually going to Lavish to get drunk and possibly hook-up. While potentially being a fun aspect of the bar culture of Lavish, these are often short-term excitements, leaving LGBTQ folks who desire longer-lasting connectivity with an environment that has an absence of opportunities for community building. This was echoed by Rose. She said, “I don't go there to have meaningful conversations... I go there when I'm drunk. It's not...very layered or an atmosphere where you can meet just any random person. I don't know. I just don't feel inspired at all when I go there.”⁵¹ Wolf, a queer genderqueer in their early 20s, mirrored this experience and recalled their first time at Lavish: “it was just weird I guess cuz, I guess we mostly spent time like on the floor dancing and... having a couple of drinks but not really talking.”⁵² The inability to potentially meet new friends, feel inspired, or feel connected to others in the bar space can be very real when the main focus of the environment is substance use and partying. While substances can have positive effects for people’s enjoyment at bars, there are also negative consequences. Carlos feels uneasy about the atmosphere of Lavish. He compared Lavish to a popular student bar: “it's very similar to... it's very much like Jack's except everybody is queer. Does that make any sense? It's like everyone is drunk and there's no consent to anything and it's very like sloppy and I don't like it.”⁵³ Jack’s is a top-40 dance club that caters to undergraduate students. It is generally packed with a constant line-up out the door, serves inexpensive drinks, and it is often staffed with off-duty city police due to the debauchery and fights that occur at the venue. Jack’s is in many ways out of control – and to compare Lavish to Jack’s is not a compliment! The party atmosphere coupled with an overindulgence in substances, can lead to sexual assaults or riskier sexual behaviours. Further, substance use at bars can also be alienating for those

who do not use any substances. Sparklebottom described Lavish as such: “It's super party oriented and a little more drug-oriented than just like drinking and stuff like that, so like for me that even removes me further from the experience cuz I also don't do drugs, so I didn't know how to relate with a lot of people.”⁵⁴ Substance use, loud dance music, and the physical layout of Lavish can potentially alienate first-timers or other community members who do not wish to partake in those activities. They help in the creation of an environment that is too specific for a particular demographic, and subsequently, the exclusion of other LGBTQ people in London.

Of course, Lavish, like any bar, is not without its problems; however, participants did provide positive reflections on the bar. Multiple people discussed how fun it is to go dance at Lavish where it is a welcoming and safe environment for LGBTQ people in London. For those who found dance party culture less appealing, some spoke about karaoke on Thursday nights and how it is a different vibe altogether, and usually a slightly older, more diverse crowd. Some people spoke about how it was a fun venue to attend, particularly when they were younger or first coming out. Others liked attending because they were able to recognize familiar faces in the space. Lastly, aside from karaoke providing a different type of environment, a couple of participants also spoke about attending specific events there that were not the typical Friday/Saturday night type of parties and how these felt more welcoming.

In terms of creating community through Lavish, it does meet some of the requirements for community as discussed by the research participants and there is opportunity to make changes to make it more inclusive. Lavish does provide a physical space that occasionally

hosts events. That being said, it lacks the recognition and visibility of LGBTQ signifiers that make some people feel at home. Some participants felt comfort knowing that there would be other LGBTQ people there, but participants did not generally discuss Lavish as a place for social supports. Common/shared visions or goals were also not highlighted by any of the participants. Overall, Lavish lacks diversity in terms of the types of entertainment that are provided to attendees and the diversity of ages, gender identities, and other characteristics. Nevertheless, it does provide a need for a space where LGBTQ people can attend as an alternative to most of the heteronormative bar spaces in London.

4.5 The APK/Gen Pop

The location of the bar, the APK, at 347 Clarence Street is of particular importance to the history of LGBTQ communities. It is located in a building that has been a variety of LGBTQ bars since at least the 1980s, including such venues as: Our Place, 52nd Street, SINNZ, Annex to 181, and Club Seven. During the research timeframe, however, the bar was changing from Brennan's Beer Bistro, which was an LGBTQ venue with a giant rainbow flag hung as the backdrop to the stage, to the APK, which has had three different locations and a variety of different owners previous to this reincarnation. The APK has historically been an arts and music pub that has been LGBTQ-friendly, but not an LGBTQ venue. However, while the name of the space changed and some of the clientele changed, it was still run by a queer trailblazer by the name of Joan Brennan, who has owned a variety of LGBTQ spaces in the city over the last three decades. While some participants interviewed spoke about the venue in general, most participants spoke about the LGBTQ events that took place in the space, specifically the event called Gen Pop.⁵⁵

Gen Pop, short for General Population, was first imagined in 2011 by a group of friends who desired something different, something queer and trans-inclusive. Though it did not surface until February 2012, Gen Pop provided an alternative to the current LGBTQ community bar scene. As advertised on the Facebook page for their first event:

General Population is a monthly trans and queer dance event that caters to individuals (and their allies) who do not identify with the gender-normative social settings of gay (male) bars. From the hybrid music collection of Boyfriend Material to the political zines that will be offered by the DJ booth, this night will be equal parts dance romp and radical provocation as well as an overall celebration of cultural and gender ambiguity.⁵⁶

Gen Pop took place at two other venues, before settling into a regularly scheduled monthly event at Brennan's Beer Bistro, and then the APK.

The major themes for Gen Pop that came from the interview participants are starkly different from that of Lavish. This is unsurprising given that Gen Pop set out to create an alternative to the other LGBTQ spots in the city. Further, in the interview guide, participants were asked about Gen Pop after similar questions for Buckwild's and Lavish, so participants often drew comparisons between Gen Pop and Lavish (and occasionally Buckwild's). The major themes discussed herein include: diversity and visibility; inclusion and support; conversation and socializing; and the general space – both the physical and the social environments.

Diversity was discussed the most by all participants who had attended Gen Pop events. Diversity was also discussed in a variety of ways. The age range and types of people who attend Gen Pop are diverse. Adam previously discussed Lavish being a younger crowd, but his experiences of Gen Pop were very different. He said:

The crowd's a few years older, and people who are older go – and like although the average age of the crowd might still be young, older people do come out, right? It is a space in which you see a wider age range than you definitely would somewhere like Lavish. So even if there's a lot of young grad students or undergrads, there's also a lot of people to...if you want to talk to people who are, you know, grown-ups. And – ya, it's just a much, it's obviously more gender – you know, at Lavish often feels like its, I mean I've only been there a few times, but it seems to be mostly gay guys and straight girls, whereas it's obviously not like that at Gen Pop.⁵⁷

While bars in London mostly cater to younger crowds, Gen Pop seemed to attract a variety of folks. I remember one Gen Pop where I ran into undergrads in their late teens, professors in their mid forties, and older folks in their sixties. And it is not just the age of the attendees that is diverse, it's also people from a variety of different educational, sexual, and cultural backgrounds. Almost all of the older interview participants had attended Gen Pop. According to Jones, a queer/lesbian in her mid 60s,

you know when you have Gen Pop events, they're not just gay, right? They're not just young, they're not just middle-age, they're not just anything, right? Because this is a small centre. You have people from the university, you have people from the activist community, you have people from the punk community, you have people from the youth community, you have lesbians from the suburbs, right? And everybody comes.⁵⁸

This melting pot, as one participant described it, is not just because London is a smaller city; if this were the case, you would see the same at Lavish and Buckwild's. It is also because Gen Pop offers a variety of events for attendees of all ages.

Gen Pop events have ranged from drag shows, themed dance parties, and musical performances, to trivia nights and film screenings with group discussions. This diversity draws people like Lunar, whom I have seen at most of the Gen Pop events. He described the diversity of Gen Pop as follows: "I feel like it welcomes a large diversity of folks and

does not consistently play one kind of music or display one kind of art or have one kind of band or anything. I think it's pretty welcoming to most anybody, which I think is the kind of community that I want to belong to and the kind of place that I would like to hang out at.”⁵⁹ The diversity of the programming at Gen Pop is not consistently the same, which intrigues people like Lunar. Dawn, who I also saw at most of the Gen Pops, also discussed the multiplicity of activities that occur. She said:

Like with the Gen Pop stuff, there's a whole show that goes on, people watch, there's sometimes a band, you never really know what's going to happen – well you do, if you read the program, but if you just go out to the show, you might not realize that tonight there's going to be drag performance this time, there might be a band this time, there might just be a DJ or there might be burlesque or whatever – it's very diverse, which I really rather enjoy because I think it brings more people out.⁶⁰

The diversity of the LGBTQ community requires a diversity of types of entertainment and activities. According to multiple participants, Gen Pop provided the diversity that many LGBTQ folks felt was needed for the community in London.

Gen Pop events were also discussed in terms of being “queer events” or in terms of the visibility or visual cues that participants read as queer and/or inclusive to a diversity of attendees. According to Wolf, the APK is turned into a place where (almost) anything goes “where you can dress differently and say things that are less, I guess, I don't know what the best term is, like mainstream, like less socially acceptable.”⁶¹ Less mainstream, alternative, or pop culture-driven are among the ways in which participants discussed spaces as “queer.”⁶² Cohen was able to draw a distinction between a gay bar and a queer bar, based on his experiences in London LGBTQ bars. He said:

there's a very distinctive difference between a gay bar and a queer bar. You know when you look around, and maybe part of it is I see what I want to see, I think we all do, but when I'm at Gen Pop I look around, I see people like me, I see trans guys, I see trans women, I see people that are all over the fucking gender spectrum that identify as nothing or everything. I see straight couples, I see folks...you know, I think of a straight couple that are friends of mine, that are really awesome that think this is the best party in the city and they just lived in Toronto for a couple of years and went to all sort of indie stuff. They're like: 'gay, straight, queer, whatever, this is just a really good party and everyone is really nice,' which is, you know, so I think I feel like there's lots of different kinds of people that are visible. I see people of colour, folks with disabilities, like there's just lots of different flavours of people the way that I feel, you know, Lavish is a very white space, it's a very male-oriented space.⁶³

While bars such as Lavish tend to cater to a specific crowd, in contrast, Cohen and his friends enjoy Gen Pop because the diversity amongst the attendees is something that is visible. This visual experience was also echoed by Sam, a pansexual/queer genderqueer in their mid 30s, who said Gen Pop was similar to their past experiences at other queer spaces in larger cities. They said:

It's good – it reminds me of my previous experiences with highly populated queer spaces. It's like walking into that space and seeing the visual cues again—maybe it's because I know it's a queer space at that time—and it's like, 'woah! look at all the queers around me.' It's awesome and feels like people can look at me and read me as queer in this space. Whereas out in the world all the time, I feel like not a lot of people read me as queer. So it's about visibility. When I go to Gen Pop and there's lots of people there and I can tell that lots of people there are queer, and I feel like people can tell that I'm queer, it just feels visible.⁶⁴

For people like Sam, it is important to see similarities of queerness in alternative spaces in comparison to the hetero and gender normative world. Visibility allows LGBTQ people to explicitly identify sameness in a crowd. These visual cues aid in providing a sense of inclusion where people are able to identify with those around them.⁶⁵

Inclusion and support were also discussed by participants at length. Cohen ties the idea of inclusion with safety and particularly the inclusion of trans people in an LGBTQ space.

He said:

I look at a space like APK or a space where you know, or an organization like Gen Pop, where the goal is like, have an amazing time, feel safe, and let's give something back. So I think that political bit about being queer ties in there and to me, I think it's about visibility too. When you walk into Lavish, you predominantly see white, gay men that fit the ideal, that have the body type and you see lesbians. And that's not to say that every trans person is visible as trans; however, I recognize myself in a lot of the people when I go into something like Gen Pop. I see other trans people and I also recognize that not a lot of trans folks I know even go to Lavish because they feel the same way, so ya for me, it's about the agenda of the people that are putting on these events. It's about their politics. It's about – do I see people, do I see myself in people that are going to this venue as well.⁶⁶

What is compelling about this quotation is the fact that Cohen ties visibility, recognition, and safety with the politics and goals of the event. Gen Pop, is an event that explicitly tries to foster a safe and inclusive space. Visibility is not just seeing others like us; rather, it also alludes to comfort and support, particularly when people are seen having a good time. This safe space fostering is particularly needed for trans folks, and other diverse gender identities and expressions. Trans inclusive spaces are unfortunately few and far between. For example, Emily, while not trans or genderqueer herself, knows people who have had negative experiences at other venues related to gender identity and expression.

She stated:

Ya, I have one friend who doesn't really identify as trans and doesn't really identify as anything and they wore a binder to Lavish and they were like not physically harassed, but just like questioned like aggressively and I don't think that would've happened at Gen Pop. Like things like that make me. That's one of the reasons I backed out of Lavish because I think that is just reflected in the kind of people who go there.⁶⁷

Trans inclusion is important for the collective that organizes Gen Pop events – so much so that it is explicitly stated on the event pages and/or the advertising posters (see Figure 3). For Toby, having trans explicitly mentioned means that ze will feel safe at the venue.⁶⁸

Some participants felt that the actual physical environment of the bar is what makes Gen Pop feel inclusive. Naomi said, “I would say it's more inclusive, regardless of the crowds, it's just the environment...it's just definitely more inclusive. Not the name APK, not that, but the establishment, the space, that's what I mean...it's more friendly.”⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier, the APK is housed in a building where there is lots of LGBTQ cultural memory, so that impacts how people interact and feel comfortable in the space. The physical layout itself is very open. When you walk through the front door, there is a large bar to the right with lots of bar seating and congregation spaces across from it. Straight ahead, there is a wide room with a stage and dance floor surrounded by chairs, booths, and the DJ booth. At the back of the bar, there is access to a large patio and the washrooms. The space allows attendees to congregate pretty much wherever, with some areas quieter than others for those who want to have conversations.

The physical environment of a bar definitely can impact one's experience in the space, as seen previously with some participants' experiences at Lavish, but there is also the social environment that impacts a feeling of inclusion away from a cliquy environment experienced elsewhere. Stanley provided an example of the crowd support that was provided to a new drag performer at Gen Pop. He stated:

the environment also influences the audience and the audience has a *huge* impact on how drag is perceived and what the show is going to be all about. I mean, for instance, at the first drag event we did at Gen Pop, our Drag Queen Victoria Show, we were working with people from the Imperial Court, which is a group of... they tend to be older and they've been around since the 70s doing drag in London and there was one member who got up named 'Denise' who... she kind of barely moved at all during her performance... she just got up and lip synched and the crowd loved it. The crowd was really supportive and really vocally supportive and I don't think any crowd would be like that ... I don't want to say that's because people who are at Gen Pop are just better... I think that it's more that what the crowd is expecting and the reason the crowd is there you could feel was for a really different reason than at kind of a night out at a bar and that was really special and important. So, ya, I think that venue, but also crowd... the reason why the people are coming together... that plays a very big influence on how the show is going to happen and what's going to come out of it.⁷⁰

Having support from a large audience can be empowering particularly for first-time performers. I vividly remember this performance. It was like an amateur night and it appeared like it was her first performance. "Denise" was visibly nervous and was not doing a very good job of performing her song. However, the audience cheered her on throughout the song and ended with a long applause. This noticeably made "Denise" feel happy and supported. Without a crowd that supports all calibers of performance, social environments can become elitist and cliquey. However, this was not the case for Gen Pop.

The feeling of inclusion and support at Gen Pop was also identified by some participants with references to the idea of being home – which is often understood culturally as a positive place for someone to be (e.g. "home is where the heart is"). Thinking about the cultural relevance for LGBTQ community in particular, according to Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, "sexual minorities have often attempted to transform landscapes to create spaces for self-protection, for pleasure, and for building homes and refuges for healing."⁷¹ While this section of this chapter is about Gen Pop specifically, this is not to

say that everyone felt this connection at Gen Pop, nor is it to say that feelings of home may not have also been experienced in other bars. As discussed by Andrea Davis (2013) in her ethnography of a drag night, LGBTQ patrons do feel at home in LGBTQ bar spaces, particularly with their chosen LGBTQ families and friends. Nevertheless, in terms of the interviews, references to “home” were discussed specifically regarding Gen Pop. For example, Naomi discussed this – only she discussed home in reference to the cultural memory that the space evokes.



Figure 3: Gen Pop Face Lick Poster

The history of 347 Clarence Street as an LGBTQ space provides elements of safety and comfort for Naomi. She said:

That venue is more of an open venue compared to Lavish, so it has already a reputation of being a gay bar, so people already know that by the time they step into Brennan’s, that they are comfortable and that they are okay. They are in a

safe environment and no matter how many times that establishment changes name or ownership or anything, people just know it to be an LGBT community. Friendly. It's very comforting. Just has this spirit the moment you walk in, you just feel like you're at home.⁷²

The cultural memory, community knowledge, and the consistency of it being an LGBTQ space adds an additional level of assumed safety, security, and a home-like feeling for people attending the space. Home was also discussed in terms of the events of Gen Pop. For example, Adam said: “I enjoy it and would like to go back, right? Ya. I don't feel like I'm in another - when I go to Lavish I feel like I'm some kind of foreign tourist; it's just not my social milieu, whereas at Gen Pop I feel very at home.”⁷³ Finally, Stanley made reference to home in terms of organizing inclusive events. He said, “I'm a part of a group called General Population that is trying to make more of a queer... bringing together more of a queer community that has more of a trans focus, so you know obviously I'm really happy and at home with that.”⁷⁴ Stanley not only feels this way in attending the events, but as an organizer, he is working to actively shape the events to be more inclusive and welcoming to the attendees. A feeling of home for Stanley and Adam provides a contentness and familiarity for them that extends beyond their primary homes. Providing a home-like space or atmosphere for attendees works to ensure that people feel safe and welcome all under one roof with a variety of community members.

The third major theme that came out of the interviews with people about the APK or Gen Pop was the ability for people to engage in conversations not just with their friends, but also with other community members. Su-Lee, a bisexual/pansexual/queer woman in her early 20s, compared Gen Pop to her experience at Lavish: “There were less people and it was less crowded and less noisy. And there was more of an opportunity for conversation,

which I really liked.”⁷⁵ Jay, a bisexual/queer man in his late 40s, also enjoys having conversations at bars. He joked: “I like being able to talk. Not just tonight, but also tomorrow morning!”⁷⁶ While some bars are focused around loud dance music, this does not particularly leave much room to have discussions with other people.

Many participants spoke about not only speaking with other people that were not just their friends, but also about make connections with people that lasted outside of the bar space. Emily reflected, “Ya, I had really good conversations at the last Gen Pop and I've met a couple of people who have been [to my home] since.”⁷⁷ Carlos also resonated with this. He said:

Yes. At the APK you can actually talk to people, and you can't hear anyone over the music at Lavish. And you actually like, you can go there and make friends as opposed to go there with your friends and not really make new ones, I guess? And I guess it would be more like community-building. Like you can, I've actually gone there and made friends with similar interests that are in programs similar to mine and hung out with them after.⁷⁸

Not only do people enjoy the ability to have conversations at Gen Pop, but they find the ability to connect with those outside their friendship circles and build long-lasting relationships beyond the bar space. While other spaces can feel cliquy, Morgan felt that it was easy to approach strangers at Gen Pop. She reflected on a time in which she approached a drag queen after a performance. She said: “I had a really good conversation with one of them and that's how I drew my conclusions talking with them rather than like this person that I don't know who they are. And I try to understand them, but talking to them is where I get that inclusion and that level of support.”⁷⁹ Through conversations with strangers, Morgan and other attendees of Gen Pop find ways to support others and increase community inclusion. Furthermore, by providing an environment where the

music is not ear-piercingly loud and there are a diversity of attendees makes space for conversations to occur, bonds to develop, and communities to flourish all in one space.

This leads into the last theme of the physical and social environment. While I already spoke about this briefly in terms of how an environment is inclusive, it is important to highlight what the environment consists of and how community members operate within the space. As seen in the title of this article, Stanley suggested that “it's not just because of the space. It's because of what people are doing.”⁸⁰ For example, Chef's perception of Gen Pop is that it is less about being LGBTQ and more about who is attending and what they are engaging in:

I don't see Gen Pop as strictly LGBTQ, you know? Um a lot of my straight friends go there too. You know? So and General Population is just that right? it encompasses everybody. It's not - it's a safe space for people who are LGBTQ, but it's - I don't really see it as a main focus really. I don't think that's what brings people together. I think it's the art and the music and just the people in general regardless of who they sleep with or...⁸¹

While Gen Pop explicitly advertises its events as trans and queer events, it does not seek to exclude people who may not identify as such. It tends to attract subcultures such as punks and goths due, in part, to the types of music, performances, and the overall aesthetics of the events. When I asked Chef to elaborate on the art of Gen Pop and how it brings people together, he said:

The art. It's just different, you know? It's something that London and that sort of community hasn't done. I mean, Lavish does a lot of art things, but I mean it's not really artistically diverse as what I would like to see it. Whereas Gen Pop – I mean, you know, some of the bands, and the performers, and stuff that have played there, I mean, you know, are amazing. I wouldn't ever see that at Lavish. I don't think, like Patron Stain.⁸² I would never see them at Lavish *laughs* unfortunately! But it... that's the main difference I think.⁸³

The particular kinds of art and music attract a diversity of people regardless of if they identify as queer or trans. The unpredictability and diversity of Gen Pop events can be seen as a positive, as not only does it bring more people out who enjoy different aspects of the event, but it also exposes attendees to potentially new experiences and forms of entertainment, such as drag shows, interactive art installations, face painting, and musical performances, to name a few.

When I asked participants about the physical space of the APK, there was a variety of responses. Some drew on the importance historically of the building being an LGBTQ space, others talked about the layout of the space. According to Emily, when asked about the space, she said: “I don't know. It may have to do with the architecture of the place. Lavish is long and black and there's always lights whereas the APK is just warmer. Umm... but also just like I think people pick up on that so they bring their friends.”⁸⁴ As described earlier, the layout of the venue is more susceptible to congregation and free movement, and this is attractive and contagious for new attendees. While the physicalities can impact the ways in which people inhabit a space, Cohen had a different take on the space of the APK. He believes that the vision and politics of the organizers and what they include in an event are key components to an inclusive community space. He said:

I think it's about the promoters of the event. To me it's not so much about the physical space, I mean you could through a queer party in a barn and it wouldn't matter that it was there as long as you had, I think it's – I mean, it's everything from the vibe that the posters portray that the way that it's put out there, that that event was created because the people who created it saw an immediate need. Like these are people that are not being served that deserve to have a safe space; that should be put first in community instead of the last letter of the alphabet soup, which I think is great and there's you know, always from the people that put on the event or the people that are working that space, I mean there's been a couple of times where someone has given me trouble and that's always addressed right

away. It's never just, oh well you know, that person does that sometimes. Like there is a valiant effort to make it a safe space, which somewhere like Lavish, they don't make it a safe space, they want to make money. I also look at Gen Pop... I mean, it's a fundraiser for a support group for queer youth, you know, like it's not just a place to go and get wasted. It's doing a good thing for an underserved community. I think knowing that I'm contributing to that forms some sense of identity as well, so...⁸⁵

Cohen clearly outlines that the organizers and volunteers of Gen Pop are making an effort to provide a space that is for the community, particularly one that strives to provide a safe and inclusive space. However, while these components are important to consider when thinking about the support, goals, and politics of an LGBTQ event, had Gen Pop occurred at Lavish, the limitations of its physical space would make it more difficult than the APK to congregate and meet new people.

Various participants spoke about the atmosphere of the APK or Gen Pop. Morgan said that she prefers to go there and that it provides a better atmosphere to sit and talk. At the same time, you are able to partake in other activities such as dancing. Morgan drew a comparison between dancing at Lavish and dancing at Gen Pop where one feels more social than the other. She said:

Lavish is like dance scene if you want to dance there and you actually want to dance you can almost get lost in the crowd and that's kind of invigorating and enjoyable if you're enjoying the dancing and it's kind of a giant group at points and Brennan's I still feel almost it has that awkward kinda dance, but it's better than it was when I first went for dancing because people didn't know what it was and there's more people going now that it's more of a like 'ok we can get in here and dance,' but it's also it has at the same time that you're dancing, it has that social aspect in a way. It just feels social. It feels like a social place to go, and Lavish doesn't feel like you should be going there to talk to people. It should be going there for other reasons. It's more of a – go there and dance and then go home or whatever – Brennan's is more of a – you can dance but we're going there to talk and have a nice drink and hang out and it's, it's almost like one of those nights where you feel good at the end and you know you're going to feel good either way because it's – there's not really a disappointment and there's no – like

you're not going from an extreme low to an extreme high to drop back down again. It's like a nice level comfortability that's enjoyable. I think that's how I'd explain it.⁸⁶

Gen Pop, at times, can feel like an awkward high school dance, with people scattered throughout the space doing art, talking with new and old friends, and only a few people dancing. However, as Morgan describes it, this is due to the social aspects of the event. It is not to say that it is always an “awkward dance” space. Having DJ'd at the majority of Gen Pop events, the dance floor quickly explodes when songs such as Sylvester's “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)” or Le Tigre's “Decepticon” plays over the speakers. Indeed, as discussed by Ramon Rivera-Servera, in his investigation of lesbian and gay Latina/o dance clubs, the emergency of community and other future possibilities surface through improvisation and interacting with others on the dance floor.⁸⁷ Dance at LGBTQ spaces does play an important role (as discussed in more detail in Chapter Six). However, while this is enjoyable to some, to have the ability to do other things within the space makes it more inviting for a diversity of community members who may not always want to dance.

The social aspect of Gen Pop that Morgan touches on was also discussed by other participants. Graham said that Gen Pop was less about sexuality and more about the community aspect of the event. He said,

Um Gen Pop is different. Gen Pop is basically kind of like, we are all individual different beings who have a shared commonality in respecting these differences and so the social circle that emerges with that are people of various walks of life, both straight and gay or queer, it doesn't even matter and it doesn't matter at all. The purpose of the event is largely for social exchange as opposed to sexual connection.⁸⁸

While Graham is right to state that Gen Pop includes people from “various walks of life,” to say that it does not matter or that people do not attend for sexual connection is somewhat incorrect. The community at Gen Pop does embrace social connection, but this is also on the basis that the event is primarily by and for trans and queer people in London.

The opportunity for social exchange is not just for friendship circles, but it also provides the potential to engage with strangers. Naomi thoroughly enjoys Gen Pop for this aspect:

I think it's a growing thing. It's - when I say growing, I mean it's more accepting, so Gen Pop is allowing, Gen Pop is doing an amazing job by being there because they're allowing all of the sexes to mix and be friendly and at peace with each other. It's a very, very good idea...And it's just a fun night. It's just everybody could just come, dance, and just be themselves, regardless of the sex and gender. It's just an inviting atmosphere. It's really, really comfortable, and I like it. And I want more Gen Pop. Like whenever there's Gen Pops I want to go because I know I meet a lot of people – like, you know, like new faces. It's not like the same old faces from the other clubs and stuff. You get to see new gays and new people. It's just interesting and you know, it's nice. I like it.⁸⁹

Both the physical and the social environment of Gen Pop provide supportive and comforting spaces for the diversity of the LGBTQ community in London. There are ample opportunities for attendees to mix together either through dancing, conversing, or enjoying a show. These are key for building a better LGBTQ community in London.

While there were a lot of positive aspects identified about Gen Pop or the APK in general, there were some negative aspects that were addressed by participants. Multiple people discussed the frequency of Gen Pop and how it was only providing events every month instead of there being a space which people could attend regularly. One participant spoke about how it also feels cliquey like other bars. Another person spoke about her

experience of transphobia at the APK when there was a non-LGBTQ event and multiple people discussed how the change from Brennan's Beer Bistro to the APK has affected either their decisions to attend the space or their perception of what now occurs in the space as somehow not being LGBTQ-inclusive. These criticisms of the change in the space and the experiences in the space are important to consider. However, for Gen Pop specifically, the event strives to provide that inclusive, supportive space that is diverse and visibly LGBTQ and provides a physical and social environment that allows for multiple engagements between community members beyond a strictly party scene that most clubs in the city try to create. The connections made at Gen Pop, as discussed by some participants, are ones that move beyond the event and foster community building.

Gen Pop at 347 Clarence Street functions most like an LGBTQ community in London. A physical space is provided that encourages LGBTQ recognition and visibility. In this space, people experience support in many ways – either from conversations shared with friends or strangers or from the crowd when they are performing on stage. There are common/shared visions and goals through the mission statement – though it is less clear that all participants at Gen Pop commit to this. However, by having a fundraiser at each event, people are made aware what they are contributing to and the overall goals of Gen Pop. Interview participants identified developing shared interests and making connections with others through conversations and socializing that often move beyond the bar.

Diversity and inclusion are also key components to LGBTQ community at Gen Pop. This can be seen from the diversity of ages, genders, sexualities, and other identities as well as the diversity of entertainment or activities occurring at Gen Pop.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an analysis of three LGBTQ bars in London. Through utilizing the four major tenets that were identified by the research participants, I investigated the ways in which these three bars related to these tenets. These tenets of community include: supports; common/shared visions/goals; physical spaces; and LGBTQ-specific events. As discussed in the previous chapter, the social fragmentation of LGBTQ communities is a result of liquid modernity, capitalism, and the neoliberal focus on the individual. I have argued previously that due to this instability and attack on community, that LGBTQ spaces and their inhabitant “aesthetic communities” (Bauman, 2001) become increasingly important for gender and sexual minorities. Similar to the HALO club, and in response to criticism of these types of communities from Bauman, all three of the spaces discussed in this chapter have held various types of events. While these spaces all have their issues, to say that, as aesthetic communities, they are short-lived, create bonds without consequences, or were based on superficial relationships really underscores the importance of the bar space for building LGBTQ community in London, as discussed by all of the interview participants.

Earlier in this chapter, I had suggested that bars have historically played a prominent role in developing a sense of community, subjectivity, visibility, political consciousness, and social supports. Do these still remain true to current bars for LGBTQ people in London? Yes and no. It is evident from the interviews that some LGBTQ spaces more than others met the four requirements for LGBTQ community. Buckwild’s, for example, while a space which most interview participants had not attended, those who did attend enjoyed

their experiences in the space. Buckwild's does provide a physical space and occasionally hosts events at the bar, but it lacks diversity and it is perceived as exclusively for gay men. Participants did not identify it as being a supportive environment where there was any sign of common visions or goals. While Buckwild's has the potential to be a community space in London, it also has a lot of stigma attached to it for some LGBTQ people in London due to its close proximity to the bathhouse and its location in the city. For those who attend Buckwild's regularly, it may provide a sense of community and aid in the development of certain LGBTQ subjectivities and visibility, but this would warrant an investigation beyond this dissertation, as the interview participants did not discuss these in reference to Buckwild's.

Participants had mixed experiences at Lavish. People liked the familiarity of the space as one that was generally safe and welcoming for LGBTQ people. The events that Lavish hosts, such as karaoke, drag shows, and all-ages pride proms, were spoken about favourably. The dance party atmosphere was highlighted by most participants as both a positive and a negative aspect, but as we have seen through various studies, dance has an importance for LGBTQ community as it is a mechanism for queer world making (Buckland, 2002) where creativity and subjectivity enable social change. In terms of the four tenets of community, Lavish was similar to Buckwild's in the sense that it provided a physical bar space that occasionally hosted events; however, participants also spoke about how it had a cliquy and judgmental environment, lacked diversity, and provided more of a party atmosphere—where there was an absence of conversation and connectivity with other attendees. Lavish, for some participants and on certain nights,

provided a sense of community, subjectivity, and visibility for many LGBTQ people in London.

Finally, the APK/Gen Pop functioned most like an LGBTQ community in London. A physical space was provided with the recognition and visibility of a diversity of attendees. Gen Pop also provided a diversity of forms of entertainment or activities from film screenings and trivia nights to bands, burlesque, and drag performances. This provided something for LGBTQ people of many ages and interests (as discussed further in Chapter 6). People attended Gen Pop with common/shared visions or goals. There was an intentionality and choice for people to continuously attend Gen Pop and raise funds for an underserved population. Some participants felt that Gen Pop provided a nurturing, supportive, home-like environment and that there was an effort to make it a safe and secure space for a diversity of LGBTQ people, though there were LGBTQ people who had never attended it. Gen Pop also only occurred once a month, leaving much waiting time in-between events. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, after the data collection phase of this research project, Gen Pop came to an end and the APK more recently closed its doors permanently.⁹⁰ These negative aspects are important to consider, particularly when thinking about how these impact the certainty of community that Bauman argues is integral for community.

LGBTQ community is difficult to create and sustain in London. The HALO club, as seen in the previous chapter, perhaps best accomplished this creation and sustainability of LGBTQ community. It provided all of the tenets of community and also provided safety, security, and certainty for the community. While the three bars that I discussed in this

chapter provide varying degrees of LGBTQ community, given the infrequency of events, they lack an element of certainty that these communities will come together once again. Nevertheless, Gen Pop has provided something more positive and inclusive to London's LGBTQ community than the other two LGBTQ bar spaces in London. While the element of certainty is currently lacking in London's LGBTQ community, this is not to say that it cannot be developed in the future as LGBTQ people continue to organize trans and queer events in London. Gen Pop, as discussed here and in the next two chapters, is a favourable working model for the future of London's LGBTQ community.

4.7 Endnotes

¹ While the discussion of this chapter is specific to bars and their events, this is not to say that there cannot be other spaces and events in which community can be formed and understood by LGBTQ people in London. For example, the London Lesbian Film Festival or Pride London could be understood as providing the tenets of community outside of bar spaces. However, in terms of the twenty-five interview participants, discussions of bars were very prominent in questions around community.

² Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

³ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987, 185.

⁴ Liz Millward, *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-1984*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015, 44.

⁵ Julie A. Podmore, "Gone 'underground'? Lesbian Visibility and the Consolidation of Queer Space in Montréal," in *Social & Cultural Geography* 7, 4 (2006): 598.

⁶ Dereka Rushbrook, "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8, 1-2 (2002): 190.

⁷ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.

⁸ When I asked Sparklebottom what his sexuality was, he first said: "I'm omnivorous; I eat anything!"

⁹ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.

¹⁰ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.

¹¹ Defining a space as an LGBTQ space can be difficult, as some people either do not identify with the space or they do not identify the space as being LGBTQ-specific. However, multiple participants had experiences at all of these spaces and while some were problematic, they were identified as somewhat LGBTQ spaces.

¹² At the time of the interviews, one of the bars was changing its name from Brennan's Beer Bistro to the APK. It will be referred to as the APK unless participants talk about each specifically.

¹³ Given the lack of involvement and experiences at Buckwild's by all twenty-five interview participants, the discussion of this venue in this chapter is significantly smaller than the sections on Lavish and the APK.

¹⁴ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.

¹⁵ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.

¹⁶ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

¹⁷ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.

¹⁸ Carlos. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 21, 2014.

¹⁹ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.

²² Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.

²³ Kinsman, 1987.

²⁴ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.

²⁵ Lavish Nightclub. 2015. <<http://www.clublavish.ca>>. Accessed 29 September 2015.

²⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.

²⁷ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.

³⁰ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.

³¹ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.

³² Fanshawe College. 2015. <<http://www.fanshawec.ca/about-fanshawe/campus/london-campus>>. Accessed 12 September 2015.

³³ Western University. 2015. <<http://www.uwo.ca/about/whoweare/facts.html>>. Accessed 12 September 2015.

³⁴ London has a city population of approximately 366, 000, as of 2011. See <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-cma-eng.cfm?LANG=Eng&GK=CMA&GC=555>

³⁵ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.

³⁶ Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.

³⁷ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

³⁸ By cliquey, I mean that there are groups of people at Lavish that are not welcoming of those outside the group.

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- ³⁹ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ⁴⁰ Alex. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 10, 2013.
- ⁴¹ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁴² Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ⁴³ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁴⁴ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.
- ⁴⁵ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.
- ⁴⁶ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ⁴⁷ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.
- ⁴⁸ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁴⁹ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁵⁰ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.
- ⁵¹ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ⁵² Wolf. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 7, 2013.
- ⁵³ Carlos. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 21, 2014.
- ⁵⁴ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.
- ⁵⁵ As mentioned in the methodologies section of Chapter 2, my role as a researcher is complicated because of my involvement first as a DJ and second as an organizer for Gen Pop. I am aware that this has impacted the ways in which I have framed the research on Gen Pop. However, all of the participants who had attended Gen Pop spoke about it in a very positive light. I took some time away from my dissertation and I have tried to reflect on the shortcomings of Gen Pop in a way that makes it seem less of a hagiography.
- ⁵⁶ General Population. 2012. <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/General-Population/134560493328589>>. Accessed 25 April 2012.
- ⁵⁷ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.
- ⁵⁸ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.
- ⁵⁹ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ⁶⁰ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.
- ⁶¹ Wolf. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 7, 2013.
- ⁶² The definition of queer is discussed in the next chapter. In short, participants had various interpretations of queer with some saying that it is all-encompassing or inclusive; more than just sexuality; it challenges the status quo and/or rigid identities; it includes non-normative identities, and so on. There was a general lack of consensus regarding the defining characteristics of queer and many participants had trouble defining it. Nonetheless, participants did identify “queer” as a valuable concept that was inclusive and pushed boundaries.
- ⁶³ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁶⁴ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ⁶⁵ For example, see Betti-Sue Hertz, Ed Eisenberg, and Lisa Maya Knauer, “Queer Spaces in New York City: Places of Struggle/Places of Strength,” in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, eds. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, Bay Press: Seattle, 1997: 357-372.

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- ⁶⁶ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁶⁷ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ⁶⁸ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.
- ⁶⁹ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.
- ⁷⁰ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁷¹ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter. "Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities." In *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*. Edited by Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter. Seattle: Bay Press, 1997, 454; emphasis added.
- ⁷² Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.
- ⁷³ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.
- ⁷⁴ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁷⁵ Su-Lee. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 9, 2013.
- ⁷⁶ Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.
- ⁷⁷ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ⁷⁸ Carlos. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 21, 2014.
- ⁷⁹ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ⁸⁰ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁸¹ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁸² Patron Stain was a queer punk band from Montréal, Canada.
- ⁸³ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁸⁴ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ⁸⁵ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ⁸⁶ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ⁸⁷ Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, "Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative," *Modern Drama* 47, 2 (Summer 2004): 269-289.
- ⁸⁸ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.
- ⁸⁹ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.
- ⁹⁰ The effects of these will be discussed in more details in the conclusion chapter.

Chapter 5

5 “It’s just a vibe I get and I can’t really explain it”: Camp, Raunch, and the Queer Aesthetics of Gen Pop’s Poster Advertisements

This chapter analyzes the ways in which LGBTQ people in London define queer and how the poster advertisements for Gen Pop utilize notions of camp and raunch in representing a queer aesthetic. This aesthetic works to transgress norms beyond rigid sexual and gender identity categories.

5.1 Introduction

It is a sunny spring day. I am riding my bicycle around the downtown core of London, Ontario, stapling poster advertisements to hydro polls and dropping them off at local businesses. The posters are for a local queer event called Gen Pop that puts on fundraisers for a trans and queer youth social support group. I help with organizing the events. It is the Friday before the event and I am putting up posters to ensure visibility of the event and hopefully to attract new attendees. It takes me close to two hours to complete this task (I usually do it once more closer to the date). I ride my bicycle home; only to discover the posters out front of my apartment building have already been torn down. This poster, specifically, has an image of Jesus Christ on it. Jesus is lying on the ground, casually smoking a cigarette in the nude with his pubic hair creeping up his stomach. This imagery is par for the course for Gen Pop posters that are designed by local artist, Yollam Naes. Gen Pop posters are often torn down, though some of them have a longer life than others. Are people taking them down because they like them and they want to attend the

events? Or are they being removed because they may be offensive to some parties?

Regardless of the rationale, the aesthetics of Gen Pop posters do attract attention, and likely for a variety of reasons.

Gen Pop poster advertisements¹ are unlike the advertisements for other bar events in the city. Other advertisements are usually comprised of loud fonts, mostly with all the pertinent information on it regarding the event and the occasional image to represent either a band or DJ or the type of atmosphere that the event is trying to cater to – usually a college/university party atmosphere for most of the nightclubs in London. In this chapter, I discuss the queer aesthetics of the Gen Pop poster advertisements. I argue that these posters offer a queer aesthetic that relies on both camp and raunch to convey its message. For the purpose of this chapter, camp is defined as an active word that, much like queer, is difficult to define. Camp is a mode of communication for queer that utilizes, irony, aestheticism, and humour in conveying its message. Raunch is defined as that which transgresses norms of respectability and privacy. It positively enforces indecency, lewdness, and vulgarity. This type of queer aesthetic confronts the viewer with imagery that challenges social norms, pushes boundaries, and moves some viewers outside of their comfort zones. This imagery captures the type of event that the organizers are attempting to create: one that is diverse and inclusive yet challenges the homonormativity of other LGBTQ bars, events, and spaces in the city.

5.2 Defining Queer

Before I delve into an analysis of the queer aesthetics of the posters for the queer and trans event, Gen Pop, a discussion around what constitutes “queer” for LGBTQ people in London, Ontario, is warranted. In this section, I discuss the multiple ways in which interview participants define queer in general. I highlight how multiple participants had a difficult time articulating the meaning of queer and how when participants were able to define queer in general, a majority of them used words like broad, diverse, and inclusive to describe the term. Queer was defined as something that transgresses normative sexual and gender categories, adds more socio-political dimensions than gay or lesbian, and disturbs the order of things.

The fact that interview participants initially had a difficult time defining queer was not surprising. I have difficulty defining it myself and I also anticipated this difficulty for the participants prior to the interview process. It is often a word that is used to define LGBTQ communities, yet its understanding and meaning is not monolithic for all those who identify with the term. When I asked Emily, a gay/lesbian/queer woman in her early 20s, about queer spaces, this was her initial response: “It's very hard to define. I don't think it's only about people. Maybe it's about...hmmm... how do I go about saying this. What makes a space queer? It's just a vibe that I get and I can't really explain it. Like when I walk into Gen Pop it just feels queer... hahaha. Like I can't, I'm sorry I can't...”² It is interesting that Emily – *who identifies as queer* – was able to experience a vibe or a feeling of queerness, yet she was unable to articulate the meaning, even when providing an example of a community event that she had experienced *as queer*. Morgan, a lesbian

in her early 20s, also had difficulties defining queer and she discussed it in comparison to how she is trying to figure out her own identity. She said:

It's almost ... I feel like if this was like a year ago I wouldn't have felt this way because queer was never really a big word that I used or understood, or even I can't understand it fully now. It's how you own it personally or view it ... I think I've learned and accepted it as a word or like understanding it or how I see it and using it as a definition, but not as a definition at the same time because that creates boundaries. Like how I figured out who I am, like my own identity, I think it was kind of like that deconstruction; tryin' to figure it out. But even that is something I don't I fully don't think I'll ever... I don't think it can ever be fully grasped.³

Morgan was able to discuss how she felt the term is used as an identity, yet she was unable to really describe it, as she sees difficulties with queer as a definition, as that would require it to create boundaries. Boundaries, for some, are antithetical to what it means for something to be queer. For example, Sam, a pansexual/queer genderqueer in their mid 30s, when discussing queer politics specifically, also had difficulties articulating its meaning: “I feel like every issue could be talked about from the perspective of queer politics. So that's why it's hard to explain, because there are so many things that fall into that category.”⁴ Queer does seem to be used as a catchall phrase in some instances. Thus, when I asked participants to define the term, it is no wonder that some had difficulties articulating it.

The fact that queer is difficult to define is in some ways part of its definition.⁵ Chef, a gay/queer man in his late 40s, described queer in the following way: “Well just playing on the, you know, the differences in gender, you know sexual ambiguity, that sort of thing. Not necessarily identifying as one thing or the other, but a culmination of everything, sort of thing. And usually it invokes sort of political and social activism. That's what that word sort of means to me. You know?”⁶ Chef identifies gender

differences, ambiguity, non-identity, and a “culmination of everything” as components of the term queer. And while queer contains a multiplicity of things, its ambiguity – like its inclusivity – is an integral aspect of the definition. In identifying himself as queer, Chef stated: “Queer is less accepting... or less accepted than saying that you're gay. You know, when I ever told people that I'm queer, even gay friends, like sort of... ‘queer, like wow!’”⁷ It is interesting that Chef states that queer is a culmination of everything, yet the term itself is less accepted, even among his gay friends. To be less accepting is to refuse or reject, which in a sense leads to its ambiguous, non-identity definition. Rather than being a culmination of everything, it might be more apt to suggest that queer is open to multiple things and is in constant flux in space and time.

Jones, a queer/lesbian in her mid 60s, when discussing her queer identity, described the openness of being queer or an identity that is not so rigid. She said:

To me, queer is lewd. Queer is more avant-garde. Queer is more open... I'm definitely queerer than... I'm more fag than most gay men. Right? I'm queerer than a lot of people in this town. It's okay I don't judge, but, you know, I do think that queer is pansexual, it's pangender, I think queer is the catch-all for all the people who don't really rigidly fit into lesbian, or gay, or fag, or whatever you identify as, you know what I mean?⁸

Jones' idea of a catchall here is important to distinguish from Chef's “culmination of everything.” In a way, she is suggesting that the catchall for those who do not conform to strict definitions and identity. These are individuals who move away from fixed categories through experimentation or “unusual” ideas (e.g. avant-garde) to be more inclusive, as seen with those who identify as pansexual or pangender, with pan- as a word forming element meaning “all, every, whole, all-inclusive.”⁹ However, it is not all-inclusive to everyone, but rather those that transgress norms, as suggested by Jones.

According to Autumn Elizabeth in her research on the ways in which various sexual identities challenge traditional binaries in Western society, the sexual ambiguity and fluidity of pansexuality, for example, challenge these binaries and transgress normative identities.¹⁰ Queer sexualities, according to Elizabeth, are those that are outside of LGBTQ communities' normative standards.¹¹

Multiple participants discussed queer as an all-encompassing umbrella term. Jay, a bisexual/queer man in his late 40s, said when he discussed his personal identity that queer encompasses a variety of attributes not just limited to sexuality. He said: "I tend to think of the queer identity as being a lot broader than that. Not even just in terms of sexuality, but also other social issues related to you know, all the various, a variety of disenfranchised groups in society. And there seems to be, I tend to think of the politics and social issues surrounding sex work are part of the queer identity in a sense."¹² Jay sees queer as something that encompasses something that is political and includes social issues for marginalized groups. Sex workers, for example, are often considered sexual minorities, and while some sex workers might be engaging in heterosexual sex, this sex is considered to be illicit and taboo.

Poseidon, a queer/lesbian in her late teens, also sees queer as encompassing more than sexuality. When asked about her queer identity, she discussed it in terms of including gender and being more of an umbrella term. She said:

I think it was definitely the fact that I like to bounce around when it comes to gender expression and so that often...you get like negativity coming from within the lesbian community, right, when you don't really have like a specific identity in that sense. So I feel as though queer is something I took on, not only to explain within the community, but...when I talk to people outside the community, I try and

just use umbrella terms because I don't want to get into the specifics because it's not worth explaining to someone who doesn't have the background.¹³

The fluidity of Poseidon's gender expression and the ways in which she feels that she does not totally fit in with a lesbian community are reasons why she chooses to use queer as an identity to describe her identity and experience.

Another way in which participants defined queer was in relation to how it was categorically different from gay or lesbian. Carlos, a queer transman in his early 20s, said:

I feel like queer – I like to use the word queer in general because I feel like it is, it encompasses the whole LGBT and I feel like it's really inclusive and on the other hand, gay is more, not that using the word gay is a bad thing cuz I feel like whatever anyone wants to identify, they should definitely own that, but gay is definitely... it only speaks to sexual identity... I don't think it speaks to gender.¹⁴

For Carlos, terms like gay and lesbian are acceptable terms for talking about sexuality, but he feels that these terms do not capture both gender and sexuality. Cohen, a queer/pansexual transman in his late 20s, when discussing bars in particular, also discussed a similar sentiment. He said:

I think it's very different because to me there's a very distinctive difference between a gay bar and a queer bar. You know when you look around, and maybe part of it is I see what I want to see, I think we all do, but when I'm at Gen Pop I look around, I see people like me, I see trans guys, I see trans women, I see people that are all over the fucking gender spectrum that identify as nothing or everything.¹⁵

The visibility of a diversity of gendered people attending a space is what Cohen sees as distinguishing something as queer rather than gay. Su-Lee, a bisexual/pansexual/queer

woman in her early 20s, elaborates on the idea of a queer space as something that is made up of people with a diversity of demographics. She suggested that,

A queer space would have a lot more diversity of body types, diversity of ability, diversity of age mostly, as well. When I think of gay community or when I think of lesbian community, I definitely do picture not that much variation in types, although that's not inherently the case, but that's the case that I've seen and have experiences with.¹⁶

Both Cohen's and Su-Lee's understanding or experiences are similar to Jones' definition of queer as being pangender and pansexual and moving away from strict categorical identities toward ambiguous identities. Emily, who earlier was unable to pinpoint a definition of queer, but knew that it had some sort of a feeling, also discussed the difference between gay and queer in terms of bar spaces. She said: "I guess the gay vibe is more like a straight bar but the people are gay and then queer just feels like the space is more radical, like you can tell that the people specifically sought it out and it feels sort of like you're on the fringes. It's not like a normal... It feels almost secret like...umm... I can't explain it."¹⁷ While Emily did not elaborate on what she meant by the gay vibe being like a straight bar, by comparing it to a more radical space with people that are on the fringes, it is likely that she is referring to a homonormative bar space where the status quo is not challenged and categories are not contested.¹⁸

Queer is also something that can include heterosexuality. Indeed, as stated by Jay earlier, he sees queer as being inclusive of social and political issues for disenfranchised groups in society such as sex workers. So queer can include particular social and political values. When Sam discussed the difference between gay and queer in the context of art, they said: "Well, those two words conjure different things in my mind. For me anyway and

my experience, queer speaks about a very specific set of social values. You could be gay and also have those values, but you could be gay and not have those values.”¹⁹ Similarly, you could engage in “straight” activities and also have those values (e.g. some sex workers). According to Cathy J. Cohen’s research on defining queer politics, in order for queer politics to be truly progressive, it needs to be “inclusive of all those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned white middle-and upper-class heterosexuality.”²⁰ This sentiment was shared by Lunar, a gay man in his late 30s. He also sees queer as encompassing those who are not in same sex relationships. He said:

I have friends who identify as queer who, if other people who don't know the difference between queer and gay is, are to look at them, they would be observed as straight or leading what they might perceive as straight heterosexual lives. I have a lot of friends who identify as queer who might just be perceived as allies or, you know, they may fully participate in gay community but because they may not be involved in a same sex relationship, they may choose to identify as queer as oppose to gay, so maybe there's a reason why they don't identify as bi or all of the other things we can identify as, I think queer is a term that is accessible to folks who may not – I think it's more encompassing than saying “I'm bi.” But I do think a lot of my queer friends are really not perceived as queer because they don't walk around saying I'm queer, they don't walk around saying I'm gay, and they're not in a same sex relationship, and unless you are in a conversation about queer politics and identity and they say “I identify as queer,” the rest of the world is going to read them as straight. So ya, I just really only have that perspective from the friends that I know who identify as queer.²¹

Queer, as discussed by multiple participants, moves beyond rigid categories to include a variety of genders and sexualities, including some heterosexual people. As encapsulated succinctly in this anonymous quotation from Cathy J. Cohen’s research, “Queer means to fuck with gender. There are straight queers, bi queers, tranny queers, lez queers, fag queers, SM queers, fisting queers in every single street in this apathetic country of ours.”²²

We have seen queer discussed in ways that align it with certain attributes such as: all encompassing, diverse, inclusive, pan, but also including certain political and social values that include non-normative identities and communities. In Patrick Dilley's analysis of the concept queer, he suggests that queer is that which is outside of societal notions of normalcy, or "a position outside of the normal trope of daily life that affords perspectives apart from the norm."²³ Queer does not have a passive position outside of the norm, but rather, it challenges the authority, authenticity, and binary logics of the norm.²⁴ Queer is not gay, though some gays do identify with queer. Queer is for those who do not conform to strict categories of gender and sexuality, or the ambiguous, yet there are also a variety of categories to describe queer.

There are multiple meanings of queer depending on whom you ask and the context. This lack of consensus is perhaps why it is difficult to define or not fully grasped by members of the LGBTQ community.²⁵ Queer is by definition indefinable. It has been described as both nothing and everything. While there are ways in which LGBTQ people in London see, feel, and experience queerness, the fact that it is ultimately difficult to pinpoint a fixed definition across all participants does not show a lack of understanding on the part of some over others. Rather, it shows how queer is something that is constantly in motion and transcends space and time, though it also is part of particular spaces and times. Sara Ahmed discusses the term queer in an investigation of the ways in which the concept queer intersects with phenomenology where queer can be understood as a "failure to be proper."²⁶ Ahmed analyzes the ways in which one "becomes" straight, as an orientation toward certain compulsory objects such as values, attractions, and styles. These are not just objects that show heterosexuality as a proper social and sexual good, but also create a

repetitive background.²⁷ These objects of heterosexuality do not just orient one person toward another, but they are something that everyone is oriented around.²⁸ In opposition to this are the objects that are queer: those that seem out of line, oblique, and fail as an orientation because they contradict social norms and values.²⁹ Ahmed writes: “To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things. The effects of such disturbance are uneven, given that the world is already organized around certain forms of living—certain times, spaces, and directions.”³⁰

5.3 Queer Aesthetics

Participants were sometimes able to define queerness more concretely when applying the term to various aspects of visual culture. In this section, queer aesthetics are discussed regarding their visual cues, the elements of counter-culture, and the subversion of beauty ideals. This section also defines both camp and raunch as they relate to this queer aesthetic.

Sam discussed queer aesthetics as visual cues in terms of how queer people present themselves within a queer community. They stated: “it’s like you read people based on how they present themselves visually. When you’re really comfortable and familiar with a specific community that is queer, or most of the people identify with queerness in some way, there’s some subtle thing about how people present themselves that looks queer.”³¹ When describing the specifics of what queer looks like, Poseidon specified visual cues whereby those who identify as queer do not conform to normativity, where people can be seen with “short cropped hair, or just like things out of the ordinary. I find that there’s a

lot of us these days who aren't trying to fly under the radar. They are proud of who they are and they don't want [to] conform to what society wants from them."³² Emily echoed the visual cue of queer when talking about how her queer friends look. She said: "they dye their hair in rainbows and they wear 'Take Back the Night' T-shirts and rainbow pins and there are so many signifiers that I feel like sometimes queer is about more than sexuality."³³ Queer aesthetics provide visual cues that are, in many ways, counter-culture. Rather than being a fixed definition, as discussed previously, queer can be seen as something that is constantly changing. Stanley, a gay/queer man in his early 30s, compared a queer aesthetic to a gay/lesbian aesthetic. He said:

A queer aesthetic would be one that is focused on change and where there's...it would be a very non-normative aesthetic; one that's focused on the ways that different expressions that I think we can have in different times and places for different people. While I think that in general, especially in London, that a gay or lesbian aesthetic tends to be normative...you know, we... it tends to be more focused on "this is how we do things as a lesbian"... "this is how we do things as a gay man" and if you're doing it different than that then I'm going to call you out on it. Which is interesting that that's the shape it usually takes, not, "I'm going to ask you about it," or not "I think that's wrong." It's an added duty to call you out on it because by not following this gay or lesbian aesthetic you're being homophobic or being oppressive or something like that, which is a very complicated question, but that I think has been one of the things I've seen come out of this difference between queer and gay and lesbian aesthetics here in London.³⁴

While not providing concrete examples of what a queer aesthetic is, Stanley was able to articulate how his experiences and understandings of queer aesthetics are seen as non-normative and challenge lesbian and gay visual codes.³⁵

Aside from visual codes that queer people possess as part of a queer aesthetic, participants also discussed the term queer as it relates to art and poster advertisements for Gen Pop. Before an analysis of the posters in question, a discussion of some of the

research on camp and raunch is warranted, as these categories are central to the discussion of the queer aesthetics of the Gen Pop posters. As noted in the literature review on queer art, according to Whitney Davis, queer art is made up of complex rhythms that are moving toward and away from an ideal. There is a constant reshaping and fluidity of identities within queer art: ones that subvert ideals of beauty.³⁶ This movement and fluidity is one of the reasons why queer is difficult to define. The same can be said about camp as it relates to a queer aesthetic.

There are a wide variety of studies on camp that focus on literature and the performing arts – especially drag performances. What is particularly interesting about camp for this chapter is the fact that it is also something that is difficult to define. However, much like queer, the struggle to define camp should not be considered a bad thing. The inability to fully define camp is what makes it an active word, and, similar to queer art, it is constantly in motion and being shaped and reshaped as the setting changes. In Fabio Cleto's introduction to his collection of essays, *Camp: Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, he discusses the power in this predicament of defining camp:

Representational excess, heterogeneity, and *gratuitousness* of reference, in constituting a major *raison d'être* of camp's fun and exclusiveness, both signal and contribute to an overall resistance to definition, drawing the contours of an *aesthetic of (critical) failure*: the longing, in fact, for a common, constant trait (or for an intrinsic, essential, stabilising 'core') in all that has been historically ascribed to camp, or the identification of its precise origins and developments, sooner or later ends up being frustrating, challenging the critic *as such*, as it challenges the cultural imperatives that rely on the manageability of *discrete* (distinct and docile) historical and aesthetic categories.³⁷

Cleto continues unpacking the challenges of defining camp by stating:

Rather than justifying the failure in definition and account of camp by charging the critical interventions with ‘inadequacy,’ the essays here clustered as the best and most significant pieces of criticism should be seen as *adequate*, appropriate responses to a conundrum issue which in itself works through failures, excess and betrayal. The refusal of any stabilising strategy denying its own betrayal seems to indicate the way that must be followed in order to give camp a *dimension of possibility* as an object of discourse, and by the same gesture to best value its multifaceted charm, reconstructing and reconstruing ‘camp’ as the sum of its historical and discursive complexity – which has *critical discourse* among the significant elements that accretion into complexity.³⁸

This refusal to stabilize is similar to the ways in which participants discussed the definitions of queer and its complexities, as well as the ambiguity of the term. Cleto discusses the ways in which queer operates: “Queer *can’t* exclude, in fact, precisely because it doesn’t envision an horizon of property and propriety of itself, and of its ‘own’ discourse, which *in itself* exists as secondary, as copy of an *absent* original, and as challenging normative definitions.”³⁹ He then later discusses the relationship between queer and camp. He states:

Camp and *queer* are cognate terms: camp is queer as a mode of being, as posturing a body, as a modality of distribution within social spaces and within the economy of the social contract, and as a mode of communication – indirect, oblique and secondary, unstable and improvised according to its specific...relation to the other.⁴⁰

The idea that queer can’t exclude speaks to how some participants suggested that queer is broad, inclusive, or a culmination of everything, yet it also challenges normative stable categories of gender and sexuality – among other things – allowing for diversities to flourish.

With this understanding of camp, there are three features of camp that apply to a queer aesthetic. In an analysis of camp and a gay sensibility in films, Jack Babuscio develops

four features of camp; however, given that the analysis for this chapter is based on advertising posters, one of his features – theatricality – is not applicable since it requires actors as they develop roles, appearances, and impersonation. The three other features of camp, I argue, are still applicable to poster advertisements. These include: irony, aestheticism, and humour.

Irony, according to Babuscio, “is the subject matter of camp, and refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association. The most common of incongruous contrasts is that of masculine/feminine.”⁴¹ An example that Babuscio provides is the androgynous quality of Greta Garbo. He states: “At the core of this perception of incongruity is the idea of gayness as a moral deviation. Two men or two women in love are generally regarded by society as incongruous—out of keeping with the ‘normal,’ ‘natural,’ ‘healthy’ order of things. In sum, it is thought to be morally wrong.”⁴² Here, irony undermines the moral judgment that results from a normative perception on incongruity. While irony is important for camp, it needs to be shaped, which is done through its aestheticism. According to Babuscio, camp “relies largely upon arrangement, timing, and tone. Camp is aesthetic in three interrelated ways: as a view of art; as a view of life; and as a practical tendency in things or persons.”⁴³ This practical tendency “emphasizes style as a means of self-projection, a conveyor of meaning, and an expression of emotional tone. Style is a form of consciousness; it is never ‘natural,’ always acquired... Camp aims to transform the ordinary into something more spectacular.”⁴⁴ Lastly, humour is a prominent feature of camp. For Babuscio, humour “results from an identification of a strong incongruity between an object, person, or situation and its context. The comic element is inherent in the formal properties of

irony.”⁴⁵ Humour is the strategy of camp. It is “a means of dealing with a hostile environment and, in the process, of defining a positive identity.”⁴⁶ Camp involves a triangulation of irony, aestheticism, and humour. Camp understood in this way fits with the queer aesthetic of the posters of Gen Pop.

Aside from camp there is also an element of gender and sexuality that moves beyond camp. This is the element of raunch. Jillian Hernandez discusses the aesthetical value of raunch for queer feminist pedagogies as articulated through the hip-hop group, *Yo! Majesty*. She argues that while raunch culture has recently permeated North American culture, that the term has not been adequately conceptualized. She briefly mentions Ariel Levy’s 2005 book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, where Levy discusses how, through raunch, women believe they are demonstrating agency but that this is actually false, and instead, according to Levy, they fuel their own subjection. However, Hernandez points out that the context for raunch needs to be analyzed before one can arrive at this conclusion.⁴⁷ Raunch, as it relates to queer aesthetics, then, needs to be considered as a specific context that is not homogenous to the examples that Levy provides in her cultural critique. Aesthetics in general are determined, in part, by their material circumstances.⁴⁸

Raunch is described by Hernandez as “an aesthetic, performative, and vernacular practice, an explicit mode of sexual expression that transgresses norms of privacy and respectability. Raunch aesthetics celebrate the movements, looks, sensations, and affects of bodies. They aim to incite arousal while often simultaneously generating laughter.”⁴⁹ While Hernandez is discussing raunch aesthetics as they relate to performances of a hip-

hop group, where bodies move in various ways, this idea can be applicable to poster images where looks, sensations, and arousal are also present. Hernandez suggests that the aesthetics of raunch “seriously center sex, but do not take sex seriously. These expressive modes do not search for or affirm the truth of sexual subjects; rather, they celebrate, often through hyperbolic excess, multiplicities of bodies and pleasures.”⁵⁰ This relates to the discussion of defining queer whereby multiple participants suggested that queer is broad and inclusive, yet it does not fully affirm a strict category. This allows a queer aesthetics the potential to be subversive. Rather than affirming truths of sexual subjects, raunch employs deviant sexual expressions in its aesthetic. In discussing the works of Cathy J. Cohen (2004), Hernandez suggests that these acts of deviance “can potentially contribute to radical politics by revealing how marginalized folk employ their limited agency to undermine norms ‘in pursuit of goals important to them, often basic human goals such as pleasure, desire, recognition, and respect.’”⁵¹ Deviance has a political effect much like queer whereby non-normative identities and experiences are valued and sustained in creative ways through visual art, including posters.

Catherine Nash and Alison Bain have also explored sexual deviance and raunch within queer culture, through their examination of the queer women’s bathhouse event, Pussy Palace, in Toronto. These events are coined as political projects, “designed to contest preconceived ideas about women’s gendered and sexualized selves—‘reclaiming raunch’, as one of the organizers put it, for women and their sexual expression.”⁵² The idea of reclaiming raunch for the bathhouse event can be seen as reclaiming sexuality away from the sex negativity of radical lesbianism in the 1970s.⁵³ This is akin to the sex negativity of the feminist sex wars,⁵⁴ post-AIDS sexual paranoia,⁵⁵ and more recently, the

conservative backlash against changes to the sex education curriculum in Ontario's public school system.⁵⁶ A goal of the Pussy Palace bathhouse event, according to Nash and Bain, is to “celebrate performances, expressions and appearances of indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, commonness and sexual explicitness that lesbians were denied through the machinations of 1980s lesbian feminism.”⁵⁷ Again, while raunch aesthetics is described here as applicable to a queer space and event, the ideas around contesting categories and positively enforcing indecency, lewdness, and vulgarity can also be applied to understanding queer aesthetics as they pertain to posters that try to capture the queerness of events.⁵⁸

5.4 Queer Poster Advertisements

This section provides an analysis – via both the qualitative data and the theories discussed above – on the ways in which the queer aesthetic developed thus far is applicable to Gen Pop poster advertisements. These posters were discussed in terms of being atypical, presenting a diversity of bodies, challenging the naturalness of gender and sexual norms, as well as utilizing camp and raunch characteristics. I also discuss how these aesthetics are specific to material conditions and provide a brief comparative analysis to earlier zines of a similar aesthetic in the 1980s to 1990s and poster advertisements from an early 2000s event in Toronto.

When I asked participants about the poster advertisements for Gen Pop, those who had either been to the event or had seen the advertisements, all had similar things to say about their aesthetic. Some spoke about the diversity of the posters. Rose, a queer/lesbian in her early 20s described the posters as different. She said: “when I talk about the posters I mean they're not the typical university scene bar culture poster. It's very – I look at them and I see something more creative, more thoughts put into it, and then inherently I feel that there's going to be thinking that's going to go on in this space and more diversity.”⁵⁹



Figure 4: Gen Pop Wonder Women Poster

Wolf, a queer genderqueer in their early 20s, who also identified as a racial minority, echoed this sentiment when describing the multiplicity of bodies on the poster advertisements. They said:

Umm like I just remember like the one with two wonder woman people and one of them was a person of colour and one of them was white and I just felt like it was a natural - I don't know, sometimes it feels like other people are intentionally trying to be diverse, but like kind of fake but with Gen Pop it wouldn't look like that, it just feels like “of course, of course this Gen Pop poster would have diversity like that.”⁶⁰

When looking at all of the various posters for Gen Pop – which spans three years – almost every single poster includes the representation of diverse genders, sexualities, and bodies in various ways.

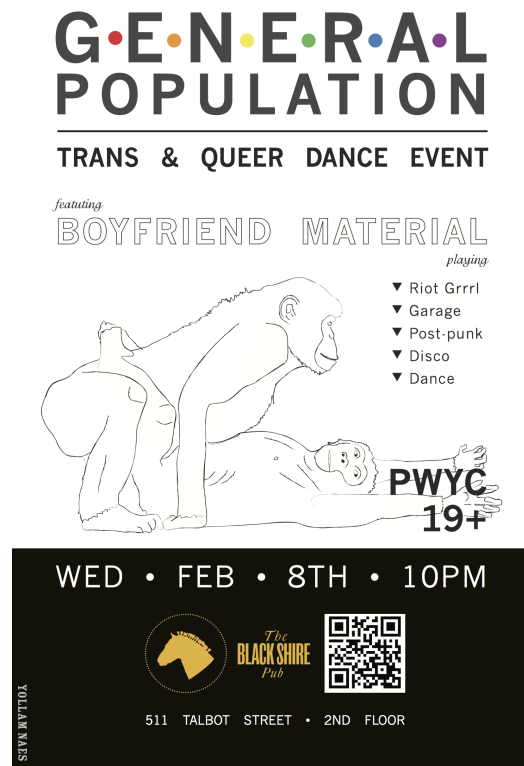


Figure 5: Gen Pop Bonobos Poster

The representation of bodies and other signifiers on the Gen Pop posters provide queer visual cues that challenge norms, yet they are also hard to define. According to Emily,

I remember looking at the posters and saying “that's a queer event” and then reading the text. It reminds me of picking up an independent magazine like *Bitch Mag* or *Shameless* or something like that. It's hard to describe exactly why though. I guess the bodies... they're usually... there's at least one person of colour, they are not all what we consider to be traditionally attractive, and I think the last poster was two women and you'd never see that on a normal bar poster - probably not even a Lavish poster. But I can't exactly pinpoint what.⁶¹

Having bodies that are not traditionally attractive relates to camp, as discussed earlier, whereby norms are challenged and bodies can be read as excesses or failures. Emily also had a difficult time describing or pinpointing the defining characteristics of the posters, which goes along with camp's resistance to definition.

The poster images representing women, for example, contrast to more normative advertisements of women where women are represented in stereotypical ways.⁶² In the wonder women poster, there is a representation of two women that are partially naked embracing in a kiss (see Figure 4). This imagery represents an iconic comic book character, who has traditionally been seen with a male love interest,⁶³ sharing an embrace with not only another woman, but also another racialized wonder woman. Miscegenation and same-sex sexual relations have historically been seen as taboo practices in North America, particularly by the religious right. Through irony, this poster thus presents a moral deviation from such views whereby “unnatural” practices are represented in a positive way. This poster also encompasses a raunch aesthetic through the utilization of this deviant act as a way to contest normative sexual ideals through sexual explicitness and arousal. The poster shows a nipple, which adds a flavour of “indecent” where

women's nipples in particular are seen as sexual. This challenges a double standard where men can be seen topless in advertisements, but women's breasts are prohibited from the public eye.⁶⁴

Advertisements such as the wonder woman poster, according to Emily, would not be used for a "normal bar," not even Lavish. As I have discussed in an earlier chapter, this bar is understood by many LGBTQ people in London as a dance club that caters to a particular crowd and lacks gender and sexual diversity. Jones for example, sees Lavish as very straight with a concern for its image. The images on the Gen Pop posters, for her, would never happen for advertisements at Lavish, where management are cultivating their image very strongly.⁶⁵ This was also echoed by Su-Lee when she was discussing the aesthetics of Gen Pop posters and the ways in which they offend even LGBTQ people.

She said:

I definitely think the Gen Pop posters are part of a queer aesthetic. I don't see them ever being for Lavish events and people not having a problem with it. Not necessarily having a problem with it, but just not doing a double take. I remember one of the first Gen Pop posters, it was the one with the monkeys or the apes... Okay, so I had friends who were in first year and who were living in res and who came to Gen Pop with us that one time and they put that poster up on their dorm... like their door to get into their dorm. And I remember them telling me that their RA [Resident Advisor] had a problem with it, but that the RA couldn't do anything about it without seeming homophobic or seeming to be prejudiced in any way. And so they were really proud of the fact that they had this poster that was ticking off the RA, but at the same time, this is just anecdotal, but there was someone else on their floor who was a gay male, and he didn't appreciate it at all. And he asked them to take it down. And they said no cuz they were kind of like "my queer identity is my own and if I want to put it on my door I can" and it was a whole political thing, but ya, long story short, I don't necessarily think that would fly at Lavish.⁶⁶

Part of the reason why Gen Pop posters would not be used at Lavish or other bars and would be seen as offensive to some is due to the ways in which they challenge

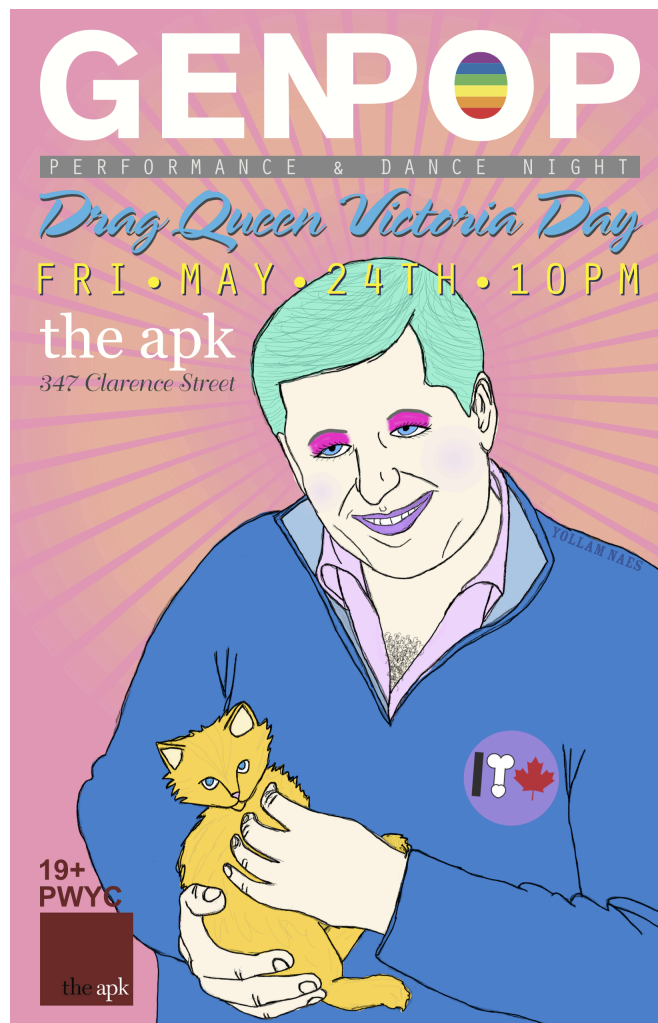
homonormative ideals and are rather unsettling in comparison to other bar posters. This relates to the raunch and campy disposition of the advertisements whereby norms are challenged and, through irony and humour, the images often entail a moral deviation where there are excesses, indecencies, and other contestations to what is thought of as natural, normal, or healthy.

The very first poster for Gen Pop featured a drawing of two bonobos engaging in genito-genital rubbing (see Figure 5). This image was used for a variety of ways. For starters, having animals engaging in same sex sexual acts challenges the arguments against the unnaturalness of homosexuality or the naturalness of heterosexuality. The image of the bonobos was also used as a way to position queer as analogous to animals whereby some “deviant” sexual behaviours are interpreted as being barbaric or primitive and are lumped together in opposition to “normal” sexual behaviours. Through sexual explicitness, this image challenges ideas of sexuality and calls into question what is considered natural, normal, and healthy.

While those who are aware of the sexual acts of bonobos may interpret this as a homosexual act, the sex or gender of each bonobo is not visible. This plays further on notions of gender ambiguity, as it relates to a queer aesthetic. Having gender or sexual ambiguity on the Gen Pop posters is important, as the event wants to be accessible to a diversity of people, including those who challenge gender norms such as transgender individuals. This inclusion is important for Toby, a lesbian genderqueer transman in per early 50s, who said:

On the Gen Pop posters, it's like queer and trans, you know? If it was just gay or just LGBT, I wouldn't go, because LGBT is always thrown about and the T is most often silent or persecuted. So it takes having a trans reference on it, for me to know that I'll be safe. At least from the organizers' standpoint which is that there'd be somebody that I can come to.⁶⁷

While the posters often are offensive to some, it is also important to ensure trans visibility and inclusion both through imagery and through text, with identifying markers that are conducive to gender transition and complexities.



**Figure 6: Gen Pop Stephen Harper
Poster**

Other participants discussed the ways in which the posters were either campy or had a raunch element. Rose tried to articulate the aesthetic: “Ya, well, ya... like the art is very sort of – sometimes it's ironic, sometimes it's just like different. Like the latest poster, or ... I don't know... you just know that it's – I can't really explain myself.”⁶⁸ Rose sees the irony of some of the posters, which is an element of camp, but she is also unable to articulate what she means. Like defining queer, camp is resistant to definitions and thus it is no surprise that some participants had a difficult time articulating the queer aesthetic of the posters. When I asked Jones to describe the aesthetics of the Gen Pop posters, she had difficulty articulating a definition. She said: “Ah it's kinda ahhh.. it thumbs its nose. It's a pisser, okay? You know. It's in a good way and it's not nasty or brutish or anything like that, but it definitely is - what's the word I'm trying to grasp for - it's almost out of my head, I mean it's in my head, but it won't come out. It's subversive. Okay. And subversive is a very queer thing.”⁶⁹ Subversive images in the posters are used to contest normative ideas of gender and sexuality in many ways.

The aesthetics of the Gen Pop posters use humour as a strategic element of camp to deal with hostile environments, as discussed previously by Babuscio. Wolf provides examples of this: “Umm... it's more provocative. Um it's willing to deal with more sensitive issues. I mean like we had a thing like one with Stephen Harper, like another with Jesus on it! It is just more of, you know, you're used to the colours... just different colours... being more daring.”⁷⁰ Both of these posters are provocative; they use humour to deal with the

hostility of the religious right that have historically negatively affected trans and queer communities in Canada.

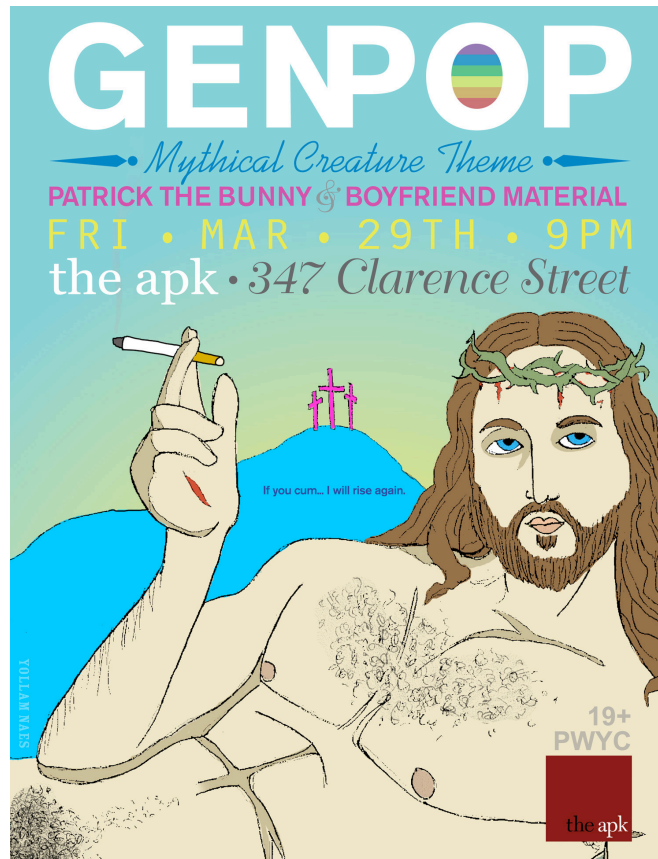


Figure 7: Gen Pop Jesus Poster

Stephen Harper, the then Prime Minister of Canada, was in opposition to same sex marriage as well as transgender rights in Canada. Using a queer representation of Stephen Harper holding a kitten (see Figure 6) – which has been used multiple times in the mass media⁷¹ – makes light of his opposition to queer and trans communities through presenting him in makeup and having an “I love Canada” pin where the heart is actually an upside down penis. This symbolizes the ways in which Harper has fucked Canada,

particularly queer and trans communities. Yet his image is used in a subversive way to advertise a trans and queer drag event.

The Jesus poster operates in a similar way to the Stephen Harper poster (see Figure 7). Jesus, as an iconic figure of Christianity, is seen in this Good Friday event advertisement, relaxing on the ground, smoking a cigarette, presumably naked with his pubic hair exposed. The exposure of pubic hair challenges beauty norms and notions of cleanliness. Pubic hair is what philosopher Julia Kristeva would call the improper, the unclean, the abject. It is not just a challenge to cleanliness that produces this abject effect. According to Kristeva, that which causes abjection is something that “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”⁷² The abject in many ways aligns with both the camp and the raunch aesthetic in how it contests boundaries and represents excess, failures, and other bodily deviancies.

In the background of the Jesus poster, there are three crosses on a hill with the words “If you cum, I will rise again.” While, of course there are denominations of Christianity that are accepting of sexual minorities – in London, the Metropolitan Community Church, for example, has a long history dating back to the 1970s of supporting LGBTQ people – the Christian right has often been at the centre of debates around LGBTQ rights in Canada. Thus, having the icon of Jesus, represented in a deviant, indecent way (raunch aesthetics), this imagery pokes fun at an otherwise harmful institution. “Queer Jesus,” as the representative body for the mythical creature party, is suggesting through sexual explicitness that his resurrection will occur should people attend the party. Of course, “If

you cum, I will rise again” is also sexually suggestive in that it encourages orgasm, which will then lead to queer Jesus getting an erection. The queer aesthetics of Gen Pop poster advertisements do not get any more raunch and camp than this.

With raunch and camp as part of a queer aesthetic for Gen Pop posters comes the offensiveness that some would expect from indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, and sexual explicitness. One participant, Jay, expressed ambivalence about the poster advertisements. He said:

Um... Ya okay so for the Gen Pop posters, in general, they're not my thing and part of that is the style of art that he's creating is not what – is not something that I'm very interested in. Um... some of them – having said that, some of them I like more than others – I wouldn't say that any of them make me angry or... one or two of them I might use the word, you know, uncomfortable. I mean it's kind of stretching boundaries that I've got. I can't think of any examples right now, but I have seen some of the posters and sort of questioned them. Um...but it's – I guess part of it is my feeling about a poster for an event like that is to try to get people to come out and having – the posters need to be very explicit about the fact that this is a queer event, but it's possible to do that without, you know, alienating part of your – the target community.⁷³

Jay is right in the fact that some of the posters may make people uncomfortable and potentially alienate them, as discussed by Su-Lee earlier. However, the role of the posters, by making people uncomfortable, is in a sense engaging the viewer to think about the ways in which the contestation of ideas through deviation, abjection, excess, arousals, indecencies, etc. are a part of what makes something queer. I further probed Jay to elaborate on his answer, by asking him about feeling uncomfortable but also how this might push boundaries. He elaborated and said:

Um I don't know, I guess it's sort of – we want to push the boundaries...ahh....we want to push social boundaries, we want to open up space, not everybody and I guess part of it, not everybody in the queer community is going to have the same

opinions about everything that we're talking about. I mean, we're all individuals. But for - so like I mean, in general, pushing social boundaries makes sense. And for a queer event you can want – having posters for a queer event that don't upset the straight people is kind of missing the point, at some level, right?”⁷⁴

So while some of the poster images could be interpreted as offensive, Jay did acknowledge that pushing boundaries is important and that contesting norms (through upsetting straight people) is needed on some level to demarcate it as a queer event. Further, as discussed in an earlier chapter, Rancière argues that disagreement and contradictory relations are what produce community. Thus, having disagreements within the LGBTQ community on the aesthetics of queer are important and have productive value. The transgression of the queer aesthetic is also political outside of the LGBTQ community. Heteronormative society is symbolic of Rancière’s idea of the police in the sense that it works to enforce norms: the ways of doing, being, and saying.⁷⁵ These posters are inherently political in that they challenge the heteronormative sensory world and reconfigure a space for the visibility of something queer.

The offensive nature (good or bad) of Gen Pop posters was not just addressed by interview participants. When promoting an event, I shared a Gen Pop poster advertisement (see Figure 8) on a queer listserv made up of LGBTQ staff, faculty, and graduate students at Western University. I received a response from someone who stated that she was offended by the ways in which the community was being represented in this poster, with guns that incite ideas about violence and war, and I was told that she would not be supporting this event. The poster in question features bisexual performance artist, Pavel Petel, naked on a horse holding a machine gun. Petel is well known in Russia for his queer aesthetics and the ways in which he uses irony and humour to challenge gender

and sexual norms.⁷⁶ As a sexual minority, having such a masculine physique, while utilizing a horse and gun – things that are sometimes associated with conquest – is incongruent with the power in which LGBTQ people have, especially in Russia where anti-gay laws still exist. While this poster was read as offensive to some, it attempted to use irony to represent the queer aesthetic that the artist tries to achieve. What is most interesting and ironic about this complaint is that the person was offended by guns and masculinity, and *not* by the nudity of Petel. Nudity is often more offensive than guns and violence in straight popular culture and mass media.⁷⁷

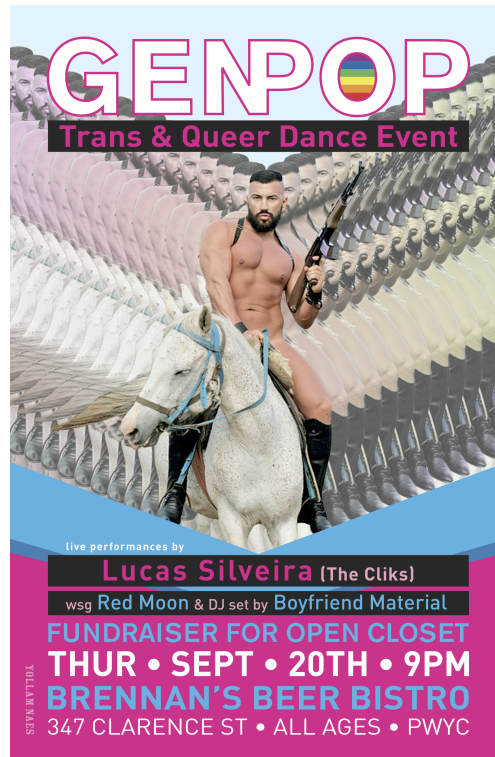


Figure 8: Gen Pop Petel Poster

The Gen Pop posters are an attempt to deal with real world problems by utilizing either images that challenge social norms or figures (such as Stephen Harper or Jesus) that are symbolic of LGBTQ marginalization and oppression. The poster designer has even relied

on current events to add relevance to the posters' aesthetics. Less than a week after the infamously homophobic Fred Phelps⁷⁸ passed away, a poster appeared on Facebook and on hydro polls throughout the city with an unorthodox representation of the late pastor (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Gen Pop Phelps Poster

This poster shows Phelps with a concerned look on his face and the caption “Open Wide, Mr. Phelps!” as he is facing a nude body, complete with a rainbow pentagram tattoo. Skeletons in a pit of fire surround Phelps, which is a representation of hell. This poster is full of ironic religious imagery whereby Phelps is being punished for his harmful past towards the LGBTQ community by giving someone a blowjob. There are also elements of raunch in this poster through the sexual explicitness of the text and the indecency of the naked body (the Facebook advertisement had to be censored to cover the buttocks). While this poster includes an opponent to the LGBTQ community, it uses humour to create more of a positive identity for LGBTQ people, as discussed by Babuscio previously.

It is clear that the Gen Pop posters are attempting to be somewhat offensive. The harnessing of queer and raunch aesthetics challenge boundaries, identities, and comfort levels. Lunar finds these aspects of the poster advertisements to be important. He said:

I'm an edgy guy and I'm also an artist. I love the posters. I think that they are just that to me. They're art, which is not confinable. It shouldn't have a – it is supposed to be interpreted differently and it's supposed to be provocative. I appreciate and encourage that kind of aesthetic in posters like that. It's what I look for. If a poster... isn't jarring or provocative, then I find it boring. I am intrigued by that kind of stuff. When a poster looks – I'm trying to think of another word other than provocative, but looks like my mom might not want to look at it, that's where I wanna go. *laughter* And my mom's a pretty cool lady!⁷⁹

Being jarring, provocative, or offensive in some ways are in line with a queer aesthetic that entails notions of camp and raunch. The aesthetic of Gen Pop posters is not for everyone, which should be seen as a positive aspect, as the posters are trying to advertise events that stray away from homonormativity toward a space that challenges the viewer

to deal with the transgressions that are posed through a queer aesthetic (see Figures 14 and 15 at the end of this chapter for other examples of Gen Pop posters).

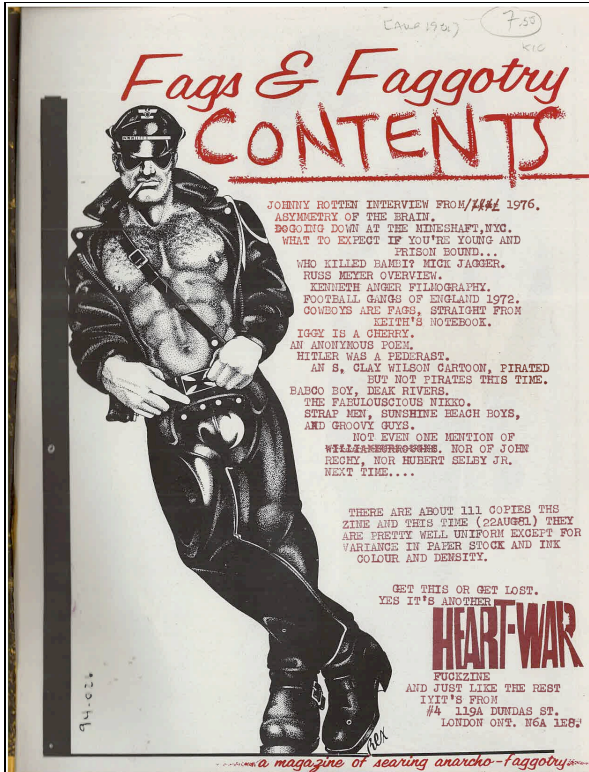


Figure 10: Fags and Faggotry Zine # 1

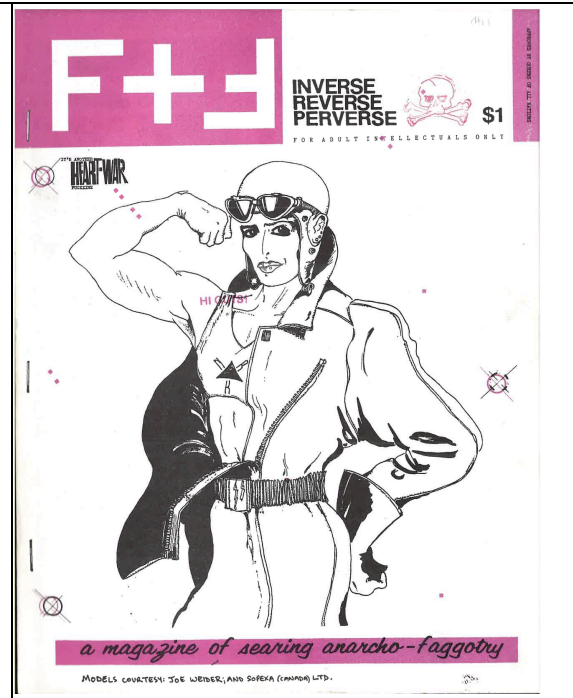


Figure 11: Fags and Faggotry Zine # 2



Figure 12: Vazaleen Faggotron Poster

The aesthetics of Gen Pop posters are unique to London, as they are not present in the poster advertisements for other LGBTQ bars and events in the city. As mentioned earlier, the transgressive nature of queer aesthetics is determined, in part, by the material conditions. That is, the time and location play a role in terms of what is understood as transgressive. So while these posters fit with the definitions of a queer aesthetic discussed herein, they are specific to London during the timeframe of 2012 to 2015. That is, what is considered transgressive in London may not be as transgressive in other cities. Further, what was considered transgressive for art in the 1980s-1990s in London may not have similar effects today (as seen in Figure 10 and Figure 11).

There have been some elements of queer aesthetics in the LGBTQ community in London, though nothing in recent times. Lunar stated that this type of aesthetic used to be present in London. He said, “in the 90s I feel like all kinds of stuff was about that: pushing boundaries, visual boundaries, and now I don't think so much.”⁸⁰ This was echoed by two key informants, both of which spoke specifically about the Gen Pop posters and how they are similar to zines from the past. Jones made reference to a queer zine called Holy Titclamps and a British zine called Fat Girl as having a similar aesthetic.⁸¹ Chef said that a lot of zines with this type of aesthetic were actually based out of London. He said:

Well back in the 80s there used to be like tonnes of fan zines and stuff that were going around the city, like Mike Niederman was a huge producer of a lot of those magazines. You know, it wasn't really gay or queer, but you know, you did get that sort of feel that it was. You know, they were pushing the envelopes on a lot of things. You know, just by pictures, articles, it was totally, you know, outside the box from what London's used to. You know, a lot of it was, you know, people did consider it offensive, but I mean, I think that's the best way to attract people's attention to certain things is to be right in your face. *laughs*⁸²

Through my archival research, I came across a variety of zines from the 1980s-90s that have similar characteristics to the Gen Pop queer aesthetic. *Fags & Faggotry*, specifically, was the title of one of the zines made by Londoner, Mike Niederman. As seen from the cover images and text in Figures 10 and 11, *Fags & Faggotry* uses a flexing androgynous superhero figure, a muscular leather daddy, as well as vulgar, raunchy texts, in similar ways to the boundary-pushing images of the Gen Pop posters.⁸³

Aside from similar imagery in local zines, this type of aesthetic was also found in posters for the Toronto-based alternative queer punk night called Vazaleen that ran from 2000-2006. This event, and most of the posters that advertised it, were the products of the late Toronto activist, Will Munro.⁸⁴

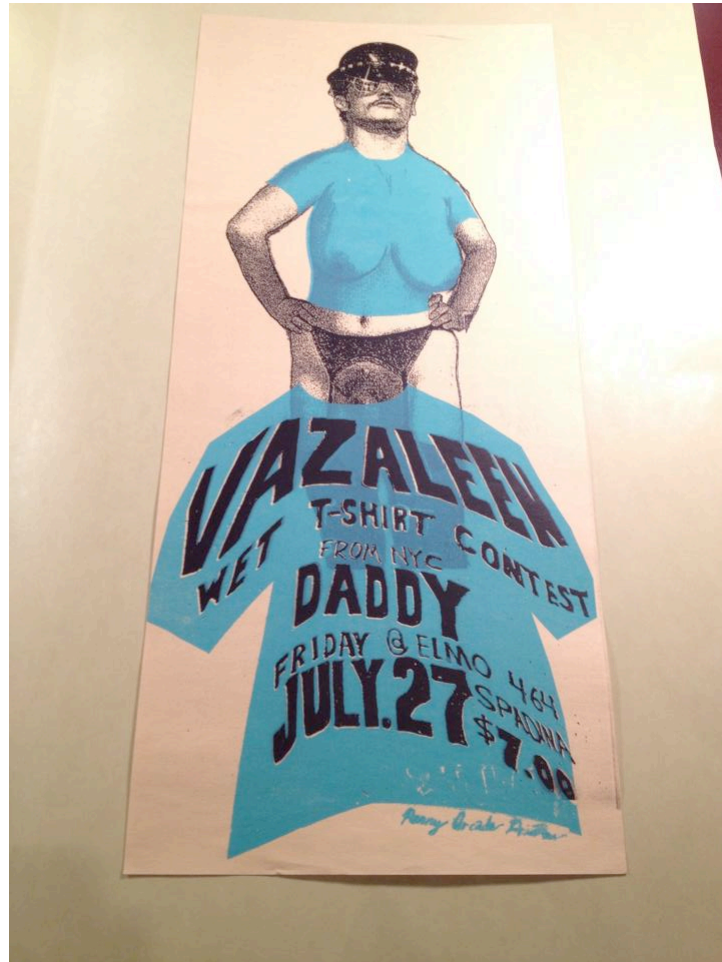


Figure 13: Vazaleen Daddy Poster

As seen in Figures 12 and 13, one poster contains a gorilla with a banana for a penis, with the words “Jerk Off” written in the cumshot, and it is advertising people to “CUM SEE FAGGOTRON.” This in-your-face animalistic and raunch aesthetic works to offend, break down boundaries, and contest ideas through the use of vulgarity and sexual explicitness. The other poster has an ambiguously gendered figure with a leather cap, moustache, and large breasts showing through a see-through shirt, advertising a wet t-shirt contest. While a bit tamer than the former poster, the presence of indecency through the visible breasts on a gender ambiguous, non-ideal body, calls into question the normalities of gender. These posters, like the Gen Pop posters, utilize camp and raunch in framing a queer aesthetic that pushes the viewer to engage with it in ways that offend and push boundaries as well as comfort levels for those who prescribe to normative social roles.⁸⁵

5.5 Conclusions

In the introduction to this chapter, I discussed one of my experiences of putting up Gen Pop posters, only to discover that some had been torn down within hours of their placement on hydro polls throughout the city. Posters have a short lifespan. They dissolve in the rain, get torn down, or are covered up by other advertisements. There is a trend of Gen Pop posters being torn down, though it is uncertain if they are being torn down because people like them and want to keep them, or people are offended by them and want to hide them. In either case, the aesthetics of Gen Pop posters attract the viewer to engage with the texts and the imagery. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, this aesthetic is a queer aesthetic. The posters provide queer visual cues that often suggest

diversity and inclusion, but they are political and they transgress norms beyond rigid sexual and gender identity categories.

The queer aesthetic is difficult to define, as it contests categories and boundaries.

Utilizing the ambiguity and the refusal of stabilization of camp, the queer aesthetic uses irony to highlight incongruities and moral deviation and it also uses humour as a strategy to deal with hostile environments. Raunch aesthetics add to the queer aesthetic of Gen Pop posters by transgressing norms through hyperbolic excess. Deviant sexual expressions are brought to the foreground through indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, and sexual explicitness to challenge the viewer's preconceived notions of bodies, gender, sexuality, and other norms. The embracement of this queer aesthetic by the Gen Pop posters highlights the offensive, in-your-face nature of queerness, against the backdrop of the usual homonormative assimilationist logic of tolerance and acceptance.

This aesthetic is also important in the creation and sustainability of community (as seen in more detail in Chapter Six). The collision of normativity with this transgressive aesthetic creates an intertwining of contradictory relations, which, according to Rancière, are productive for community. The queer aesthetics of the posters thus play a pivotal role for LGBTQ community in London, and in particular, the Gen Pop events.

While their lifespan may be short, the ephemeral nature of posters has lasting effects. Ephemera, according to José Muñoz are anchored firmly in the social. These include: “traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feelings have been

lived.”⁸⁶ Queerness is a structure of feeling. Through Gen Pop’s poster advertisements, glimmers of queerness are found beyond the lifespan of the advertisements. Through engaging the viewer in non-normative, often sexually explicit imagery, the urgencies to think differently – or to think queerly – are on display for everyone to see.



Figure 14: Gen Pop Arcade Poster

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- ² Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ³ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ⁴ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ⁵ This is also true of academic discussions of the meaning of queer. For example, see Tom Warner (Editor), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- ⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁷ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁸ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.
- ⁹ Online Etymology Dictionary. 2015. <<http://www.etymonline.com/>>. Accessed 16 October 2015.
- ¹⁰ Autumn Elizabeth, "Challenging the Binary: Sexual Identity That Is Not Duality," *Journal of Bisexuality* 13 (2013): 330.
- ¹¹ Elizabeth, 335.
- ¹² Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.
- ¹³ Poseidon. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 25, 2013.
- ¹⁴ Carlos. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 21, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ¹⁶ Su-Lee. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 9, 2013.
- ¹⁷ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ¹⁸ See Michael Warner, "Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5, 2 (1999): 119-171.
- ¹⁹ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ²⁰ Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3 (1997): 441.
- ²¹ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ²² Quoted in Cathy J. Cohen, 452.
- ²³ Patrick Dilley, "Queer Theory: Under Construction," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 12, 5 (1999): 458.
- ²⁴ Dilley, 459-460.
- ²⁵ For an example of a discussion of the multiple meanings of queer in different communities, see Meg Barker, Christina Richards, and Helen Bowes-Catton, "'All the World is Queer Save Thee and Me...': Defining Queer and Bi at a Critical Sexology Seminar," *Journal of Bisexuality* 9 (2009): 367-369.
- ²⁶ Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, 4 (2006): 544.
- ²⁷ Ahmed, 557-558.
- ²⁸ Ahmed, 560.
- ²⁹ Ahmed, 561.
- ³⁰ Ahmed, 565.
- ³¹ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ³² Poseidon. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 25, 2013.

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- ³³ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ³⁴ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ³⁵ These normative visual codes can be seen at the venue Lavish, where gay men, for example, are dressed in collared shirts, dress shoes, and generally present in a classy way. The normative body type at this venue is a slim and fit body. I think the point that Stanley is trying to get at is if a queer punk with a Mohawk, dyed hair, and ripped jeans were to attend this venue, it would challenge the status quo aesthetic of the space.
- ³⁶ Davis, Whitney. *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- ³⁷ Fabio Cleto, "Introduction: Queering the Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, 3.
- ³⁸ Cleto, 5.
- ³⁹ Cleto, 22.
- ⁴⁰ Cleto, 30.
- ⁴¹ Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," In *Camp Grounds: Style & Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, 20.
- ⁴² Babuscio, 21.
- ⁴³ Babuscio, 21.
- ⁴⁴ Babuscio, 23.
- ⁴⁵ Babuscio, 26.
- ⁴⁶ Babuscio, 27.
- ⁴⁷ Jillian Hernandez, "Carnal Teachings: Raunch Aesthetics as Queer Feminist Pedagogies in Yo! Majesty's Hip Hop Practice," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, 1 (2014): 92.
- ⁴⁸ With reference to Levy's book, for example, women are performing raunch within an entirely heteronormative context.
- ⁴⁹ Hernandez, 94.
- ⁵⁰ Hernandez, 94.
- ⁵¹ Hernandez, 95.
- ⁵² Catherine Jean Nash and Alison Bain, "'Reclaiming Raunch'? Spatializing Queer Identities at Toronto Women's Bathhouse Events," *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, 1 (2007): 49.
- ⁵³ Nash and Bain, 54.
- ⁵⁴ Teresa De Lauretis, "Feminism and Its Differences," *Pacific Coast Philology* 25, 1/2 (November 1990): 24-30.
- ⁵⁵ Benjamin Junge, "Bareback Sex, Risk, and Eroticism: Anthropological Themes (Re-) Surfacing in the Post-AIDS Era," in *Out in Theory: The Emergency of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology*, edited by Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap, 2002, 186-221.
- ⁵⁶ Ashley Csanady, "Opposition to Ontario's Sex Ed Curriculum hasn't changed since it was introduced: Poll," *National Post*, 16 September 2016.

<http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-politics/opposition-to-ontarios-sex-ed-curriculum-has-dropped-by-more-than-10-per-cent-since-it-was-introduced-poll>.

Accessed 27 September 2016.

⁵⁷ Nash and Bain, 54.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that while queer and raunch aesthetics are similar, they are not one in the same. Queer aesthetics can contain elements of indecency, lewdness, and vulgarity; however, something can have a raunch aesthetic and not be queer (e.g. a picture of a man peeing in an alleyway).

⁵⁹ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.

⁶⁰ Wolf. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 7, 2013.

⁶¹ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.

⁶² For example, see *Gender, Culture, and Consumer Behavior*, eds. Cele C. Otnes and Linda Tuncay Zayer, New York: Routledge, 2012.

⁶³ J. Caleb Mozzocco, "The Many Loves of Wonder Woman: A Brief History of the Amazing Amazon's Love Life," *Comics Alliance*, 28 August 2012,

<http://comicsalliance.com/the-many-loves-of-wonder-woman-steve-trevor-nemesis-batman-superman-romance/>, accessed 26 October 2015.

⁶⁴ More recently, a #FreeTheNipple campaign was launched on social media by various celebrities, such as Naomi Campbell and Miley Cyrus, to challenge this double standard. See Madelyn Chung, "Naomi Campbell Goes Topless in #FreeTheNipple Instagram Post." *Huffington Post*, 16 September 2015,

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/09/16/naomi-campbell-topless-free-the-nipple_n_8148388.html, accessed 25 October 2015.

⁶⁵ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.

⁶⁶ Su-Lee. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 9, 2013.

⁶⁷ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

⁶⁸ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.

⁶⁹ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.

⁷⁰ Wolf. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 7, 2013.

⁷¹ Canada.com 2015. <http://www.canada.com/news/decision-canada/cms/binary/4671951.jpg?size=620x400s>. Accessed 24 October 2015.

⁷² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 4.

⁷³ Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.

⁷⁴ Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.

⁷⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

⁷⁶ More images of Petel can be seen on his website here: <http://pavel-petel.tumblr.com/>

⁷⁷ For example, movies that contain subtle nudity in Canada are rated for adults whereas movies that involve guns and fighting are sometimes rated appropriate for children.

⁷⁸ Phelps is known as the founder for the notorious Westboro Baptist Church that organizes protests of various events with signs such as "God Hates Fags."

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- ⁷⁹ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ⁸⁰ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ⁸¹ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013
- ⁸² Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁸³ “Zines,” London, Ontario Vertical Files, *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives*, Toronto, Canada, various years.
- ⁸⁴ See Jaime Woo, “Remembering Will Munro with *History, Glamour, Magic*,” *Torontoist*, Feb 16, 2012. <<http://torontoist.com/2012/02/remembering-will-munro-with-history-glamour-magic/>>. Accessed 25 October 2015.
- ⁸⁵ “Vazaleen Posters,” Poster Holdings, *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives*, Toronto, Canada, various years.
- ⁸⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, 2 (1996): 11.

Chapter 6

6 Challenging Norms through Drag and the Arts: The Queer Aesthetics of Gen Pop Events

The aim of this chapter is to show the ways in which the arts at Gen Pop function for the community and how they challenge and transgress gender, sexual, and social norms.

6.1 Introduction

I show up at the bar at around seven o'clock in the evening, even though the trans and queer event, Gen Pop, does not start until ten. No one is there, aside from the owner, a bartender, and a patron who was just there for an early evening post-work beer. The venue is a bit run down and gloomy, with mostly black interiors, dim lighting, chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and a bucket in the corner catching a water leak from the ceiling. I arrive with the other DJ, Patrick, and we load in all of our DJ gear. We often have issues with the sound system at this bar, so we arrive early to troubleshoot the mixing board and make sure the music sounds just right. We then hook up the projector. Tonight we are projecting visuals from John Greyson's *Zero Patience* as well as some random kitschy sci-fi video edits that my friend put together on DVD. The other organizers arrive in waves. They start unpacking their bags and decorating the space. Various coloured balloons are strung together and hung over fixtures in the bar along with streamers. Banners are stapled to the wall on the stage, where a yellow one with hot pink trim reads: "GENERAL POPULATION" in spray paint across the front. It also has

a blue jean back pocket sewn onto it, with an orange handkerchief hanging out of it, which, according to hanky code, means *anything goes*.¹ A large photograph of undone jeans with pubic hair exposed – taken by local artist, Ethan Lester – is taped to a wall above a leather bench, between two sconces. Blank pieces of paper are distributed to the tables around the bar, with text on them that say, “Draw Something Queer.” A donation box is set up at the front entrance to the bar, with a sign that reads: “Pay What You Can,” with all donations going to a local trans and queer youth support group. Beside the donation box to the right are dozens of buttons hand-made by the event organizers, which are given to people who attend the event. To the left side of the donation box is a supply of free condoms, dental dams, latex gloves, lube packets, and information pertaining to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Gender markers on the washrooms are covered up with signs that simply read: “Washroom.” It is around nine-thirty now and two organizers fetch a tall ladder to hang a bunting banner from the ceiling that reads: “KEEP LONDON QUEER.” Performers for the evening start to trickle in and they go to a makeshift change room area set up in the corner of the kitchen to get their outfits and other performance paraphernalia ready for the night. I dim the lights and put on an Arthur Russell playlist until the crowd starts to arrive. Gen Pop is finally ready to begin.

A lot of effort goes into the planning and execution of Gen Pop. It is a monthly fundraiser that hosts a variety of types of events from film screenings and queer trivia nights to themed dances, live music, and drag and burlesque performances. In this chapter, I discuss the significance of the role of art for LGBTQ communities as it pertains to events that are situated at bars. Bars and events, as I have argued earlier in chapters three and four, are an integral component of LGBTQ community in London, Ontario. Bars function

as physical spaces that are required to bring LGBTQ people together to develop culture, strengthen community, and provide a hub for subjectivity, visibility, social supports, and political consciousness. LGBTQ events function as the means through which active engagement and participation in community is fostered. I argue that drag performance and other forms of art at Gen Pop utilize a queer aesthetic to challenge social norms. The queer aesthetic at Gen Pop is one that is political in that it reconfigures fields of experience through the contestation and transgression of normative categories. This queer aesthetic not only challenges heteronormativity, but it also challenges homonormativity, and other bar cultural norms that pertain to dancing as well as other social/sexual interactions in bar spaces. It does this through the use of visual cues and interactive arts that rely on notions of camp and raunch. These queer arts are important for community as they expand our understandings and practices of gender and sexuality. Through challenging norms, the arts at Gen Pop help to build a more inclusive and political community where they engage people in dialogue and practice that can lead to socio-political change.

6.2 Drag

As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, there is an abundance of scholarly work on drag performance. Earlier works by Newton (1972) and more recent studies by Berkowitz et al. (2007), compare different types of performers in terms of their social class and social interactions with the LGBTQ community. Davis (2013) and Hopkins (2004) discuss drag events and their performances where events create home-like safe(r) spaces and the performances aid in the development of identities, self-affirmation, and

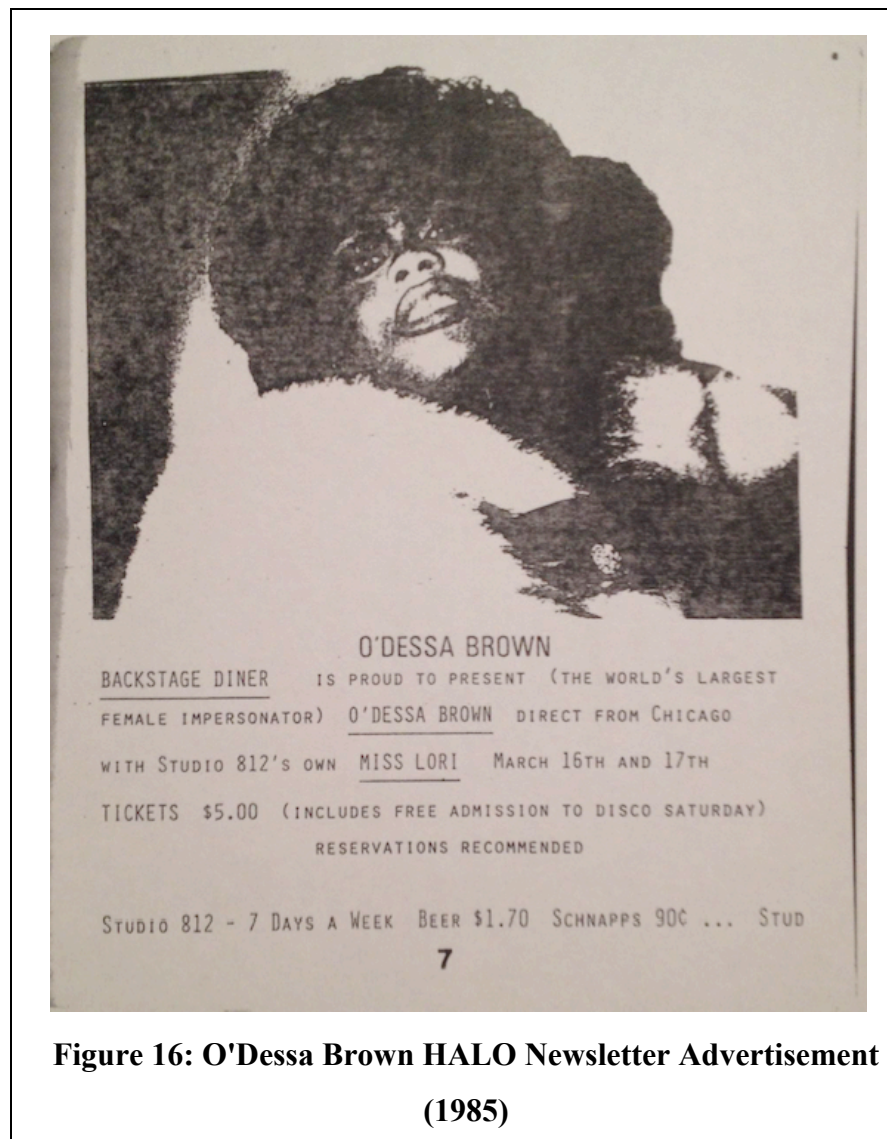
empowerment. Through a qualitative approach, Taylor and Rupp (2004) extend Butler's questions about whether or not drag destabilizes gender norms. They conclude that drag allows people to develop their own complex genders and reject authenticity and the naturalness of gender and sexual norms. Over the next few sections, I respond to Namaste's (2009) concerns about the relevance of gender and drag theory to the lives of LGBTQ people, by providing a contemporary analysis of drag in London that substantiates the above literature in the experiences of the LGBTQ community in London.

In this section specifically, I briefly discuss drag's history in London, how drag performances impact community members in different ways, and how they validate diverse identities. To begin, I first turn to a memorable quotation from one of the key informants who had this to say about drag. He said:

Oh god! You know, I've been performing now probably for 15 or 16 years and it's actually really funny that when I first came out to my mom, I was 18 or 19 and I remember we were just walking through the neighbourhood and we're talking, and I had said to her, I got something to tell her, she's like, "what's that?" and I'm like, "doctors told me I have cancer and I have three months to live" and she's like, "What?!" and I'm like, "no, no, I'm just kidding - I'm gay!" And she smacked me, open-hand up the back of the head and she said, "don't do that to me, I knew you were gay, I'm your mother, just promise me you'll never dress in women's clothing." And I remember sitting there and I scoffed at her like, "I would never do that... that's just sick, that's just twisted! That's just wrong!" And I remember going off like that and then fast-forward five years and standing in heels with a face full of makeup and it was a red Lycra mini dress. *laughs* First time I was ever on stage and I was shaking my booty in women's clothing and I was standing on stage and I got introduced and that conversation that I had with my mother flashed in my head and I just had to kind of laugh to myself. It was so funny!²

This was the first thing Blake said to me in an interview when I asked him about his introduction to drag. Blake is a gay man in his mid 30s. My interview with Blake was

different from all of the other interviews. I sat on a bench outside of the downtown library in London where the interview was taking place, and a man that I had never seen before approached me. I had to do a double take to realize that Blake was a drag queen that I have known in the community for a number of years. Only I have never seen Blake *not* in drag. I always referred to Blake as his drag name and I always referred to him as *her*. Given my experience and knowledge of Blake in a drag context, writing field notes, and this chapter in particular, has been challenging to reflect on this individual's multiple identities and his role as anyone other than a drag queen in London, Ontario.



**Figure 16: O'Dessa Brown HALO Newsletter Advertisement
(1985)**

Drag performance in London, much like many other North American cities, has a long history in the LGBTQ community.³ In my archival research of the Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO) – a nightclub *and* a social service centre for the LGBTQ community for over two decades⁴ – there were constantly advertisements in the HALO monthly newsletter for a variety of different types of drag performances. Some events had queens and kings from out of town performing (e.g. see Figure 16), while others had local talent or organizations such as the Royal Imperial Sovereign Court (formerly the Ducal Court),⁵ hosting performances at a variety of bars and venues in the city.

Drag events were not put on solely for entertainment purposes. Historically in London, there has been a fundraising component for most of the shows. According to Chef, a gay/queer man in his late 40s, “drag queens were always at the forefront of a lot of shit that was going on. I mean, you know as far as social and political activism, you know, they were always sort of out there more so than the rest of us. They always did a lot of good work. I mean the Ducal Court and stuff did a lot of fundraising during the times at HALO.”⁶ This was echoed by Dawn, a lesbian in her mid 40s, “At the HALO many years ago, if there was a drag show, people would be bringing their dollar bills, their two-dollar bills, their five-dollar bills, their twenty-dollar bills, and they would be raising money. A big part of the drag performance was people tucking money in the people's bras or pants or whatever, so that was a part, I think that that was a big part.”⁷ Fundraising continues to be an important component for drag shows in London, at least for ones that are put on by

the Royal Imperial Sovereign Court and Gen Pop. The homonormative “alternative” club, Lavish, often has professional drag queens perform a few numbers on a Friday or Saturday night, but there lacks a fundraising component at this venue. The cover from the door is for profit and to pay the performers.

According to the key informants, and other general interview participants, drag has always played an integral role for LGBTQ community in London. When I asked Blake about the level of importance that drag has for the community, he said:

I think it's a – well, drag performance is – my opinion is going to be a little biased because of the history of it. You know, when I was being taught how to be a performer, it was drilled into my head. You know, the cross dressers, the trannies at Stonewall... they were the victims and then they stood up. So if it wasn't for drag queens, cross dressers, transsexuals...we wouldn't have a gay community, we wouldn't have the rights when Stonewall marched. We wouldn't have those today, we wouldn't have what we have today without those people standing up for their rights and believing what they believe in. So as far as – I think drag has a very significant historical role to play within the LGBT community. I think drag has its place and its time. I don't think you need to put a drag queen out at every LGBT event, granted they're usually very entertaining, very funny, and let's face it, some LGBT events can be quite stale and stuffy, so you need a little drag in there to throw a sparkle around and kind of just shake the stuffiness off, 'cause you know, the information that's being passed on in these events, is important to be communicated...I don't think you can have an LGBT community without a drag queen. You would just be missing something.⁸

It was noted by multiple interviewees that the role of drag performers were seen as important figures historically, not just in terms of their political involvement and fundraisers, but also in terms of their importance in adding diversity in terms of genders or types of entertainment events for LGBTQ communities. This was echoed by Jones, a queer lesbian in her mid 60s and a former LGBTQ bar owner in London. She said that drag performers – both kings and queens – were a necessity for culture, bars, and events:

You want that. You want a few more levels. Some people who come in and they're loud and they're dressed in feathers, and glitter, and they're dripping diamonds all over the place. You want that because that draws people. We always had a no cover for drag queens in drag. And that was my idea and I enforced it rigorously. If I heard about anybody getting charged who was a drag queen I'd seek them out and give them their money back...because I believe in the culture. Do you know what I mean? It's like there are layers to a culture. Tear off a layer. Like say there's no whatever, no transsexuals, no lesbians, no butches, no... you know? Pick a layer and remove it and we'll all lose it. It's negative, you know?⁹

Jones does not just see drag performers as an optional component to the LGBTQ community, but rather a necessary one that adds gender diversity to the community.¹⁰

Aside from being important members of the LGBTQ community, drag performers play a role in terms of how their performances impact the community in various ways. Jay, a bisexual/queer man in his late 40s, said that drag is not really his cup of tea, though he sees value in it:

I'd say it is important. It's valuable. It's - there's a really long tradition of it. It's something that the people who are doing drag want to do and the people who are going to drag want to see...Yes I think it is valuable, I think it's important, I'm never going to complain about the folks in drag in the parade or anything like that because they're part of our community.¹¹

Jay's lack of interest in drag has more to do with his personal tastes and less to do with its importance for the community. He has a preference for more androgynous performers, which are more rare than the usual drag queens that he has seen, ones that often play around with the ideals of femininity.

Other participants saw drag as important for self-expression – both for the performer and the audience. Poseidon, a queer lesbian in her late teens, discussed the impact drag has had on her peers:

I think they're very helpful in any part because they exaggerate any insecurities you may have like – I have a lot of gay male friends who are always concerned about being too effeminate or something, but then they see that and they're like, you know what, whatever, like it doesn't really matter. So I think they just put on display what you're worried about and it's like – your worries disappear.¹²

The ability of drag to help others to accept, explore, or negotiate their genders or sexualities, is a positive outcome of drag performances, which is similar to how Taylor and Rupp (2004) understand drag as a way for people to develop their own complex genders through costume, play, and performance, and by being role models for folks with insecurities about their own identities. They argue that drag performers “are people who create their own authentic genders, suggesting that, rather than eliminating the notion of gender categories, we need to expand the possibilities beyond two or three to a whole range of identities.”¹³

Emily, a gay/lesbian/queer woman in her early 20s, discussed the important element of having drag shows that lead to the creation of safe spaces. She said: “It just secures the space as safe and I can see people are expressing themselves in ways that they can’t do in other places, so it makes me even appreciate the space more. Even if it’s not something that I’ve set out to find or do myself, I can appreciate it.”¹⁴ Safe spaces are integral for many members of the LGBTQ community. As seen in Angela Davis’ (2013) ethnography of drag performances in a bar, the drag shows transformed the space into a home space where patrons felt comfortable with their genders and sexualities. Safe spaces are especially important for trans people to access, as discussed by Toby. Drag shows, according to Toby, a lesbian/genderqueer transman in her early 50s, have a positive impact on some trans people. Ze said: “there are people who are, you know, just cross-dressing and that's enough for them in the trans community; that's a legitimate place to be

on the spectrum and that's a way for them to get their full bang for the buck on putting out their fabulous self there before they pack it back up again. It's a very important release I would think.”¹⁵ Multiple participants saw drag as their introductions to exploring their genders and sexualities. Cohen, a queer/pansexual transman in his late 20s, echoed this. He said:

I think it's a space for people to explore extremes of gender; to look at stereotypes and play with them. You know, my favourite drag is folks who are more androgynous with it, who are playing around with it. I think, you know, I know a lot of trans folks who have since transitioned, that initially were into drag. And it was through exploring that male or female identity that they got to try it on and see if it felt good. I mean I probably know half a dozen folks who I met that were doing drag ten years and have since transitioned. So I think it's an important space for people to be able to try on a different persona, to try on a different identity in a safe place.¹⁶

Aside from having an entertainment value, drag for both Cohen and Toby, is an activity where trans people can explore their identities and get validation from others.

Sparklebottom expressed a similar sentiment regarding drag and the experimentation with gender. Sparklebottom is a pansexual/queer/omnivoracious man in his mid 20s. He has never performed in drag, but he first started dressing in drag before he came out. He said:

I think it's important in that, for me it's important because it help me come out, but it's also just really great to – like it creates a fun thing for queers to get like super glammed up and, you know, just be like as outrageous as you can. I feel like that, to do that with some of your friends and go somewhere, is like this really great thing because it really brings – you know, I would do it with one of my friends and it would just bring us much closer – yeah, so I feel like it's really important because it's like this – it can be an event, it changes it from being like, we're going out tonight just like any other night to hang out, it makes it more fun and notable and memorable thing.¹⁷

Drag – whether one is performing on stage, being an audience member, or dressing in drag for a night on the town – provides a way in which LGBTQ people can experiment

with their expressions of gender and sexuality in designated spaces where diversity is supported and encouraged.

6.3 Drag Distinctions: Gen Pop and Lavish

In this section, I discuss the distinctions between drag performances at Gen Pop versus those at Lavish. In most of the interviews, participants were able to describe clear differences in drag between the two settings. These were discussed in terms of the production quality, the performance level, and the diversity or types of performances at each place. On the one hand, drag at Lavish was described as short and random performances that seem to be professional performers that are exclusively drag queens performing hyper-feminine gender roles. On the other hand, drag at Gen Pop was described as amateur shows that included a diversity of types of performances and gender expressions.

Drag that occurs at Lavish usually happens late on a Friday or Saturday night when the dance floor is packed full of patrons, some of which are dancing on stage. There is no formal schedule for the performances. According to some participants, the drag queens come out at random times and do a few numbers and then the environment changes back to a dance club. This was described by Rose, a queer lesbian in her early 20s: “Ummm the drag that takes place at Lavish is – I don't like it as much because you're in the middle of dancing and then there's this drag performance that is a big interruption.”¹⁸ Toby has also seen drag at Lavish, but not very often. Ze said: “they just seem to sometimes throw it in. Like you're there and then someone just jumps up and does a drag number.”¹⁹ This was also echoed by Morgan, a lesbian in her early 20s: “at Lavish it feels like we're

dancing and then suddenly there's a performer and you're like, 'what?' and it's like, 'listen to me. I'm here!'"²⁰ This interruption of the dance club atmosphere felt out of place to some and was annoying for others.

Similar to some of the literature on drag, interview participants made distinctions between professional and amateur drag performers in London. Interviewees described the drag queens that perform at Lavish as professionals. According to Cohen, "the production quality is much higher – keeping in mind that [the owner] is paying people to do drag professionally to come in, so I would say the show quality at Lavish is better."²¹ Stanley, a gay/queer man in his early 30s, who has also performed in drag in London, described drag at Lavish as more polished, though he did not see this as necessarily a good thing.

He said:

The shows at Lavish I guess are a bit more polished, but they're also a lot more boring. I found that I've never really seen that many performances that I've found exciting there. The song choice is always whatever is top 20 right now, which is fine then you know, that's whatever. But I've never seen anything really exciting there. They have backup dancers... they have sexy men as backup dancers, which you know...whatever.²²

The fact that Lavish hires professional drag queens can be seen as a good thing for some people. Naomi, a straight transwoman in her early 30s, who used to perform as a drag queen, believes that professionalism and talent are key for being good at drag. She said, "Not anybody could just be a drag queen. A lot of people like to claim that they're a drag queen, but they cannot actually do the work. There's a lot of talent that you need to put into it...you get a lot of lazy people just come in with a tiara on and sashay dress behind them and just say 'I'm a drag queen.'"²³ While having talent for drag can be seen as a good thing, Naomi's perspective fuels elitism and excludes those who are trying drag for

the first time and thus might not be perceived as doing “proper” drag. Graham, a bisexual man in his mid 30s, holds a different perspective to that of Naomi. He does not necessarily think that professional drag equates to better drag. He makes a clear distinction between the professional drag performers and the amateur performers, as seen at Gen Pop, because professionals are less likely to be risqué and push norms. He said:

Ya. The shows that I've seen at Lavish, for example, this is a drag performer who has been doing this for years, takes pride in that kind of thing. Um at Brennan's, they may be less professional insofar as they might not have been doing it for so long, they may not necessarily have brand name associated with it there as well, but therein lies the distinction. You can see some more risqué things there as well. I mean, professional drag performers are going to be a little bit safer when it comes to doing a show, you know? And I mean if the object of doing drag is to get people out of their comfort zones to basically defy gender norms, well that means you have to necessarily visualize some deviance every so often. You see that at a Gen Pop event. That's great. Um not so much with a – with the ones I've seen at Lavish, shall we say.²⁴

The performances at Lavish, while entertaining to some, were described by multiple participants as conforming to stereotypes of feminine beauty standards and a higher degree of professionalism. From my observations at Lavish, drag queens are dressed in very hyper-feminine ways: lots of makeup, fake eye lashes, luscious wigs, tight dresses, high heels, and they perform routines that look as though they have been practiced hundreds of times. The performances are in many ways flawless. At Gen Pop, even for drag queen performers that have a similar wardrobe and self-presentation style, the performance is like a dress rehearsal with surrounded by a group of friends and supporters. For example, one drag queen had a great routine put together; however, you could tell that she was doing this performance for the first time. At one point, she tripped on something on stage and her wig tilted a bit off of her head. Instead of fixing her wig, she tore it off and threw it into the audience. Here she was acknowledging this problem,

but owned it by making it a part of her performance. This speaks to what Graham suggested as queens being less safe in their performances. Further, at Gen Pop, while there definitely are drag queen performers, they are part of a diversity of performers, which include faux queens, drag kings, and more androgynous performers.²⁵

The performers at Gen Pop are not hired professional drag performers, yet the amateurism of the nights is an attractive quality to some. Cohen said, “You know, somewhere like APK or Gen Pop when there’s drag, I find it’s much more entertaining. The production value may not be higher, but those people are characters. They’re – it fringes on burlesque sometimes and that sort of thing.”²⁶ The plethora of characters that make up the performance roster at Gen Pop is not always drag performers performing in uniform ways. Adam, a gay/queer transman in his late 20s, does not like drag, though he sees the drag performances at Gen Pop offering something different than the typical drag performances he has seen at clubs in Toronto. He said:

The drag I've seen at Gen Pop, what I liked about it – I still don't like drag – but what I liked about it is that it was a total motley crew of not just the same... because sometimes you go to drag shows and it's like the same archetype, it's four people doing the same archetype. So if you go to a drag show at Woody's - it's all very polished queens doing a particular repertoire of songs and you're like, after the first one, you don't need to see the next four. So the mix of people [at Gen Pop] was nice. And seeing – like amateurs are not cute, but first time performers are fun to watch, right? Cuz they are adorable and it's fun to experience that. And I think also just seeing people, like people from the Imperial Court – it was like, where did they come from? I've never seen them before. So that too. But that said, it was cute also cuz – I liked it also because of the novelty aspect of it, right? If Gen Pop had a drag show like that every time? Or any drag show every time, I would scratch my eyes and ears out. It's like, once in a while it's totally cute and fun and campy and – I'm gay, I can't hate drag! *laughs*²⁷

Adam’s joke about not being able to hate drag speaks to what Jones and Blake commented on earlier about how you cannot have LGBTQ community without drag

performers. It is engrained in the LGBTQ bar culture. The “motley crew” of performers that Adam spoke about, and the fact that Gen Pop has a variety of different types of events and shows are reasons why some participants preferred Gen Pop over other events that they have attended even if they generally do not love drag. There are a variety of archetypes and a diversity of different types of performers (not all drag-specific performances). This contrasts with the professionalism of drag queen performances as seen at Lavish. For example, at one Gen Pop during Pride, there were performances by faux queens: cis-women performers who perform in the style of drag queens. There was a performance from an androgynous burlesque performer with short hair, make-up, and a Zorro-esque outfit including a long black cape. There also was a group of cis-men performing a diversity of genders, including a bearded man wearing makeup, heels, a fishnet shirt, and jeans; another bearded man in makeup, leather pants, and heels; and another performer with a shaved head, goatee, makeup, red fishnet stockings, and a black lace corset (see Figure Two).²⁸ These are some of the types of performers that frequent the Gen Pop stage.



Figure 17: Gen Pop Performers (2014)

6.4 The Queer Aesthetic of Gen Pop

The diversity of performers and non-normative gendered performers is part of a queer aesthetic that Gen Pop tries to attain through its various events. I have argued in the previous chapter that the queer aesthetic of Gen Pop's event poster advertisements relies on camp and raunch to convey its message. I further argued that this type of aesthetic challenges the viewer to engage with the imagery in ways that challenge social norms, push boundaries, and move people out of their comfort zone. The posters provide queer visual cues that often suggest diversity and inclusion, but they move away from homonormativity, beyond rigid sexual and gender identity categories. The queer aesthetic

is difficult to define, as it contests categories and boundaries. Utilizing the ambiguity and the refusal of stabilization of camp, the queer aesthetic uses irony to highlight incongruities and deviancy. It also uses humour as a strategy to deal with hostile environments. Raunch aesthetics also add to the queer aesthetic by transgressing norms through hyperbolic excess. Deviant sexual expressions are brought to the foreground through indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, and sexual explicitness to challenge the viewer's preconceived notions of bodies, gender, sexuality, and other norms. The embrace of this queer aesthetic by the Gen Pop posters highlights the offensive, in-your-face nature of queerness, against the backdrop of the usual homonormative assimilationist logic of tolerance and acceptance. This aesthetic is not limited to the poster advertisements, but also a part of the overall aesthetic of the Gen Pop events through various performances and arts. In this section, I extend the discussion of a queer aesthetic in an analysis of specific performers at Gen Pop. Participants spoke about how many Gen Pop drag performers utilize more artistic expression and transgress norms. Participants also discussed drag performances that are more androgynous or non-normative and the ways in which they challenge binary gender as well as homonormativity.

Almost every single Gen Pop drag event has featured performances by local performance artist, Red Moon (pictured in the centre of Figure 17). Red Moon's performances are hard to categorize. Some would call it drag, though it is not your traditional drag performance. Others would classify his performance as queer, based on the ways in which he challenges norms of gender and sexuality. Red Moon is often clad in PVC fetish wear, such as a jockstrap with a zipper down the middle, over-the-top colourful makeup, long luscious eyelashes, a shaven head, fishnet stockings, an avant-garde costume, and some

form of high stiletto or platform shoes. Red Moon performs lip synch numbers and often sings original materials. Red Moon's aesthetic is a mixture of genders and moves more toward gender ambiguity or gender bending. This fits into Gen Pop's queer aesthetic in the sense that, through various performances, Red Moon challenges social norms – and these norms are not just challenged in terms of norms of gender, but also in terms of norms of drag performances that usually are either hyper-feminine for the queens and masculine for the kings.²⁹ This was described by Rose, not in terms of Red Moon specifically, but in terms of all of the different performers at Gen Pop. She said: "I feel like it's more open to diversity and a lot more different forms of, or it's like a different idea of what it means to be like... it's like different kinds of beauty and different kinds of femininity...you know what I mean?"³⁰ The diversity of kinds of beauty and kinds of femininity in its performances at Gen Pop denaturalize the norms of gender and highlight its fluidity. One of the upsides to having a diversity of amateur performers is that the audience never really knows what to expect. Carlos, a queer transman in his early 20s, reflected on the randomness of Gen Pop events. He said:

Ya, it's a really good thing... because then it's not boring. I feel like I've seen – you know exactly what you're going to see when the Lavish drag show starts. You know exactly what's going to happen, but the Gen Pop one, it's actually like – I don't know how to describe what I saw, and even though I saw it two or three months ago, like I don't even know...and I feel like a lot of my friends don't even know what they saw. It was really random and – I just know that I liked it.³¹

It is interesting that despite the fact that Carlos was unable to articulate the performances at Gen Pop, the randomness and the unintelligibility of the performances had an appeal.

Unintelligibility, or undefinability, is a key component to a queer aesthetic. When I interviewed the research participants, multiple people had difficulty defining what a

queer aesthetic entails. For example, when asked about defining characteristics of queer, Morgan stated:

It's almost ... I feel like if this was like a year ago I wouldn't have felt this way because queer was never really a big word that I used or understood, or even I can't understand it fully now. It's how you own it personally or view it ... I think I've learned and accepted it as a word or like understanding it or how I see it and using it as a definition, but not as a definition at the same time because that creates boundaries. Like how I figured out who I am, like my own identity, I think it was kind of like that deconstruction; tryin' to figure it out. But even that is something I don't I fully don't think I'll ever... I don't think it can ever be fully grasped.³²

Morgan's understanding of the word queer is interesting to consider in the context of performances at Gen Pop. She is unable to fully articulate what it means and does not think that this will ever happen; yet she still has an idea of the ways in which the term is used.

Others have used the term "inclusive" to describe the meaning of queer. However, while according to Morgan, queer by definition cannot be defined, boundaries need to exist, otherwise, queer would be applicable to everyone. In defining queer, as discussed in the last chapter, Jones said:

To me, queer is lewd. Queer is more avant-garde. Queer is more open... I'm definitely queerer than... I'm more fag than most gay men. Right? I'm queerer than a lot of people in this town. It's okay I don't judge, but, you know, I do think that queer is pansexual, it's pangender, I think queer is the catch-all for all the people who don't really rigidly fit into lesbian, or gay, or fag, or whatever you identify as, you know what I mean?³³

The inclusion that many participants were attempting to describe is one that includes those who do not conform to strict categories of gender and/or sexuality. Lunar, a gay man in his late 30s, has performed drag at multiple venues – though he, too, does not

conform to rigid categories. In describing his first performance he talked about how he was able to be androgynous and have more artistic expression. He said: “I felt more comfortable there because there was a bit more I think artistic expression encouraged there as opposed to specifically needing to dress up like a woman and lip-synch...it was about being artistic and not necessarily about looking like a woman, like a show girl. That’s not what that kind of drag was about.”³⁴ He later elaborated on his performance style:

I feel like I have chosen to take a personal approach to it as opposed to just assuming the regular old perspective of drag that I’ve seen people like, and that as a performer, I like. So the more me I can be with that, the more – it’s like a genderfuck that I try and push. Sometimes I think that the parts of the Court drag and the drag I was describing before that I don’t like, are the perpetuation of weird gender norms that are misguided and I think that that’s what I try to mess with as a performer. So the parts of drag that I like are the avant-garde artistic piece that I can push envelopes with and the ability to actually make art on stage as well as music.³⁵

Lunar felt that the type of drag performance that he does pushes boundaries and allows him to transgress gender norms, which are major components to a queer aesthetic.

A few other participants discussed ways in which they enjoyed drag performances that were more part of a queer aesthetic. Jay spoke about how he did not particularly like most drag performances that he has seen. He said:

My surface interpretation of a drag queen performance is hyper-feminized, stereotypical hyper-feminized performance, which I don’t find particularly attractive. The kings in general tend to be – they tend to not to be hyper-masculine. Right, it’s like...when a drag queen is shooting for Dolly Parton or Jennifer Lopez or something like that. Like a very heavily like femme kind of identity. The kings are not going for, are usually in my experience, don’t seem to be going for a really – they’re not going for Arnold Schwarzenegger, or a body builder kind of a thing. They’re pushing it so it’s a bit more androgynous and it’s the androgyny that I like.³⁶

Jay points out a distinction between drag queens and drag kings: the queens usually are presenting a hyper-femininity while the kings are not usually presenting a hyper-masculine identity. He is more interested in androgyny and later stated that he would be more interested in seeing a drag queen performing as kd lang. A queen performing as kd lang would be a genderfuck as cisgendered men overwhelmingly perform in hyper-feminine roles rather than as butch women.

For some, drag performances are understood as adhering to a binary between masculinity (kings) and femininity (queens). However, as seen in the drag research of Taylor and Rupp (2004), drag performers do not portray a strict binary, but use drag to develop their own complex genders and reject the authenticity of gender. For example, interviewee Toby, who has performed drag numerous times over the last few decades, said that ze does not see drag in terms of a binary. Toby has performed in a variety of different drag roles that are not the typical roles. Ze said: "I did Carol Pope's 'Birds of a Feather,' I did Stevie Nicks' 'Think About It,' I did Freddie Mercury, I did David Bowie...I did Soft Cell."³⁷ Toby sees these types of performances as ways to challenge the false binary.

TOUGH DRAG NIGHT
AND COMPETITION
-AT HALO-
FRIDAY MARCH 30/70- 12 A.M.
DOORS OPEN- 9 P.M.- NO FEE

*-Mrs. Tough Drag must be a
male in female attire.
-Mr. Tough Drag must
be a female in
male attire.*

WHAT IS "TOUGH DRAG"?
To me it is fun drag - no
shaving of body parts to do - no
tucking or binding of extruding
parts - no hours of fussing - no
expensive bills for 'haute couture'
fashions. Basically, coming out in
attire of the opposite sex that's fun
and 'casual'.

COME OUT AND HAVE
A GREAT TIME
ON A NEW
FUN NIGHT
AT HALO

PRINCES

Figure 18: Tough Drag HALO Advertisement

Toby also discussed a type of performance called scrag drag (also known as tough drag):
 “scrag drag is when guys are doing drag like they do, and they are dressing up like
 fabulous women in sequins dresses, but they didn’t do the whole face make-up thing with

the lipstick, they were still wearing a beard, so don't worry, you can do drag too! Finally!"³⁸ Toby's examples of the diversity of drag roles that ze did along with scrag drag as an alternative drag identity are part of a queer aesthetic that challenges normative perceptions of drag, gender, and sexuality.³⁹ They also break down the masculine/feminine binary. As discussed by Butler (1993), drag parodies and subverts hegemonic gender and contests the naturalness of normative categories. Scrag drag is a good example of this. While scrag or tough drag performances are important when thinking of ways in which they challenge normative social categories, this is not to say that more traditional types of drag do not also have a similar effect. While some participants might see the different types of drag as a binary, it is a false binary. Different types of drag can be equally as important or powerful depending on the context. Drag calls into question how we think about gender, sexuality, and other identities.

The diversity of drag performances have also played a major role in terms of helping some people come out, or, as Poseidon stated earlier, allowing people to explore their genders and sexualities. Stanley echoed this, in terms of his gender identity as it relates to his experience performing drag. He said:

I think drag and camp are really great parts about being gay and being queer. Especially as a way of connection with our history and with previous generations of gay men, and not just gay men, but queer people in general. So I like that. I guess as a gender presentation, I mean, as I said before, I'm cis-gendered, but I especially like that in drag in a gay community that is increasingly concerned with masculinity and masculine performances and being masculine enough, drag is this thing that has for a very long time, been a part of this community that emphasizes being feminine and being sissy and being whichever... So I like that that kind of breaks up this kind of, you know, overly... this focus on being overly masculine that happens way too often in the gay community. You know it makes it like being back in the locker room, but not in the good way. So ya, that's one thing that I definitely like about drag.⁴⁰

Stanley's emphasis on utilizing feminine drag queen performances to challenge norms of masculinity in gay culture shows how drag can be equally as powerful in pushing people's normative understandings of gender and sexuality, or as Butler would say, where it can proliferate "gender configurations outside the restricting frames of [masculinity]." ⁴¹ Drag can be one way to move beyond and celebrate being feminine for gay men where it may not otherwise be celebrated in all of their social spaces. As seen in the research of Hopkins (2004), drag performance allows people to create their own drag identities and do so in a supportive environment where performers get self-affirmation. Stanley's experiences of performing femininity in a supportive space for drag shows emphasizes how he is able to create a drag identity and feel empowerment through this. This is in contrast to how he may not feel empowered or self-affirmation in other gay male spaces that privilege some gender identities and expressions over others.

6.5 The Other Queer Arts of Gen Pop

In this section, I discuss the other mediums at Gen Pop through which a queer aesthetic is harnessed. I consider the relevance of a punk aesthetic based on amateurism, glam, and camp, as a way to challenge societal norms. Other art forms such as music, dance, and interactive installations are discussed in reference to the queer aesthetic and the ways in which diverging perspectives are productive for community. I end this section by drawing a comparison between the aesthetics of Gen Pop and the former Toronto queer night, Vazaleen.

The queer aesthetic can be seen in a variety of arts and performers at Gen Pop, not limited to drag performers. When discussing the various forms of art at Gen Pop in comparison to Lavish, Chef said:

The art. It's just different, you know? It's something that London and that sort of community hasn't done. I mean, Lavish does a lot of art things, but I mean it's not really artistically diverse as what I would like to see it. Whereas Gen Pop - I mean, you know, some of the bands, and the performers, and stuff that have played there, I mean, you know, are amazing. I wouldn't ever see that at Lavish. I don't think, like Patron Stain: I would never see them at Lavish *laughs* unfortunately! But it... that's the main difference I think.⁴²

Patron Stain, self-described as “dry, trashy, queer, blasé punk,”⁴³ were a band that performed at one of Gen Pop’s events during the Pride London Festival. With songs such as “Invisible Clit” and “Sprezzatura” – which means to perform something without any apparent effort, very fitting for a punk band – Patron Stain’s set was an in-your-face punk performance that certainly would not be seen at other LGBTQ venues in the city. This same show also featured Owl & Antler performing on the bar’s patio. Owl & Antler plays in the genre of folk-punk. It is a solo act featuring a queer punk in his mid-20s wearing combat boots, a studded jean vest, short shorts, armed with a banjo, shouting lyrics to his songs as a crowd surrounds him.

Punk as an aesthetic has similarities to queer aesthetics and the amateurism of Gen Pop drag performers as discussed previously. These similarities include: the anti-establishment and challenges to societal norms that have been a part of punk since its inception in the late 1970s; the lack of “perfection” for performances; and instances of raunch, camp, and gender experimentation. Stanley sees the diversity of performers and the amateurism of Gen Pop as positive for the community. He specifically relies on a

notion of “punk” to explain the amateurism of drag performances that occur at Gen Pop.

He said,

Ya, it's always different. I mean it's hard to generalize. What I like about Gen Pop is that there's a lot of amateurs, which is a lot of fun. I like that it's a very large mix of types of performers, genders, ability levels, experience levels, like we've got some people who are doing it for the first time [and] we've got some people who have been doing it for fifteen years or whatever, so I really like that mix... it makes it feel like it is more fun and more about the performance and more about this almost... like it's funny. Drag is something that is very focused. There is one side that is focused on perfection and this kind of flawless illusion of presenting as a different gender than the one that you are and there is this other side of drag that is almost punk... like about just trying things out, experimenting, and just working with what you have. And I think that that side about working with what you have and just performing because you want to perform, I get a lot more of that from Gen Pop which I really, really like.⁴⁴

The diversity of performers and the amateurism make drag at Gen Pop more fun for Stanley. It is interesting to highlight Stanley’s reference to punk as it relates to drag at Gen Pop. Punk aesthetics – as they relate to queer culture or drag – were mentioned by multiple interview participants in a variety of contexts. Drawing on the works of queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz, in his reading of Kevin McCarty’s photographic installation, *The Chameleon Club*, Muñoz discusses punk aesthetics and amateurism. He says: “The celebration of an aesthetics of amateurism is reminiscent of punk rock’s aesthetics. The performance of amateurism [in punk] signals a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming.”⁴⁵ This insistence on process and becoming is a way that performers at Gen Pop are, in the words of Stanley, “trying things out and experimenting” and moving away from flawless performances and a refusal of mastery. This refusal of mastery is also a way to satirize or mimic norms, or as Butler (1993) would say, mimic the structures of gender and question heterosexuality as natural and original.

Others discussed punk not necessarily in terms of drag, but more so as part of a queer identity that pushed gender boundaries. Chef, who grew up in London as a self-identified queer punk, found that his queer identity was more supported in the punk community than the gay community in the 1980s, where he saw punk as “all about being yourself and being totally anti-establishment, and being queer at that point totally fit into that.”⁴⁶ He then went on to discuss the relationship between punk and drag: “if you look at like old school bands like the New York Dolls and you know, like ’63 Monroe even locally, I mean you know, it was all about pushing that sort of gender identity thing. You know, wearing high heels and make-up...even though it was more androgynous than maybe full out drag.”⁴⁷ The androgynous look of past glam punk bands moved away from stereotypical gender roles toward more of a gender ambiguity. In his article entitled, “Frock Tactics,” Richard Smith comments on the gender fuck of punk and glam bands from the UK in the 1970s. He cited glam as *self-conscious camp*, “not just because of the dressing up and the drag, but because it was about pop stars not taking themselves in the least bit seriously.”⁴⁸ Glam, according to Smith, inspired bands such as the New York Dolls, who wore cellophane tutus, combat boots, and really played with their genders and sexualities.⁴⁹ Four decades later, punk music, bands, and communities are still an avenue for people to explore their genders and sexualities, as seen through the Gen Pop performances of Red Moon, Patron Stain, Owl & Antler, and Wet Nightmare, to name a few.

Sparklebottom got involved in the punk scene a few decades later than Chef, but he saw punk as an entryway into drag and eventually his queer identity: “I kind of bounced over to the punk scene where it was more okay to be a little more loose with your gender. So

for me, more so, it was like gender stuff that I started figuring out. You know, I started doing drag and stuff before I even identified as queer.”⁵⁰ Punk community for Sparklebottom, presented an opportunity for him to explore his gender in a community where he felt that he was not constrained to strict gender norms. Sparklebottom later discussed how he sees drag and punk as synonymous in terms of challenging what is socially acceptable. He said:

I think it’s just more common in the punk scene to see drag and gender bending than in a lot of other scenes, but I think that, you know, having someone talking to you and they’re in full drag, but them also being the person that’s performing on stage and singing really aggressive music. I think it’s just something that’s really powerful to be like not only singing about fucking with the conventions of society, but I’m also presenting myself as this, you know, like hypersexualized, but also really genderfucked and really, you know, I’m dressing as a woman tonight.⁵¹

This congruency of the acceptance and commonality of gender bending and the punk community in London over the last three decades, as described by both Chef and Sparklebottom, is similar to the amateurism of performances at Gen Pop – where there are a diversity of performers that are part of an aesthetic that does not align with mastery (of gender roles), but rather by being anti-establishment, non-normative, and as Stanley said, “just trying things out, experimenting, and just working with what you have.”⁵² Experimentation and a queer aesthetic can be seen in a variety of aspects of Gen Pop events, not just limited to performances. The organizers of Gen Pop experiment with artistic interventions in various ways to actively engage the attendees of the events in building community.

As discussed in the literature review and in chapters three and four, in defining community, art is utilized as a way to bring people together. It waves together sensory

fabrics and creates community through shared sensations, even if there are different perspectives or levels of enjoyment and engagement. For example, in this chapter, we have seen different types of drag performances categorized by interviewees as good, bad, or ambivalent. Not every LGBTQ person will have the same perspective. However, as discussed by Rancière (2009), these contradictory relations are what produce community. The complexity of different sensations and disagreements of queer arts – from performances, posters, and interactive art installations to films, music, and dance – are productive for the development of community.



Figure 19: Pride Parade Pubic Photo

There are multiple sensory outlets that occur at Gen Pop that transmit sense data of a queer aesthetic to the attendees (though some of these were discussed less than others). The various artistic interventions – like drag and punk performances – challenge social norms and push boundaries of gender, sexuality, and normative social behaviour. For example, a photograph taken by artist Ethan Lester (see Figure 19)⁵³ is mounted on the wall of every Gen Pop event since the event's inception. This photo of pubic hair was chosen for a variety of reasons. Pubic hair is something that heteronormative culture requires that women (and some men) shave and remove to stop the crossing of the line between eroticism and the abject. Pubic hair is a fact of life for all genders, one that gestures toward a non-rational, non-normative bodily eroticism and abjection that cannot be contained. The photo was purposely taken to not reveal the gender of the model. The use of this photo without any caption or framing leaves the viewer to engage with this image and determine how it fits with the rest of the aesthetic of Gen Pop.

At the Gen Pop two-year anniversary party, a private booth was constructed beside the dance floor that was labelled “Tunnel of Love” (see Figure 20).⁵⁴ The idea behind this installation was to provide a booth where attendees could cuddle, make-out, or fornicate if they so chose. People of all genders utilized the “Tunnel of Love,” as well as other spaces (such as the washroom stalls), as a way to queer the social norms associated with “proper” bar behaviour. This is similar to the ways in which queer women in Toronto “reclaimed raunch” and contested preconceived ideas about women’s sexuality and gender at Pussy Palace, an infamous women’s bathhouse event, as discussed in the last chapter.⁵⁵



Figure 20: Gen Pop Tunnel of Love

Music and dance are another sensory form of art that brings people together in a variety of ways. At Gen Pop, this involves experimentation by the DJs. I was asked to DJ at the very first Gen Pop event, before I volunteered to help organize the events. Given that the organizers told me that they were trying to facilitate a queer space that is antithetical to homonormative bar spaces, I prepared a variety of musical genres that worked against the mainstream and the top 40. Starting off my set with Laurie Anderson’s infamous 1981 track, “O Superman,” and slowly moving into punk and post-punk sounds, riot grrrl, and eventually into what musicologist Tim Lawrence (2009) would call “queer musical aesthetics” through the sounds of Arthur Russell and other avant-garde disco and dance artists, I attempted to create a non-normative musical sensory that transmitted to the

crowd our struggles and protest against normative gay bar culture. This experimental approach to DJing worked out well, as I mixed together unknown tracks with other songs that were known or that various attendees had requested. This mash-up of musical genres worked as a way to not only challenge norms of current gay bars – where top 40 hits are overwhelmingly played – but also to provide a queer alternative to what attendees might normally expect from other bars.

According to Adam, music is “something that does build community for queer people locally. You know, there’s a reason – people would not go to Gen Pop if there wasn’t a DJ, I think actually DJs are really – part of the reason people go to queer dance parties is to dance and that’s actually really important.”⁵⁶ As a DJ, I do not simply weave together various tracks at random. Rather, it is a dialectic between the DJ and those in the club – one that is challenged by the dissensus of the community where there are a variety of tastes among the attendees. If one particular beat or style of music gets people dancing, the DJ continues playing music in the rhythm to build momentum with the hopes of bringing the community together on the dance floor. According to Ramón Rivera-Servera (2004), in his study of LGBTQ Latino dances, “the act of dancing in itself constitutes the utopian ‘doing’ of the club by materializing bodily exchanges that articulate, showcase, and even flaunt queer sexuality publicly.”⁵⁷ Dancing at the club is what Rivera-Servera calls choreographies of resistance, which are “embodied practices through which minoritarian subjects claim their space in social and cultural realms.”⁵⁸ This is similar to Buckland (2002), who argues that through dance with other sexual and gender minorities, LGBTQ people are able to embody queer memories and develop queer agency to challenge heteronormativity. This can be seen at Gen Pop whereby those who do not

identify with the normative culture of other bars and spaces, can attend the event as a way to collectively claim space as a queer community while dancing to music that is more in line with the community's aesthetic in comparison to mainstream dance music and heteronormative dance floor interactions. LGBTQ people on a dance floor are able to be active and creative agents in resisting norms, as suggested by Johnson's (2005) study of two-step dance at a gay country and western bar. Through dance where usual gendered roles of lead and follower are assumed by men as the leaders and women as the followers, it is not so clear-cut for queer dance. Dance at an LGBTQ bar thus is able to destabilize and challenge compulsory heterosexuality in similar ways that drag also challenges these normative categories.

Aside from dance, music can also play a role for those who are not on the dance floor. In Gill Valentine's analysis of kd lang's music for lesbian communities, she discusses the ways in which music can be experienced through listening. She states: "music is corporeal and, as such, allows us as listeners mentally to detach our inside from the outside and to retreat from the hegemonic heterosexuality of our everyday surroundings."⁵⁹ While detaching from hegemonic heterosexuality, attendees at Gen Pop can attach themselves to music through listening and singing lyrics to queer songs. Valentine adds: "the personal meanings that songs acquire in this way make listening to music not an abstract experience but a concrete one and so music has an important role to play in the ceaseless construction and reproduction of 'who we are' and 'where we stand.'"⁶⁰ While attendees may experience varying degrees of attachment to particular songs (dissensus), through dancing and listening to queer music, the community can start to develop a shared sensibility. From my observations from the DJ booth, the degrees of

attachment to songs are sometimes very apparent. While younger generations do not outright reject older icons like Rough Trade or Sylvester, their lack of familiarity with music from past LGBTQ generations can lead to a disengagement from dancing while the older crowds can be seen dancing or singing along. I had similar observations for the queer punks that attend Gen Pop. They tended to engage more with the loud guitars and more abrasive music of Bikini Kill, Le Tigre, and The Buzzcocks and less with the dance music of the 1990s. Despite the diversity of musical tastes of Gen Pop attendees – whether enjoyed through dancing, listening, or requiring one to take a break from the dance floor – a shared sensibility is developed based on what Rancière calls the intertwining of contradictory relations. These, as I have argued previously, are productive for community.

Attendees at Gen Pop interact within the space in a variety of ways, not limited to dancing and listening. Aside from the pubic hair picture and the banners and decorations, as mentioned in the introduction, there have been various ways in which art installations have been created to forge an active relationship with the attendees. At two different Gen Pop events, large wall-sized maps of London were created with only the major streets drawn on them. Participants were asked to add their own details, drawing in other streets, buildings, and locations that they considered to be part of their own queer experiences in London and creating a collective queer memory along the way. London can feel rather isolating to those who do not conform to the homonormativity of the very few LGBTQ spaces in the city, so the goal of this installation was to bring together a plethora of queer experiences – regardless of their differences – all in one place. The final product from the first Gen Pop event was a mixture of coming-out stories, cruising grounds, kisses (first or

otherwise), and one corner of East London one writer described as “where all the lesbians live.” While the artwork itself was written with markers on chart paper and not built to last, the act of collectively articulating London’s secret queer histories was one that got people to think of London collaboratively in a queer way. As Rancière would say, the intention of this art installation wove together “a new sensory fabric by wresting percepts and affects from the perceptions and affections that make up the fabric of ordinary experience,”⁶¹ bringing together a new way of being together created through the collision of different lives and stories enshrined in a single work.⁶²

Aside from the interactive social mappings, the Gen Pop organizers have used other means to get attendees to interact artistically with the event space. For example, one event featured blank pages at every table and on the bar with the only instructions being: “draw something queer.” This exercise allowed multiple people to illustrate something that they consider to be queer without providing any further instructions. This exercise drew a variety of interpretations by attendees. Some examples of drawings include: people having sex in a bathroom stall, various shapes, sizes, and types of genitalia, women scissoring, anthropomorphized animals, unicorns, and other abstract impressions. Another example included blank pages with varying instructions on them such as: “Tell me a secret”; “Is London your community?”; “What is General Population?”; “What makes you hot?”; and “What do you want General Population to grow into?” The responses from this exercise were collected and made into a collage that was posted on the wall of the next Gen Pop event so attendees could read the diversity of responses from other attendees and think about how various people responded differently to each question. Lastly, Gen Pop also hosted a queer fast/slow dance. Dance booklets were

designed with instructions for participants to mingle with other crowds and ask others to dance to the listed slow songs. Not only did this provide a means for people to ask others to a dance, but also it encouraged all attendees to make contact with people they might not normally communicate with in a social setting. These examples are some of the ways in which Gen Pop creates interactive art that weaves community together through a variety of sensory fabrics.

Gen Pop provides a space in London where queers and other non-normative genders and sexualities could come together, claim space as queer, and engage in a variety of different art forms – drag, posters, music, films, dance, interactive art, etc. – and social behaviours that utilize a queer aesthetic to challenge heteronormativity, homonormativity, and other cultural and sub-cultural norms. Gen Pop is similar in many ways to a monthly night in Toronto, Vazaleen, which occurred between 2000 and 2006. Vazaleen was known to have a variety of queer performers that were really pushing limits and challenging music, performance, and social norms. Some artists that have performed at Vazaleen include: the punk drag act of Ursula Android and Jackie Hell; genderqueer performing artist, Vaginal Creme Davis; punk cover band, Rocket Tits; queercore band, Limp Wrist; and the legendary Jayne County.⁶³ Jayne County, a transgender rock n roll performer who used to be a cross-dressing performer under the name Wayne County, is a good example of how performers challenged and queered music, performance, and social norms. According to Richard Smith, County used shock tactics on stage and sang songs such as, “(If you don’t wanna fuck me) Fuck Off” and “Are you Man Enough to Be a Woman?”⁶⁴ As quoted in a 1971 issue of *Crawdaddy!* magazine, “County’s act is carried on in total drag; he wears a plastic cunt with straw hair, sucks off a large dildo, shoots ‘come’ at the audience with a

plastic squirt gun, and for an encore eats dog food out of a toilet bowl.”⁶⁵ The avant-garde performers at Vazaleen, such as Jayne County, and those who attended its events, really pushed the boundaries of what it means to be queer and carved out a queer space in Toronto’s homonormative LGBTQ bar scene.

In Ken Moffatt’s (2006) examination of Vazaleen, he argues that the event contributes to a queer politic that is transformative.⁶⁶ Vazaleen displayed how, “the imagery, explicit politics of the organizers, and the not-for-profit character of the event is meant to allow for a unique mixing of people and a different experience of engagement among community members.”⁶⁷ Much like Gen Pop, Vazaleen consisted of a diversity of queer subcultures. According to its founder, Will Munro, Vazaleen consists of:

your gay rock and rollers um as well as your dyke kind of like punks um also you get into like leather subcultures. So you have like dykes who are into leather ... as well as fags who are into leather. As well, you get all those sort of trans subcultures – so you’re getting tranny boys and tranny girls. You are getting people who are into gender fuck, um you are getting like bear subcultures, you’re getting swingers, you’re getting cool straight hipsters, music kids. Um, it’s pretty shook up...I’ve seen most sexual subcultures. I think there’s also a pretty strong bi contingent that shows up ... You get a lot of people who come out who have wanted to ah explore queer things ah and they identify mostly as being straight and will come to this event specifically.⁶⁸

This diversity of participants is similar to how Chef described Gen Pop. He said:

I don't see Gen Pop as strictly LGBTQ. You know? Um a lot of my straight friends go there too. You know? So and General Population is just that right? it encompasses everybody. It's not – it's a safe space for people who are LGBTQ, but it's – I don't really see it as a main focus really. I don't think that's what brings people together. I think it's the art and the music and just the people in general regardless of who they sleep with or...⁶⁹

Vazaleen, like Gen Pop, is another example of how a diverse community comes together through various queer aesthetic sensory fabrics. These constitute the basis for community where queer aesthetics challenge a variety of normative categories as discussed throughout this chapter.

6.6 Conclusions

During the interviews for this research, when I asked Sam, a pansexual/queer genderqueer in their mid 30s about differentiating types of art, they said:

You could understand art as including performance and intervention and art that you can talk about in complex critical ways. I think art that is critically or conceptually more complex operates in a different way than, say, just a painting of a naked guy. I see the more conceptually complex work as operating on a broader social level than the painting of a naked guy. Maybe that's because the ideas behind it are what trigger or motivate social change. If it's just like, "I'm a guy who is attracted to guys, so I'm going to make a painting of a guy who is naked," does that motivate social change in any way? I'm not sure.⁷⁰

Sam then makes a distinction between a painting of a naked man and conceptually complex art. They provide an example of an art show by Hazel Meyer and Logan McDonald that was recently featured at a local artist-run gallery. According to Sam, "their concept for that work is super queer. That's a queer art show and it's like, giant green hands painted on the wall, with this big banner that says: 'PROBE YOUR OUTER LIMIT,' and a table of suggestive objects...It conceptually pushes the boundaries further, like much further."⁷¹ These quotations succinctly describe a queer aesthetic, one that is more in line with the ways in which the various arts operate at Gen Pop. However, this is not to say that a drawing of a naked man may not push boundaries. Within the LGBTQ community, as I have shown throughout this chapter, there are a variety of perspectives

that are sometimes at odds with each other. The sensory experience of art within a community is not univocal. Dissensus is the inevitable condition that makes community thrive.

In this chapter, I have provided a variety of different ways in which a queer aesthetic is presented and engaged with at Gen Pop. I discussed drag at length, showing its long tradition and importance for LGBTQ community and the ways in which it provides a safe space for people to explore ideas of gender and sexuality. I have also shown how drag can expose the false binary of masculinity and femininity. The amateurism of drag performers at Gen Pop in contrast to Lavish, for example, signals a sort of punk-like aesthetic, one that is anti-establishment, DIY, challenges transgresses gender and sexual norms, and is a refusal of mastery. This punk aesthetic has been utilized by various LGBTQ community members, not just through drag performance, as a way to explore and/or challenge the societal norms.

The queer aesthetic of Gen Pop utilizes notions of camp and raunch to push boundaries and challenges a variety of norms including, but not limited to, heteronormativity, homonormativity, dance, and social interaction norms. Aside from drag and other musical performances at Gen Pop, a queer aesthetic can also be seen in other sensory outlets such as music, DJing and dancing, where a variety of genres are mashed together to create an alternative queer dance space. It is also seen through visual arts – from the pubic hair photo to posters and banners hanging on the walls – and through other interactive art installations such as the “tunnel of love,” interactive social mapping, drawings, and comment cards. All of these various artistic interventions and the variety of sense data,

woven together with the diversity of attendees at Gen Pop with varying degrees of attachment challenge social conventions and celebrate non-normative identities, performances, and experiences. The role of the arts, and in particular, queer aesthetics, plays a large function in change – whether it is social change, political change, or individual change.

To conclude, when asked about the role of arts and aesthetics in LGBTQ communities in London, this quotation from Dawn captures the value of the arts that I have highlighted in this chapter. She said:

So I mean I think the arts are an exceedingly valuable...I mean, they're telling a story. They may be making it catchy, but they're telling a story just the same. Whether it's through spoken word or through music...I think inherently that people that go out and participate and listen to the arts are really open to absorbing new and different ideas. That's why they're there. That's quite possibly why they enjoy the arts so much because they lack the fear of – like they're willing to change. They're open to change because, well it's the only constant in life, but you can stagnate in something and think that this is the only way it can be done, but when you see the arts, you hear, you feel, you see, so many different ways of everything being done and you start to be a little bit empathetic to somebody else's point of view. Some people may have never thought of or dreamt of whatever. Just by being introduced and being a part of the arts you're going to have a much fuller idea I think of what society has out there. It's not just what's in your mind, there's so many other things that are on different people's minds to be able to hear and understand and absorb those points of views. I think that's what the value of the arts are in my own view.⁷²

While there are differences of values, opinions, and experiences of gender, sexuality, and the arts in London's LGBTQ community, it is through weaving together different sensory worlds, being empathetic to others, challenging the status quo and normativity, and embracing dissensus that makes queer aesthetics so important for the development of LGBTQ community. The challenges to societal norms in London posed by the queer aesthetics of Gen Pop work to build an inclusive and political community and develop

dialogue, understandings, and different practices of gender and sexuality as a way to create liberatory politics for the LGBTQ community.

6.7 Endnotes

¹ Hanky code is a colour-coded system where different coloured handkerchiefs represent what type of sexual relations one is seeking.

² Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.

³ Drag performance also has a long history outside the LGBTQ community, particularly as a form of entertainment for the Canadian armed forces in World War I and II. See Halladay (2004).

⁴ HALO opened its nightclub in 1974 and it ran until 1999.

⁵ This is a drag king and queen organization that organizes a variety of charity shows.

⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.

⁷ Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.

⁸ Blake. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 19, 2014.

⁹ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.

¹⁰ It is important to note that some parts of the trans community historically have been anti-drag performance. This invokes a complicated politics around gender performativity (for example, see David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). However, interestingly enough, all of the trans people that I interviewed not only spoke about their fondness and respect for drag performers, but some also participate as drag performers.

¹¹ Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.

¹² Poseidon. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 25, 2013.

¹³ Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Chicks with Dicks, Men in Dresses: What It Means to Be a Drag Queen," *Journal of Homosexuality* 46, 3/4 (2004): 131.

¹⁴ Emily. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.

¹⁵ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

¹⁶ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.

¹⁷ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.

¹⁸ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.

¹⁹ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.

²⁰ Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.

²¹ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.

²² Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.

²³ Naomi. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 27, 2014.

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- ²⁴ Graham. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 11, 2013.
- ²⁵ Depending on the event, drag kings at Gen Pop usually make up between 30-40% of the roster of performers.
- ²⁶ Cohen. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 30, 2014.
- ²⁷ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.
- ²⁸ Photo taken by Dana Nosella (2014) and used with her permission (see appendix E).
- ²⁹ It is imperative to note that this is specific to London. As I have discussed in the last chapter, queer aesthetics are contingent on material conditions (e.g. place and time). So while in other contexts this binary between kings and queens is less perceptible, when it comes to London and the contexts in which drag occurs and is spoken of by the interview participants, there is more of a binary between normative drag performers. Furthermore, questions in the interviews were about specific locations in London where participants had seen drag. Thus, the discussion here is mostly about two different locations – Lavish and Gen Pop – as there were not questions about other cities or media where drag might have also been seen.
- ³⁰ Rose. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 3, 2013.
- ³¹ Carlos. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 21, 2014.
- ³² Morgan. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 4, 2013.
- ³³ Jones. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 8, 2013.
- ³⁴ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ³⁵ Lunar. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 11, 2014.
- ³⁶ Jay. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 23, 2013.
- ³⁷ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.
- ³⁸ Toby. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 28, 2014.
- ³⁹ Scrag drag was advertised as “Tough Drag” in a March 1990 HALO Newsletter (see Figure 2). It reads: “WHAT IS TOUGH DRAG? To me it is fun drag – no shaving of body parts to do – no tucking or binding of extruding parts – no hours of fussing – no expensive bills for ‘haute couture’ fashions. Basically, coming out in attire of the opposite sex that’s fun and ‘casual’.” However, I find it rather odd that they are using an appropriative image of Josephine Baker’s famous banana dance since this has nothing to do with, nor is it representative of scrag/tough drag. Based on a review of many of the newsletter adverts from the time, most were handmade and relied on a limited amount of fonts and images (pre-internet era). The newsletter editor likely used the image to grab one’s attention, but it is important to identify how this could also perpetuate issues of racism and the exotic other. See Anne Anlin Cheng, “Skin Deep: Josephine Baker and the Colonial Fetish,” *Camera Obscura* 69, 23, 3 (2008): 35-79.
- ⁴⁰ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 180.
- ⁴² Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁴³ Patron Stain. 2015. <<https://patronstain.bandcamp.com/releases>>. Accessed 9 November 2015.

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- ⁴⁴ Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁴⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, “Impossible Spaces: Kevin McCarty’s *The Chameleon Club*,” *GLQ* 11, 3 (2005), 429.
- ⁴⁶ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁴⁷ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁴⁸ Richard Smith, “Frock Tactics,” *Drag: A History of Female Impersonation in the Performing Arts*, eds. Roger Baker, Peter Barton, and Richard Smith, New York: New York University Press, 1994, 246.
- ⁴⁹ Richard Smith, 246.
- ⁵⁰ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.
- ⁵¹ Sparklebottom. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, January 14, 2014.
- ⁵² Stanley. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, September 27, 2013.
- ⁵³ This photo has also been used during Gen Pop’s involvement in the London Pride Parade. As seen in Figure 17, I am holding this image beside one of the few Christian protesters that attend the festivities every year in London. Permissions to reprint Ethan Lester’s photograph as well as the photograph taken at the London Pride Parade (by Ayden Scheim) are located in Appendix E.
- ⁵⁴ Photograph taken by the author.
- ⁵⁵ See Catherine Jean Nash and Alison Bain, “‘Reclaiming raunch’? Spatializing queer identities at Toronto women’s bathhouse events,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, 1 (2007): 47-62.
- ⁵⁶ Adam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 9, 2014.
- ⁵⁷ Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, “Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative,” *Modern Drama* 47, 2 (Summer 2004): 272.
- ⁵⁸ Rivera-Servera, 282.
- ⁵⁹ Gill Valentine, “Creating Transgressive Space: The Music of kd lang,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, 4 (1995): 481.
- ⁶⁰ Valentine, 482.
- ⁶¹ Rancière, 56.
- ⁶² Geoff Bardwell and Matthew Tóth, “Pubes, Poppers, Perverts: Building Queer Aesthetic Community in London, Ontario,” *Theorizing Practice, Practicing Theory Conference*, Western University, April 24, 2013, unpublished.
- ⁶³ Vazaleen Posters Vertical File, Poster Holdings, *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives*, Toronto, Canada, various dates.
- ⁶⁴ Richard Smith, 247.
- ⁶⁵ Qtd. in Smith, 247.
- ⁶⁶ Ken Moffatt, “Dancing Without a Floor: The Artists’ Politic of Queer Club Space,” *Canadian Online Journal of Queer Studies in Education* 2, 1 (2006): 1.
- ⁶⁷ Moffatt, 3.
- ⁶⁸ Will Munro quoted in Moffatt, 10.
- ⁶⁹ Chef. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, October 22, 2013.
- ⁷⁰ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.

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- ⁷¹ Sam. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, February 28, 2014.
- ⁷² Dawn. Interview by Author. Audio recording. London, March 12, 2014.

Chapter 7

7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I conclude this dissertation project by answering the overarching research questions. I then comment on the temporal, material, and social elements of this research project and what has changed in London since the collection of data. Lastly, I discuss the future research questions for LGBTQ communities in London and then end with a personal anecdote about queer aesthetic communities.

7.2 Research Questions: Revisited

(1) What are the constitutive elements that make up London's LGBTQ communities?

Arriving at a definition of LGBTQ community was a difficult task. The literature on LGBTQ culture predominantly focuses on issues of belonging, sexual citizenship, and queer spaces. Aside from an essay by Ingram et al., the academic literature does not adequately define LGBTQ community. Ingram et al. defined queer community as “a full collection of a select subset of queer networks for a particular territory, with relatively stable relationships that enhance interdependence, mutual support, and protection.”¹

Physical space is required for queer communities, ones that recognize the differences within community and the need for a queer space. Ingram et al. argue that it is increasingly important to defend spaces for the community due to social fragmentation that limits the congregation of gender and sexual minorities.

By contrast, literature on community generally in the social sciences and philosophy is plentiful. For example, community has been defined as a concept that is best understood etymologically; community as an elusive or paradoxical concept based on social or political ideals; community as a place to live; community as a spatial unit; community as a way of life; community as an imagined identity; or community as a social system.

While there is not a shortage of literature on how communities should be understood and defined, a theory on how best to define LGBTQ community in London was not immediately clear.

The main tenets of LGBTQ community in London, as developed in this dissertation, were based on the knowledges and experiences of the twenty-five research participants.

Through an analysis of their interviews, I arrived at four main tenets that are best suited in understanding LGBTQ community in London. These are (1) support; (2) common or shared visions/goals; (3) physical spaces; and (4) LGBTQ-specific events. This is the most important theoretical contribution this dissertation makes.

Support was discussed in a variety of ways when people were discussing what makes a community for LGBTQ people in London. It was discussed in terms of providing information/advice to others within a group, accepting people for who they are, and people helping others who have similar lived experiences related to a diversity of genders and sexualities. This theme was reflected in multiple experiences of the interview participants whether this support came from a friend, colleague, stranger, or a member of their chosen family.

Common or shared visions/goals was the second theme that was present in most of the data from the research participants. This theme refers to the ways in which like-minded people come together in an intentional way to articulate their shared interests, often with more of a political investment. This theme highlights the ways in which LGBTQ people came together for a particular reason; it was more than just coming together solely because people identified as LGBTQ.

Physical space is the third tenet of LGBTQ community in London. These were often discussed as physical spaces that are designated meeting locations such as a community hub or a bar. These spaces were identified as mutual spaces that allow for the visible recognition of others and also allow for intentional conversation and engagement in discourse to take place. LGBTQ spaces in London provide a specific location where LGBTQ people know they can go to participate in functions that allow for the creation of shared visions or goals. LGBTQ spaces can also be places where people can go to receive LGBTQ-specific support.

Finally, events are the last major theme of community. When participants were asked about the defining characteristics of community, events that took place in bars were often discussed. Many made connections to the history of bars and events in London as activity and/or political hubs for the LGBTQ community. Others discussed bar events as essentials that connect individuals to the community – particularly for those who are just coming out – or places that provide continuity to the community. Events play a prominent role in the development of community because they encourage engagement and participation in the particular type of LGBTQ activity, such as drag shows.

While I have provided a summary of the four tenets of LGBTQ community in London, this type of conception of community is not without its criticisms. As I have discussed throughout this dissertation, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that these are aesthetic communities, ones that are based on characteristics of judgement and passion. He argues that these are short-lived communities due to the fact that, as he suggests, passions are notoriously volatile. Musical performances are an example of this where there is a shared focus of attention, judgement, and passion among a crowd of spectators toward a musical performer. While in the moment of the event there appears to be a shared passion, the attendee's passions or judgement for the musical performance may also change over time (thus making them negotiable). For Bauman, aesthetic communities are thus problematic. He argues, "The need for aesthetic community, notably the variety of aesthetic community, which services the construction/dismantling of identity, tends for those reasons to be as much self-perpetuating as it is self-defeating. That need is never to be gratified, and neither will it ever stop prompting the search for satisfaction."² Spectators in aesthetic communities are rewarded with a feeling of belonging; however, according to Bauman, members of this so-called community are actually part of a community of non-belonging: a togetherness of loners. In aesthetic communities, Bauman suggests that there are not any real relationships because they are meant for immediate consumption and come together for short durations and then dissolve. They are made of bonds without consequences. While these criticisms are important to consider, in response to the next two research questions, I highlight how aesthetic communities for LGBTQ people in London function positively as communities in the sense that they act as a means through which LGBTQ people can develop spaces as their own, and how through dance, drag

performance, and other interactive arts, people feel senses of visibility, recognition, and empowerment in long-lasting ways beyond the duration of the event.

(2) What forms of community-making prove to be viable and effective in a smaller urban setting?

As highlighted briefly in the first question, community in the form of aesthetic communities through events hosted at bars proves to be viable and effective in London, though there are some limitations. There is an abundance of literature on LGBTQ bars. Historically, bars were physical places where LGBTQ people could work, develop an economy, and sustain their own spaces. Bars helped fuel the visibility and recognition of LGBTQ community. They provided opportunities for LGBTQ-specific support, socialization, leisure, and entertainment. There has been a diversity of events at LGBTQ bars, including drag shows, musical performances, and dances. These events, according to the academic literature, have helped to develop rich histories, memories, subjectivities, modes of empowerment, political consciousness and social change through challenging normative genders and sexualities.

Four LGBTQ bar spaces were analyzed in this dissertation: HALO, Buckwild's Bar, Lavish, and the APK (specific to Gen Pop). In this research project, I have discussed the ways in which HALO operated as a community (based on the four tenets of community) for over thirty years. HALO was one of the most organized, political, and determined LGBTQ organizations in Canada. In this dissertation, I demonstrated how HALO created and sustained LGBTQ community in London through providing a physical space for

supports, the development of common/shared visions or goals and political activism, and events that allowed for the growth of community through a variety of activities such as dances, drag nights, games nights, and youth support nights. The research herein on HALO provides an example of the ways in which community making has proven to be viable in London.³

I also extended the analysis of community to three contemporary bars that host events. I demonstrated that while Buckwild's, Lavish, and Gen Pop at The APK provide varying degrees of community, they all lack elements of certainty, continuity, and inclusion that a space like the HALO club provided to LGBTQ Londoners for three decades. Buckwild's Bar provided a physical space that hosted LGBTQ-specific events, but these events lacked diversity and alienated some people. It was not identified as providing a supportive environment nor were there any common visions or goals. Buckwild's also has been stigmatized by some members of the community due to its close proximity to the bathhouse and its geographical location in a seedier area of London. Secondly, Lavish provided a safe and welcoming space for some LGBTQ people. They occasionally host events and participants generally enjoyed the bar when there were specific events.

Participants had mixed feelings about the dance party atmosphere as while it was great for dancing with other LGBTQ people, it impeded on participants' abilities to engage in conversations with others. Thirdly, Gen Pop at the APK provided a physical space for a diversity of forms of entertainment and activities from film screenings and trivia nights to bands, burlesque, and drag performances. This event provided a variety of activities for a diversity of LGBTQ people in London. People attended Gen Pop with common/shared visions or goals and an intentionality and choice to raise funds for Open Closet: a social

support group for LGBTQ youth. Many participants felt that Gen Pop provided a safe and supportive space for a diversity of LGBTQ people. However, Gen Pop occurred infrequently and left much waiting time between events. Gen Pop also ended its successful run after three years of community organizing.

All four of these examples show that building community is viable in London, though its level of effectiveness varies between each of the examples. HALO was most effective as a means for community making. As mentioned previously, the other three examples lacked positive characteristics of certainty, continuity, and inclusion that a space like HALO provided to LGBTQ Londoners. Nevertheless, Gen Pop, as described in greater detail in the next question, was the most effective contemporary example and working model of LGBTQ community.⁴

(3) Does the practice of aesthetics/artistic performance lead to socio-political change among members of London's LGBTQ communities?

Both the literature and qualitative data from this dissertation on queer art and aesthetics suggest that they do lead to socio-political change. Queer aesthetics are discussed as aesthetics that involve constant change. The queer aesthetic is difficult to define, as it contests categories and boundaries. These aesthetics work to transgress public culture and subvert ideals, as seen in the Gen Pop poster adverts (discussed below). Queer aesthetics are part of a cycle of constant becoming, reshaping, and fluidity of sexual identities. This cycle, according to Whitney Davis, is one that moves toward and away from an ideal. Queer aesthetics transgress public culture and subvert or queer its ideals.

LGBTQ experiences materialize in the aesthetics of a variety of arts including poster advertisements, print culture, and facades where there is an ambiguity of identifying marks. LGBTQ posters, for example, have been used as ways to respond to normative genders and sexualities. They increase visibility and highlight the non-normative genders and sexualities of the LGBTQ community. Hertz et al. argue that queer poster installations provide ways to validate LGBTQ histories and cultural memory in everyday spaces. Posters can increase queer visibility and highlight social and political activism through a diversity of imagery.

Gen Pop poster advertisements harness this queer aesthetic. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how these posters utilize notions of camp and raunch to inform this queer aesthetic. I showed how this queer aesthetic uses irony to highlight incongruities and deviations and humour as a strategy to deal with hostile environments. Raunch aesthetics add to the queer aesthetic of Gen Pop poster advertisements by transgressing norms through hyperbolic excess. Deviant sexual expressions are highlighted through indecency, lewdness, vulgarity, and sexual explicitness to challenge the viewer's preconceived notions of bodies, gender, sexuality, and other norms. The embrace of this queer aesthetic by the Gen Pop posters highlights the political and transgressive nature of queerness, against the backdrop of the a homonormative assimilationist logic of tolerance and acceptance. Queer aesthetics are also important in the creation and sustainability of community. The collision of social norms with this transgressive aesthetic creates an intertwining of contradictory relations, which, according to Rancière, are productive for community. The queer aesthetics of the Gen Pop posters play a pivotal role for LGBTQ community in London in encouraging change.

This queer aesthetic is also instrumental at Gen Pop's events. In Chapter 6, I showed how the arts at Gen Pop events are the mediums through which active engagement and participation in community is fostered. I demonstrated that drag performance and other forms of art at Gen Pop utilize a queer aesthetic to challenge social norms. Drag has been used at Gen Pop as a means to destabilize the gender binary and call into question the naturalness of normative categories. This analysis confirmed Butler's theory and Taylor and Rupp's questions on whether drag performances destabilize gender and sexual categories or reinforce dominant binaries. Taylor and Rupp argue that performers use drag not to portray a strict binary of masculinity and femininity, but rather as a way to develop their own complex genders. This was more the case for Gen Pop performers than Lavish performers, where participants saw the former as embodying more of a queer aesthetic, one that relies on notions of punk and amateurism, whereas the latter was more professional and relied on drag stereotypes. Aside from challenging normative notions of gender, drag shows have also been shown to provide empowerment, support, and a home-like feeling for LGBTQ people.

The queer aesthetic at Gen Pop is one that is political in that it reconfigures fields of experience through the contestation and transgression of normative categories. I have shown that this queer aesthetic not only challenges heteronormativity, but it also challenges homonormativity, and other bar cultural norms that pertain to dancing as well as other social/sexual interactions in bar spaces. It does this through the use of visual cues and interactive arts that rely on camp and raunch as intrinsic parts of Gen Pop's queer aesthetic. These queer arts are important for community as they expand our understandings and practices of gender and sexuality.

Aside from drag and art installations such as posters, dance as an art form can lead to socio-political change. Dance has been shown as a means to flaunt queer sexuality publicly. It is an embodied practice where LGBTQ people claim social spaces as their own. Buckland argues that, through dance, LGBTQ communities are able to embody memory and political agency that defies heteronormativity. LGBTQ people find opportunities on the dance floor for social exchange and empowerment, which are contrary to their experiences in a transphobic and homophobic world. Here, they are able to redefine their pleasures that are rendered invisible in a heteronormative world.

Art is utilized at Gen Pop as a mechanism that brings people together in a community. In opposition to Bauman's critique of aesthetic communities, Rancière sees aesthetic communities as ways of bringing people together who might normally be apart. Aesthetic communities are communities of sense, which includes a combination of different sense data: spaces, forms, words, visuals, and rhythms. While there are a diversity of sense data and people who may have varying interpretations of art, Rancière suggests that this tension between different people or the intertwining of contradictory relations produces community. Rancière calls this the dissensus of community and sees disagreements as productive to, and political for, community. Politics is that which reconfigures fields of experience. It is a relationship between different worlds. Through subjectification, politics invents worlds of community. Dissensus is the manifestation of a gap in the sensible. It is an inevitable conflict between the sensory worlds of multiple people in a community. These contradictory relations are what produce community.

Through challenging norms, the arts at Gen Pop help to build a more inclusive and political community where they engage people in dialogue and practice that can lead to socio-political change. While there are differences of values, opinions, and experiences of gender, sexuality, and the arts at Gen Pop, it is through weaving together different sensory worlds and embracing dissensus that makes queer aesthetics so politically important for the development of LGBTQ community in London.

7.3 Changing Contexts, Changing Times, Changing Communities

The data collection for this dissertation began in the fall of 2013. At this point in time, Gen Pop was in full swing and every event was well attended with over 150 attendees at each event. I was very embedded in the community at this time. I was doing LGBTQ outreach work, organizing and DJing at Gen Pop, going to Lavish on occasion, all while recruiting interview participants and observing the world around me. My community involvement and the time and context in which I was doing my research are important to highlight here, as these ultimately impacted how the data was reported in this dissertation. My perspective as an insider/outsider was something that I reflected on at all stages of the research, as I was aware that it would impact my interpretations and observations. Having the ability to reflect on this created a positive tension where I felt like I was part of the community in multiple ways that collided together to provide complex insights into the community that I would not have had had I done this study in another social setting.

While the times in which this research was conducted were very exciting, things quickly changed when multiple Gen Pop organizers moved away or had other commitments.

With no one within the volunteer collective stepping up to take the lead, Gen Pop was forced to end, hosting its finale on its three-year anniversary on February 6th, 2015. While this caused sadness for many community members, Gen Pop went out with a bang with over 250 people attending the last drag and dance show, which raised over \$1000 for Open Closet, a social support group for queer and trans youth in London. Aside from Gen Pop coming to an end, the APK eventually closed its doors permanently almost a year later.

The ending of LGBTQ events and the closure of LGBTQ-specific spaces can have negative effects on our community, especially in smaller locations like London where these spaces are few and far between. Jason Narlock comments on his experience of a gay bar closing down in his hometown: a mid-sized city in North Dakota. He asks:

When same-sex public affection is broadly frowned upon, when the possibility of serendipitous meeting is taken away, when the fabulousness of local gender bending loses its sparkle, do we not lose a sense of ourselves? Is our relative freedom to dance with whomever we want, make out with whomever we like, or sport size eleven heels all in full view of a (un)consenting public diminished by the unavailability of a place and space to call our own? The virtue of political struggle stems, in part, from the quality of collective engagement between similarly and dissimilarly positioned social actors. The spaces of these engagements – the sites of possibility spatially and architecturally delineated through our individual and collective reckonings of modern life – invariably inform the quality and efficacy of our social and political struggles. Without the spatial potentiality of the gay bar, is queer political struggle simply another causality of mainstreamed homosexuality?⁵

These questions are important to reflect on as our material conditions change in significant ways. The changes to London in terms of events ending and the closure of

bars, call into question the sustainability and certainty of aesthetic communities. Was Gen Pop at the APK really a working model for LGBTQ community in London or was it a short-lived community creating bonds without consequences? Gen Pop managed to build something that consistently improved over time (three years to be exact). While each event only lasted for four to five hours, it was not as though LGBTQ people came together then left on their individual ways. The events brought a diversity of people together who otherwise may not have ever been in the same space as each other. Many people developed friendships, drag troupes, new community events, social supports, and other long-term bonds based on common goals. These events, and the multiple arts that comprise them, have been crucial in the development of subjectivities, visibility, recognition, political consciousness, and empowerment. To say that these events created bonds without consequences is to completely misrepresent the value that LGBTQ people in London have said they have received from them. While these events may be ephemeral, they have lasting effects in the social, which, according to José Muñoz, include “traces of lived experience and performances of lived experience, maintaining experiential politics and urgencies long after these structures of feelings have been lived.”⁶ So while Gen Pop may have come to a close, glimmers of LGBTQ community continue in the future as new communities are formed and new events are organized: ones that continue to challenge and transgress not just the heteronormative world, but also homonormative culture, moving beyond the liberal assimilationist logic of equality, tolerance, and acceptance, toward a political queer aesthetic.

7.4 Futures

It is clear from this dissertation that LGBTQ spaces and their events play a significant role in building and sustaining community in London. However, there are further questions that are important to consider should research continue in this area. Some of these questions include: what does LGBTQ community look like for those who do not attend bars or spaces? Who or what is invisible in the community? What are the ways in which LGBTQ spaces can be more inclusive to those who experience barriers to accessing community? Can LGBTQ communities be formed online? Is a community centre like HALO still viable in London and if so, what would it look like, what roles would it play, and how would it be sustained? These are some of the questions we need to reflect on as we work to better the lives of LGBTQ community in London.⁷

I started this dissertation with a personal anecdote and I feel it is fitting to end with one. I had the pleasure of attending a Limp Wrist reunion show at a punk festival called Not Dead Yet in Toronto in 2013. When I arrived, I saw the singer, Martin. He was a big burly bear with a very large beard and he was sitting in the corner selling band merchandise. I approached him and spoke briefly about my accidental introduction to his band. Limp Wrist were scheduled to appear last on a bill of four bands, but Martin disappeared for most of the show. When Limp Wrist finally took the stage, Martin strutted out on stage in full drag, surprising all of those in attendance – including me! Up until that point, I thought I had *really* seen it all. He spent all of the time prior to their set shaving off his beard and doing his makeup as a way to transgress his normal bear appearance and fuck with his gender through a performance of his “mum” persona throughout their set, where Martin kept referring to himself as mum and the audience as

his children.⁸ It was in the moment that Martin came on stage and his ensuing performance, that I realized the continued power of queer aesthetics in that, through their reliance on raunch and camp, performers are able to embrace a punk-like aesthetic that is anti-establishment, DIY, and one that continues to challenge and transgress gender and sexual norms. These queer aesthetics engage the audience to think differently and to challenge norms in the LGBTQ community and beyond.

I end this dissertation with some lyrics from Limp Wrist that comment on the parts of the aesthetics of queer events. Does Your Daddy Know?:

“Daddy's gonna drop his boy off at the show
 But he doesn't realize Limp Wrist is playing, oh no!
 We're not the typical safe punk band
 We're the raunchy old wrist; a band of fags
 His son's 19 and bored with his life
 It's a tired straight world, he doesn't want a wife
 Daddy thought he'd have some good clean fun
 Daddy let me tell you that your son's the one
 The kids here aren't like the ones at other shows
 The kids are really crazy here, it's the way that it goes

Daddy didn't know his boy had a plan
 Daddy did you know your boy's out looking for a man?
 Does your Daddy know who the hell is playing this show?
 The record and shirt you bought, you hid it away
 Cuz your folks will harass you cuz they'll think that you're gay
 Does your daddy know? Does your daddy know? Does your daddy know? Does
 your daddy know?”⁹

7.5 Endnotes

¹ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, “Strategies for (Re)constructing Queer Communities,” in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Place, Sites of Resistance*, Edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, Seattle: Bay Press, 1997, 449.

² Zygmunt Bauman. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001, 66.

³ While HALO was so effective, it also ended. The political battles in the city, combined with a changing demographic as LGBTQ rights became more entrenched both contributed to HALO’s demise. HALO also ran solely on private donations; so with these changes, there was not any public funding to rely on to sustain HALO. A service and space like HALO is still needed in London – although what that would look like remains to be studied. Changes in laws and views of LGBTQ people have changed since HALO and these have impacted the number of LGBTQ spaces in the city. These may not affect the LGBTQ folks that want to assimilate with mainstream culture (e.g. get married, move to suburbia, and have 2.5 kids), but it is less the case for liberationists who want to challenge these social norms. Legal changes have had some positive impacts on LGBTQ people, but overall, changes to trans rights have only recently occurred provincially and they still remain to change at the national level. These laws are not having a trickle down effect. While laws and perceptions have somewhat changed, there are still many things that need to change and bars and their events are one means in which people can come together collectively for political action and change in London.

⁴ Bars seem to be spaces that provide the most viable option for community-making in a smaller city like London. While events are infrequent, given the smaller population having monthly events where many people look forward to the events is more sustainable than having events on every night of the week, as seen in larger cities.

⁵ Jason Narlock, “When a Gay Bar Closes its Doors Forever,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* (July-August 2008): 5-6.

⁶ José Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, 2 (1996): 11.

⁷ All of the interview participants provided consent to have their interview transcripts archived thus allowing further research on the experiences of these twenty-five participants.

⁸ For video footage of this show, see Limp Wrist, “Live in Toronto,” 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZoj6cSLlmc>>. Accessed 3 October 2016.

⁹ Limp Wrist, “Does Your Daddy Know?” no year, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4II01i_DioQ>. Accessed 3 October 2016.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A – University Ethics Approval



Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wendy Pearson
File Number: 104038
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 30
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario
Department & Institution: Arts and Humanities/Women's Studies and Feminist Research, Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: September 11, 2013 **Expiry Date:** August 30, 2015

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:


Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Other	This appendix contains the 'Bibliography' for all works cited throughout the application.	2013/07/03
Western University Protocol		2013/07/10
Instruments	Interview Guide for the key informants.	2013/08/23
Letter of Information & Consent	Letter of information and consent for the key informants	2013/08/23
Letter of Information & Consent	Revised Letter of Information and Consent form	2013/08/23
Advertisement	Revised poster information including university affiliation	2013/08/23

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.


This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Signature: 

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

 Grace Kelly	 Vikki Tran	 Erika Basile
--	---	---

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150
 London, ON, Canada N6A 3K7 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/services/ethics

9.2 Appendix B: Poster Advertisement

Do you live in London, Ontario?

**Are you 19 YEARS OF AGE OR
OLDER AND HAVE BEEN LIVING IN
LONDON FOR OVER 1 MONTH?**

**Do you identify as Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer
(LGBTQ)?**

If you answered **YES** to **all three** of these questions, we would like you to participate in a qualitative research project on LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario!

To participate or for more information on this PHD research project, please send an e-mail to either [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN'S STUDIES AND FEMINIST RESEARCH, THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

Revised August 22nd, 2013.

9.3 Appendix C: Letters of Information/Consent

Letter of Information and Consent Form

PROJECT: LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario

RESEARCHER: Geoffrey Bardwell, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research, The University of Western Ontario

My name is Geoffrey Bardwell and I invite you to participate in a university-based research project entitled, "LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario." This project involves conducting, recording, and transcribing interviews with LGBTQ people 19 years of age or older who live in London, Ontario. This project also involves the participation of five key informants (such as you) who have lived in London, Ontario for at least 20 years and have been involved in local LGBTQ communities. The main goal of this project is to understand the in depth experiences of LGBTQ people in London, Ontario.

If you agree to take part in this study, which consists of an interview of approximately 1-2 hours in length, we will discuss some of the following overarching issues related to LGBTQ communities in London from a historical perspective: (1) LGBTQ community membership and social dynamics; (2) the role of artistic performances in LGBTQ communities; and (3) social and political change in local LGBTQ communities. For participating in this interview, you will be compensated in the amount of \$20.

This study does not pose any harm to you, nor are there any known risks attached to participating in the study. However, if you become upset or triggered during the interview, I will provide you with support, time away from the interview, and a list of contact information regarding LGBTQ-friendly counselling services in London. In terms of benefits, this study will provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences related to the local LGBTQ communities in London. Another potential benefit of this study is that it gives you a chance to have your voice heard regarding any important changes you think should be made to local policy and programs offered for LGBTQ members in London (e.g. health, advocacy, social representation).

The interview will last approximately 1-2 hours and will be conducted in-person at a time that is best for you. The interview will be conducted at a quiet and private location that is most convenient for you. As the researcher, I will be audio recording the interview to ensure accuracy of data and I will be providing you with a transcript of the interview so that you may have the opportunity to correct any errors or add any clarification points. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, you can still participate in the interview, and I can write your responses down in a notebook (that is only seen by me). It may be necessary to connect with you on an on-going basis to gather further information and to ensure that I have an accurate understanding of your experiences and viewpoints.

Recordings and interview transcripts will be stored in a safe and secure location throughout the research project. All data collected from this research project (except for audio recordings and the master list containing personal information) will be archived at either the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto or the Pride Library at the D.B. Weldon Library at Western University. The results from this study may also be published in public documents such as academic journals or books. If this is the case, I will provide you with a copy upon request. Any information that could identify you will be removed in the creation of these publications or books, to protect your confidentiality and anonymity. A pseudonym or fake name will be used to further protect your identity in these documents.

A consent form for you to sign is enclosed with this letter of information. If you agree to me using some of the direct quotations from your interview, please check the box on the consent form. This letter is yours to keep for future reference. Please read this letter carefully to ensure you understand all the implications of participation.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate, decline to answer specific questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. For further details about this research, you may contact me, Geoffrey Bardwell, or my supervisor, Dr. Wendy Pearson, at the addresses listed below:

Geoffrey Bardwell

Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
3249 Lawson Hall
The University of Western Ontario
London, ON, N6A 5B8

██████████

Dr. Wendy Pearson
Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
3233 Lawson Hall
The University of Western Ontario
London, ON, N6A 5B8

██████████

██████████████████

If you have questions about this study with regard to your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at Western University by telephone at ██████████
██████ or via e-mail at ██████████

Sincerely,

Geoffrey S. Bardwell, MA, PhD Candidate
Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
Canada N6A 5B8

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wendy G. Pearson
 Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
 The University of Western Ontario
 London, ON, N6A 5B8

Researcher: Geoffrey S. Bardwell
 Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
 The University of Western Ontario
 London, ON, N6A 5B8

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please check this box if you are willing to allow direct quotes from the transcript to be used.

Date	Date
Interviewee Name (please print)	Interviewer Name
Interviewee Signature	Interviewer Signature

Letter of Information and Consent Form

PROJECT: LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario

RESEARCHER: Geoffrey Bardwell, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research, The University of Western Ontario

My name is Geoffrey Bardwell and I invite you to participate in a university-based research project entitled, "LGBTQ Communities in London, Ontario." This project involves conducting, recording, and transcribing interviews with LGBTQ people 19 years of age or older who have lived in London, Ontario for more than one month. The main goal of this project is to understand the in depth experiences of LGBTQ people in London, Ontario.

If you agree to take part in this study, which consists of an interview of approximately 1-hour in length, we will discuss some of the following overarching issues related to LGBTQ communities in London from a historical perspective: (1) LGBTQ community membership and social dynamics; (2) the role of artistic performances in LGBTQ communities; and (3) social and political change in local LGBTQ communities. For participating in this interview, you will be compensated in the amount of \$20.

This study does not pose any harm to you, nor are there any known risks attached to participating in the study. However, if you become upset or triggered during the interview, I will provide you with support, time away from the interview, and a list of contact information regarding LGBTQ-friendly counselling services in London. In terms of benefits, this study will provide you with an opportunity to share your experiences related to the local LGBTQ communities in London. Another potential benefit of this study is that it gives you a chance to have your voice heard regarding any important changes you think should be made to local policy and programs offered for LGBTQ members in London (e.g. health, advocacy, social representation).

The interview will last approximately 1-hour and will be conducted in-person at a time that is best for you. The interview will be conducted at a quiet and private location that is most convenient for you. As the researcher, I will be audio recording the interview to

ensure accuracy of data and I will be providing you with a transcript of the interview so that you may have the opportunity to correct any errors or add any clarification points. If you do not want the interview to be recorded, you can still participate in the interview, and I can write your responses down in a notebook (that is only seen by me). It may be necessary to connect with you on an on-going basis to gather further information and to ensure that I have an accurate understanding of your experiences and viewpoints.

Recordings and interview transcripts will be stored in a safe and secure location throughout the research project. All data collected from this research project (except for audio recordings and the master list containing personal information) will be archived at either the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) in Toronto or the Pride Library at the D.B. Weldon Library at Western University. The results from this study may also be published in public documents such as academic journals or books. If this is the case, I will provide you with a copy upon request. Any information that could identify you will be removed in the creation of these publications or books, to protect your confidentiality and anonymity. A pseudonym or fake name will be used to further protect your identity in these documents.

A consent form for you to sign is enclosed with this letter of information. If you agree to me using some of the direct quotations from your interview, please check the box on the consent form. This letter is yours to keep for future reference. Please read this letter carefully to ensure you understand all the implications of participation.

Participation in the study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate, decline to answer specific questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. For further details about this research, you may contact me, Geoffrey Bardwell, or my supervisor, Dr. Wendy Pearson, at the addresses listed below:

Geoffrey Bardwell
Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
3249 Lawson Hall
The University of Western Ontario

London, ON, N6A 5B8
[REDACTED]

Dr. Wendy Pearson
Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
3233 Lawson Hall
The University of Western Ontario
London, ON, N6A 5B8

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

If you have questions about this study with regard to your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Ethics at Western University by telephone at [REDACTED] or via e-mail at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Geoffrey S. Bardwell, MA, PhD Candidate
Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
Canada N6A 5B8

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wendy G. Pearson
 Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
 The University of Western Ontario
 London, ON, N6A 5B8

Researcher: Geoffrey S. Bardwell
 Department of Women's Studies & Feminist Research
 The University of Western Ontario
 London, ON, N6A 5B8

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please check this box if you are willing to allow direct quotes from the transcript to be used.

Date	Date
------	------

Interviewee Name (please print)	Interviewer Name
---------------------------------	------------------

Interviewee Signature	Interviewer Signature
-----------------------	-----------------------

9.3 Appendix D: Interview Guides

Interview Guide – Key Informants

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your lived experience with LGBTQ communities based on your long-term involvement and residency in London. I have a number of questions to guide the interview, but these are only guides. I am interested in understanding a variety of aspects of the LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. Therefore, anything that you would like to share with me that will help my understanding of LGBTQ communities in London (both past and present) would be most welcome.

1. First off, I would like to know how you identify (i.e. your sexual identity and/or gender identity). Can you explain when and how you first realized this was how you identify?
2. Can you tell me about any social supports you may have had when you first came out as (insert sexual/gender identity here)?
 - a. Can you tell me who they were, how they supported, where they were, etc.?
 - b. Do you have these supports or anything similar to these in London, Ontario?
 - b.i. If yes, how do these compare to the supports you may have had when you first came out?

3. Since this is a study on experiences of LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario, I would first like to know how long you have lived in London for, and if you moved here from some place else, what were the reasons for moving to London?
4. I am wondering how do you define (LGBTQ) community? Lots of people have written about community, but I'd like a local perspective on the definition of community. Keywords, general characteristics, etc.?
5. Since you have lived in London for over 20 years, could you please tell me more about the histories of our local LGBTQ communities?
 - a. What was the first LGBT community event you attended?
 - b. What were the first clubs, organizations, or spaces that were LGBT-specific?
 - b.i. HALO
 - b.ii. Strange Angels
 - b.iii. Upstairs/Downstairs; Bannister's
 - b.iv. Lacey's
 - b.v. Any others? (AWOL?)
 - c. Who were the key players and organizers in the city?
 - d. If you were around in the 80s/90s, can you talk about the impact of HIV/AIDS and the LGBT community?

- e. Diane Haskett, Project Guardian, other opposition?
 - f. Any specific activist groups?
6. In your opinion, what happened to HALO?
- a. Is this something that London needs a replacement for?
7. Were there some communities and/or spaces that you identified with or were involved with more than others?
- a. If 'yes', can you please explain to me what these were, including who was a part of them, what they did, and how they related to your experiences with your sexual and/or gender identity.
8. Have these various local LGBTQ communities changed at all over the last 20+ years?
- a. If 'yes', please elaborate.
9. Now talking about experiences in a variety of LGBTQ communities and/or spaces in London, have you ever attended an event where there were drag or musical performances? If yes, can you talk about where this event occurred and any details you can remember about the performance(s)?
- a. Did these performances relate in any way to your sexual and/or gender identity?

- b. Do you see these as important for LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario?
 - c. Did you have any positive or negative experiences from these performances? Please elaborate.
10. Given that you have lived in London for over 20 years, are you familiar at all with the local Royal Imperial Sovereign Court? Have you ever been to any of their events?
- a. If 'yes', how did these events compare with other LGBTQ events in the city?
 - b. Were the performances at these events different from other LGBTQ events?
 - c. Can you discuss if you had any involvement with this community beyond attending their events? Please elaborate.
11. There have been many LGBTQ events and venues that have come and gone in London. First, I would like you to tell me a list of all of the LGBTQ spaces that have existed during your tenure in London.
- a. Now that we have this list, I would like to go through each in more detail and I would like to know if you have ever been to them, what your experiences were like (both positive and negative), who attended them,

and how they relate to your sexual and/or gender identity and experiences of community.

12. Have you ever attended events at these current locations? If so, please explain how they compare to any of the spaces we discussed previously.

- a. Buckwild's / Central Spa
- b. Lavish Nightclub
- c. Brennan's Beer Bistro (now the APK)
- d. 181
- e. 347 Clarence Street (elab on histories)
- f. Pride London
- g. LLFF
- h. Are there any LGBTQ events or venues in London that are missing from this list? If so, can you please tell me about them?

13. Do you find these venues and events as important elements for London's LGBTQ communities?

- a. If 'yes', what do they provide that makes them important?
- b. If 'no', why are they not important? Is there anything you would change about them that would make them important?

14. What is the relationship between London's LGBTQ community organizations, social services, advocacy groups, etc. and London's LGBTQ venues and events. Are there similarities or differences in what they provide (or do not provide) for you and/or London's LGBTQ communities?
15. What do you see as some of the social and/or political goals of LGBTQ communities in London? Or what would a utopian London look like for LGBTQ communities? These can either be personal goals or goals that others in the community would want (e.g. youth).
16. Is there a link between drag or artistic performances at bars and/or events and these social and/or political goals? If so, please, elaborate on how they are related.
17. How do you envision the aesthetics of LGBTQ communities and events? This can be in terms of art installations, fashion, decor, artistic/musical performances, identities, etc. I am specifically interested in how your understanding of the current aesthetics relate to past community aesthetics.
 - a. Have you ever seen a poster for the event Gen Pop? If so, can you elaborate on its aesthetic? Lots of people think the posters are more different than anything ever before. Do you think this is true? If so, what makes them different?
 - a.i. Are there links between the aesthetics of this poster and LGBTQ or queer politics?

a.ii. What makes something queer? How would you define queer? Is it different from LGB?

18. Is there anything you would like to see in London that would benefit your experiences as (insert sexual/gender identity here)? If yes, please elaborate on what these might look like (events, venues, organizations, social/health services, etc.).

19. Do have any other thoughts and experiences related to London's LGBTQ communities that we have not yet discussed, but you would like to share with me?

20. Over the next few weeks, I will be transcribing the interview which I will send to you. I may need to contact you in case of clarification or for some follow-up questions via telephone or e-mail. Would this be okay with you?

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me on LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. If you have any questions, please let me know. I will be in touch to let you know about a future 'town hall meeting' that will discuss some of the research findings.

General Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your lived experience with LGBTQ communities. I have a number of questions to guide the interview, but these are only guides. I am interested in understanding a variety of aspects of the LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. Therefore, anything that you would like to share with me that will help my understanding of LGBTQ communities in London would be most welcome.

Demographics (see separate sheet).

1. First off, I would like to know how you identify (i.e. your sexual identity and/or gender identity). Can you explain when and how you first realized this was how you identify?
2. Can you tell me about any social supports you may have had when you first came out as (insert sexual/gender identity here) ?
 - a. Can you tell me who they were, how they supported, where they were, etc. ?
 - b. Do you have these supports or anything similar to these in London, Ontario?
3. Since this is a study on experiences of LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario, I would first like to know how long you have lived in London for, and if you moved here from some place else, what were the reasons for moving to London?
4. I am wondering how do you define (LGBTQ) community? Lots of people have written about community, but I'd like a local perspective on the definition of community. Keywords, general characteristics, etc.?
5. Do you identify with any LGBTQ communities in London?

- a. If 'yes', can you please explain to me what these are, including who is a part of them, what they do, and how they relate to your experiences with your sexual and/or gender identity.
 - b. If 'no', what are some reasons you do not identify with any of these communities?
6. Are there other communities you identify with other than LGBTQ communities? If so, can you explain them to me and how they are similar or different from LGBTQ communities in London?
7. Now, I am going to go through a list of LGBTQ events and/or venues. For each, I would like to know if you have ever been to them, what your experiences were like (both positive and negative), who attended them, and how they relate to your sexual and/or gender identity and experiences of community. Also, questions of bi and trans inclusion/exclusion; generational divide; queer vs. LGB, etc.
 - a. Buckwild's / Central Spa
 - b. Lavish Nightclub
 - c. Brennan's Beer Bistro (now the APK)
 - d. Your Drag Show
 - e. Gen Pop (or General Population)
 - f. Royal Imperial Sovereign Court events

- g. London Lesbian Film Festival
 - h. Sex Toy Bingo
 - i. Pride London
 - j. Pride Western events
 - k. Spectrum Fanshawe Events
 - l. If you have lived in London for a long period, can you also tell me about:
club 181, club 7, and the HALO venue?
 - m. Are there any LGBTQ events or venues in London that are missing from
this list? If so, can you please tell me about them?
8. Now talking about experiences in a variety of LGBTQ communities in London,
have you ever attended an event where there were drag or musical performances?
If yes, can you talk about where this event occurred and any details you can
remember about the performance(s)?
- a. Did these performances relate in any way to your sexual and/or gender
identity?
 - b. Do you see these as important for LGBTQ communities in London,
Ontario?
 - c. Did you have any positive or negative experiences from these
performances? Please elaborate.

9. Are there LGBTQ events or venues in London that you either think are missing or you would like to see happen in the future? Please elaborate on what these might look like. Or **experiences in other cities** with communities, spaces, events, etc.
10. Do you find these venues and events as important elements for London's LGBTQ communities?
 - a. If 'yes', what do they provide that makes them important?
 - b. If 'no', why are they not important? Is there anything you would change about them that would make them important?
11. Can you discuss other elements (e.g. organizations, social services, advocacy groups, etc.) that you see as part of London's LGBTQ communities?
12. Do you see these other elements as important for LGBTQ communities?
13. What is the relationship between these organizations, social services, advocacy groups, etc. and London's LGBTQ venues and events. Are there similarities or differences in what they provide (or do not provide) for you and/or London's LGBTQ communities?
14. What do you see as some of the social and/or political goals of LGBTQ communities in London? (Or What are some needs of the community? What would a utopia LGBTQ community look like in London?)

15. Is there a relationship between events, spaces, and aesthetics/artistic performances and these social and/or political goals or utopia ideals? If so, please, elaborate on how they are related.
16. How do you envision the aesthetics of LGBTQ communities and events? What do LGBTQ aesthetics look like? This can be in terms of art installations, fashion, decor, artistic/musical performances, etc. (e.g. would you be able to **distinguish between a queer aesthetic versus a gay aesthetic?**)
17. Is there anything you would like to see in London that would benefit your experiences as (insert sexual/gender identity here)? If yes, please elaborate on what these might look like (either events, venues, organizations, social/health services, etc.).
18. Do have any other thoughts and experiences related to London's LGBTQ communities that we have not yet discussed, but you would like to share with me?
19. Do you plan on, or would you consider living in London for a long period of time?
- a. If yes/no, does your gender identity or sexual orientation impact your decision to live in London longterm?
 - b. If no, where would you like to live longterm? Does this place have different things to offer than London? Elaborate.

20. Over the next few weeks, I will be transcribing the interview which I will send to you. I may need to contact you in case of clarification or for some follow-up questions via telephone or e-mail. Would this be okay with you?

Thanks again for agreeing to speak with me on LGBTQ communities in London, Ontario. If you have any questions, please let me know. I will be in touch to let you know about a future 'town hall meeting' that will discuss some of the research findings.

Demographic Questions for Interviewees

Age:

Education:

Employment:

Sexuality/sexual identity:

Gender identity:

Preferred Pronouns:

Cultural background:

Current living location in London:

Any other identities you'd wish to share?

9.5 Appendix E: Copyright Permissions

11/26/2015

https://wc.uwo.ca/iwc_static/layout/shell.html?lang=en&2-4.01_114059

Subject: Re: Pride Parade Photo

Date: 11/26/15 11:09 AM

To: Geoffrey Stephen Bardwell <[REDACTED]>

From: Ayden Scheim <[REDACTED]>

OutlookEmoji- .png (400bytes)

I LOVE it that this picture will be in your dissertation. Again, I'm in the wrong field 😊

Go for it.

Best,

Ayden

From: Geoffrey Bardwell <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Thursday, November 26, 2015 11:01 AM

To: Ayden Scheim

Subject: Pride Parade Photo

Hi Ayden,

For copyright purposes in my dissertation, I need to get permission from you to use the photo you took of me holding the pubic hair photo at the London Pride Parade.

Please let me know if this is possible by replying to this email.

Thanks in advance,

Geoff

8/31/2016

Re: Permission to use image in dissertation - Geoffrey Bardwell

Re: Permission to use image in dissertation

dnosella <[REDACTED]>

Tue 8/30/2016 10:53 PM

To: Geoffrey Bardwell <[REDACTED]>

Hey Geoff,

Totally ok. Thank you for asking...

Good luck with the dissertation.

Dana

On Aug 30, 2016, at 10:48 AM, Geoffrey Bardwell <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Hi Dana,

I am emailing you to see if I can get copyright permission to include an image of some drag performers from Gen Pop in my PhD dissertation. I will ensure that the image is properly cited. Please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Thanks!

Geoff

11/26/2015

https://iwc.uwo.ca/iwc_static/layout/shell.html?lang=en&2-4.01_114059

Subject: **PHD**

Date: 10/06/15 07:34 PM

To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

From: [REDACTED]

Hello Geoff,

I am emailing you as a confirmation to use my photograph of Greg for your dissertation. I would like to be cited as well.

Thanks,
Good luck
Ethan

Sent from my iPhone

11/26/2015

https://wc.uwo.ca/wc_static/layout/shell.html?lang=en&2-4.01_114059Subject: **Posters**

Date: 11/26/15 12:09 PM

To: [REDACTED]

From: Sean Malloy <[REDACTED]>

You have permission to use the Gen Pop posters in the publication of your PhD dissertation. Please cite me as Yollam Naes.

Thank you
-Sean Malloy

Curriculum Vitae

- Name:** Geoff Bardwell
- Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2000-2006 B.A.
- The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2007-2009 M.A.
- The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2011-2017 Ph.D.
- Honors and Awards:** Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
2007-2008
- Province of Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS)
2008-2009, 2014-2015
- Related Work Experience** Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2011-2015
- Publications:**
Bardwell, Geoff. *LGBT Needs Assessment for Emergency Shelters in London, Ontario*.
Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness: London, Ontario, Canada, 2015.