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QUEER REPURPOSED ARTIFACTS: THE STATE OF NEW
YORK CITY'S CONTEMPORARY WEST VILLAGE BARS

by

STEPHANIE DEBIASE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New
York

2018

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Village Bars

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Women's
and Gender Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Queer Repurposed Artifacts: The State of New York City's Contemporary

West Village Bars

by

Stephanie DeBiase

Advisor: Matt Brim

In recent years, there has been a shift in queer bar culture in New York City's West Village, and this thesis aims to explore what these changes are and why they are happening now. How do West Village bars survive when queer populations are forced out? While there are various ways to consider how and what survives in the Village, three variables will be addressed: queer history, or the history queer-identified groups using activism, safety measures, or collaborating with outside sources to secure their rights and overall wellbeing; (post)gentrification, beginning with the 90s when mainstream LGBT groups teamed up with developers and police, and ultimately raised the financial value of the West Village's real-estate; and (inter)national tourism, or the lengths New York City has taken throughout the years to promote tourism, especially during Pride month to benefit financially. These variables are interconnected to the queer bar, and what I will term 'queer repurposed artifacts'—or the queer bars in the Village with the deepest roots, such as Stonewall, Henrietta Hudson, and Cubbyhole, who all have altered their business model throughout the years to accommodate the neighborhood, and the city's, changes. This thesis aims to explore the vast ways bars survive and what these repurposed artifacts represent for the present-day queer bar.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a shift in queer bar culture in New York City's West Village, and this thesis aims to explore what these changes are and why they are happening now. Growing up on Long Island, I used to frequent Fire Island's Cherry Grove in the summer. It was the only designated queer space that I had ever been to, the only space where I could be surrounded by other lesbians and queer people. It felt formative, safe, and free. However, in recent years, I have noticed a change in the space. Three years ago, I walked into Cherry's on the Bay on Fire Island with some friends and we were confronted with what was obviously a bachelorette party. The space was nearly filled with straight men and women. Decked out in cliché bachelorette crowns and sashes, they were dancing with each other, making out with each other, and loudly, overtly celebrating the impending wedding. Entering this space, there was quite literally nowhere for me and my queer friends to fit in: there simply wasn't enough room in the bar.

In the years since, Cherry's on the Bay has become an increasingly popular stop for straight men and women visiting Fire Island. What was once a reliable queer bar has recently devolved into a space that seems to increasingly attract a broader, decidedly less queer audience, while still utilizing, and capitalizing on, queer culture. This is obvious from the description of Cherry's on their website:

Cherry's prime location is the place where patrons come to have one of the best cocktails in Fire Island. While sipping your cocktail you can enjoy beautiful bay front sunset views and a sneak peak of weekend warriors running off the ferry to enjoy a weekend of endless

possibilities...Weekly drag shows, theme parties, contests, special guest DJs and drink specials. (Cherry's on the Bay)

Cherry's, it seems, is a prime location for straight patrons to drink a delicious cocktail and explore the "endless possibilities" of queer culture. But where does a young lesbian from Long Island go to find the reliable, formative queer space that drew me to Cherry's and Fire Island each summer?

Lesbian bars, it seems, are disappearing in all sorts of ways. A year ago, when I visited my sister in Los Angeles, we attempted to go to a lesbian bar in Mar Vista, only to find it boarded up. I decided to search for other lesbian bars in the area. As I scrolled through the list of bars on my phone, next to each name read, "permanently closed." We ended up taking a 40-minute Uber ride to a lesbian bar in West Hollywood called Girl Bar. When I returned to New York, I decided it was time for me to start researching this slow but seemingly ubiquitous loss of lesbian bars.

Much has been written on the closure of the lesbian bar; *Slate*¹, *Vice*, *New York Times*² and *Huffington Post*³ all have commented. When I moved to New York City, the West Village seemed to promise the queer spaces I had lost or lacked on Long Island. However, as I began to experience them, their classification as queer spaces seemed somewhat shallow. That said, with this thesis, I would like to delve into the local functions of queer space in the Village, as these spaces seem to complicate their intended purposes, and are thus not something I would identify

¹ Binstock, Rae. "Why Lesbian Spaces Will Always Be in Danger of Closing, and Why Some Will Always Survive." *Slate*, 20 Dec. 2016.

² Burton, Krista. "I Want My Lesbian Bars Back." *The New York Times*, 14 Apr. 2017.

³ Giesecking, Jen Jack. "On the Closing of the Last Lesbian Bar in San Francisco: What the Demise of the Lex Tells Us About Gentrification." *Huffington Post*, 28 Oct. 2014.

as a 'queer space.' My thesis will not focus on theorizing queer space, but instead, it will reflect on its vast purposes. I will be questioning how bars in the West Village adapt to gentrification, heavy tourism, and low-income people of color's dispersion, and, additionally, how the queer bar's location and purpose financially secure them. There are business strategies and patron audiences that can help these bars survive, but I believe the cost of such practices leaves queerness at a loss.

This historically gay neighborhood has a survival advantage that has not been written about because it is new and currently happening. There are new features to the neighborhood: bars are advertised through tourist campaigns and non-profits, new types of people/tourists are exploring these bars, and as the dynamic of the bars change, there are nuanced corporate practices emerging. These types of changes form through multiple variables. Bar owners are adjusting to different dynamics in their bars where tourists, locals, and other New Yorkers are gathering, but there are undertones of appropriation. I will explore the methods of the gay and lesbian bar owners in the Village by considering the following: interconnected business strategies between gay and lesbian bars tourist campaigns and attractions, the partnership of Stonewall and Brooklyn Brewery, and the tendency for queer bars to collaborate with non-profits (and possibly capitalize on queer culture). I will also take into consideration the current climate of the neighborhood, in terms of expense and culture, and the sustainability of these nuanced practices.

While there are various ways to consider how and what survives in the Village, I would like to look at three variables: queer history, or the history of queer-identified groups using activism; safety measures, or collaborating with outside sources to secure their rights and overall wellbeing; gentrification, beginning with the 90s when mainstream LGBT groups teamed up

with developers and police, and ultimately raised the financial value of the West Village's real-estate; and (inter)national tourism, or the lengths New York City has taken throughout the years to promote and profit from tourism, especially during Pride month. These variables are interconnected to the queer bar and what I will call 'queer repurposed artifacts'—or the queer bars in the Village with the deepest roots, such as Stonewall, Henrietta Hudson, and Cubbyhole, who all have altered their business models throughout the years to accommodate the changes in the neighborhood and the city.

Using Christina Hanhardt's (2013) *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* as a primary source for a history of the Village will reveal the different goals of the radical LGBTQ Villagers, compared to the mainstream, or homonormative⁴, gay and lesbian Villagers. Hanhardt elaborates on the opposition of groups such as FIERCE, and other trans and homeless queers had to mainstream gay and lesbian folks who vehemently rejected marginalized groups, in order to reside in the Village and ultimately set the stage for a gentrified neighborhood (4). *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* acknowledges the collaboration between the privileged gay community and developers who drove underprivileged, youth of color out of the Christopher Piers through their alliance with police. This additionally parallels with contemporary times, in the 2000s, when an identical dispersion occurred in order to make the neighborhood better suited for financial gain through gentrification.

⁴ I am using homonormativity throughout this paper to reference the portion of the LGBT community that uses the privileges of class, race, gender to their advantage politically, socially, financially, etc. while ignoring or opposing other queer folks who do not hold those same privileges.

As a gentrified neighborhood, the Village seems to contrast its past queer urbanity (before mainstreaming gay and lesbian⁵ groups gained power) through the persistence of Village committees whose intentions are rooted in racism and classism, and yet, gay and lesbian bars, from the 90s or earlier, continue to exist within a post-gentrified neighborhood, though a large portion of the queer community is forced out by harsh policing and the current state of the neighborhood. Before delving into the dilemmas of queer bars, and what that means for patrons, bar owners, and the future of these spaces, this historic approach to understanding the Village will provide a foundation for the reader. Marginalization is continuous throughout queer history in New York City, and by looking at the politics from the 70s and forward, I will develop a framework to make sense of the current Village, and who has been left out of LGBTQ safety measures.

As I move toward the 90s and reflect on the changes in the Village, I will provide a microhistory of Henrietta Hudson's opening. Johan Andersson's article, "Wilding in the West Village: Queer Space, Racism and Jane Jacobs Hagiography", on Village residents will precede this microhistory to establish the foundation of the decade. The residents' ire toward the youth of color hanging out in the neighborhood, and what that meant for the neighborhood's safety through the eyes of residents, will showcase who pushed for a more robust police presence and the monitoring of queer youth, and what those developments might mean for the future of the Village. Andersson's work includes policing that solely targeted youth of color in the Village and how those youths became criminalized through minor infractions and their "rowdiness," or loudness out in public places. The seemingly paradoxical, yet appropriating desire for crime-free,

⁵ I use gay and lesbian throughout my thesis. Chapter 6 will acknowledge lesbian's contribution to gentrifying neighborhoods.

yet historically deviant spaces begins the section on (inter)national tourism and continues on to bar strategies.

The fourth chapter, *Contemporary Tourism in the Village*, will use scholars such as Rushbrook, Paur and Kantsa to argue how international queer geographies can produce revenue by attracting queer and heterosexual visitors while simultaneously creating conflict between locals and tourists. Ending that section will produce a background on the vast ways scholars explore international tourism, and this will additionally act as a transition to the local level of queer tourism I wish to further explore. In the fifth chapter, *The Stonewall Hierarchy*, and the sixth chapter, *Lesbian Bar Tactics*, I delve into specific examples of bar strategies that the Stonewall Inn, Henrietta Hudson, and Cubbyhole have been practicing. These strategies include advertising and collaborating with non-profits. I begin with Stonewall as a ‘hierarchy’ for the rest of the queer bars in the Village to establish how its power through the history of the riots, and the national monument across the street, have helped to cement it as a premier and widely visible queer bar. I will then shift to the lesbian bars, examining advertisements and interviews with bar owners to consider how they attempt to adopt Stonewall’s model in order to draw in crowds.

CHAPTER 2: THE WEST VILLAGE’S QUEER HISTORY

In the 1970s and 1980s, queer spaces were areas of the inner-city that were ignored by the non-queer public, corporations, and politicians, and this left queer folks’ homes in disarray because their neighborhoods, such as the West Village and the East Village, did not receive the attention that they needed in terms of safety and quality (Hanhardt 10). This ultimately led queer

folks to focus on securing their rights to protection and better living conditions. This search for security and queer visibility was often plagued with racism and classism. As Christina Hanhardt (2013) notes in *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*, “safe space patrols” had taken responsibility for the queer community’s neighborhoods, and how their insistence on safety did not stop racial profiling, an issue that shaped the Village (3). Her historical approach acknowledges the anti-violence movements that began in “gay territories,” working under the “assumption” that their communities would “secure visibility” by the “power of publicity as visibility” (16). The sentiments of these patrols began to convolute as the 90s approached, however, when gay and (some) lesbian residents with financial and political powers withdrew themselves from the broader queer community who lacked the privileges of race, class, and gender. This unequal access to power, Cathy Cohen suggests, is “intrinsic to how sexual subjects are situated,” and can “enhance or mute the marginalization of queers” (Hanhardt 182). With the reiteration of antiquated visibility practices from former queer New York City safety patrols, homonormativity produced alternate forms of police and developer alliance for some identities, such as white, rich gays, while others like underprivileged, youth of color faced dispersion without protection. These marginalized groups began organizing for radical change in New York City.

The initial legislative division between normative and queer began with discriminatory laws in place during the 60s. Gay and lesbian behavior was often influenced by restrictive gender and sexuality guidelines; anti-sodomy laws posed threats on the private sexual lives for some, while “laws against lewdness, vagrancy, solicitation, and cross-dressing,” policed queer bodies in public (Hanhardt 21). Using José Esteban Muñoz’s contemplation of ‘queerness’ in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, the deconstruction of gender binaries accesses

fluidity, but historically guarantees risks⁶. Police interpretations of legislation often harassed queer youth, which is something that has carried out in contemporary times. Rejection of this “assimilationist ideology” juxtaposes the mainstream privileged gays and lesbians who “want to be found on a normative map of the world” (Muñoz 73). As some of these gay and lesbian mainstream individuals made their way into positions of power, their wider options allowed them to stray away from more radical behavior. There was less at stake for them and their ability to conform to societal standards of ‘decency’ gave them job security, considering their performativity outside and against fluid concepts of gender permitted them to access safer living conditions.

In their rise to political power, Hanhardt notes the ire of white, middle-class gay and lesbian Villagers. They were consistently absent in queer initiatives such as FIERCE, “a force helping queer youth advocate for later hours and better social services in the area” (Andersson). Johan Andersson’s “Wilding in the West Village: Queer Space, Racism and Jane Jacobs Hagiography,” explains FIERCE as “informally” offering “some kind of representation for a constituency too young to vote and without any residential claim to the neighborhood.” By declining and working against organizations such as FIERCE, the concerns of the white middle-class established alliances with developers. One of FIERCE’s organized mass protests, for example, argued for the protection of homes on the pier, known as the Queer Pier fight. Sylvia Rivera, a ‘mother’ to the queer homeless population, developed bonds of affinity through her shelters on the Christopher Pier (Wicker 2011). Her pleas to the mainstream gay and lesbian movement were rejected, as residents of the Village benefitted from dispersing queer, lower

⁶ Muñoz asserts, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world,” and in this case, represents queer folks ‘risking’ themselves for another world (1).

class, people of color. Developers and residents of the Village neglected queer perspectives of the pier as a place for community and shelter, and were eager to ‘revitalize’ it. Andersson furthermore alludes to queer occupancy in terms of “appropriating public space” to “redefine kinship and property through the metaphorical use of the term ‘house.’” This ‘metaphorical’ usage relayed a complicated dynamic between the two types of residents—the queer youth of color occupying the piers, which Andersson argues are being “designed out” by developers, and those Hanhardt mentions who own property and voice their concerns of creating “safe” space within the gay neighborhood.

This design to disperse the non-white population from the Village raises some complications. There is an implication that gay neighborhoods are ‘diverse,’ in terms of sexualities, according to Gary Gates, and due to this succeed financially. Yet, these neighborhoods fail to intersect race, class, and gender. Gates’ Gay Index research, from Hanhardt’s *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*, claims ‘tolerance’ in the gay neighborhood is nationally celebrated by city agencies who believe its “predictive of the regional success of high-tech industries” (186). Gates’ evidence suggests that the “risks” of “coming out” provoke gays and lesbians to initiate “risks in other aspects of their lives,” according to city agencies (Hanhardt 187). What Gates seemingly refers to are business risks and the financial aspects that could uplift the neighborhood, and ultimately increase the net worth of gay and lesbian household incomes for the neighborhood. This statement somewhat alludes to the ‘risks’ Munoz claims queer folks face; however, these risks, historically, stem from marginalized politics and overall societal views of heteronormativity in the past.

In the case of the contemporary gay neighborhood, tech-firms, such as Ad Tech Company⁷, located within places such as the Village, tolerate numerous sexualities, as long as they are tethered to privileges of class and race. Economically speaking, Richard Florida seems to confirm that while the firms have a high acceptancy of sexuality, people of color residing in these neighborhoods are a “liability” for a prosperous economy (Rushbrook 202). This contradiction for diversity initiatives results in the underprivileged and non-white folk’s involvement in criminality rhetoric. Ideas of decency began to mold a narrow profile for the preservation of the gay neighborhood in terms of wealth that seem to rely on mainstream gay and lesbians—meaning the white, cis, upper/middle-class majority. This type of financial success that the gay community can potentially offer to businesses and neighborhoods has been used by corporations as well. Profiting off of gay culture is something I will explore further in the fifth chapter. The alignment, however, between a gentrified neighborhood that disperses the “liabilities,” or the non-white, lower-class populations, and the ‘deviant’ culture that I previously alluded to, creates a unique opportunity for companies to receive the best of both worlds: queer culture and desirable real-estate.

CHAPTER 3: LESBIAN BAR HISTORY

On Halloween of 1991, Henrietta Hudson, the name originating from the “feminization of the Hudson River's namesake, Henry Hudson,” became the newest addition to queer bars in the West Village, and opened under Lisa Cannistraci’s ownership (Swalec). In a recent interview,

⁷ Ad Tech Company relocated to the West Village in October, 2014, according to *Commercial Observer* (Salinger).

Cannistraci proudly shared in “Insider Guide,” a part of *NYC Go*’s website, “we are the longest running lesbian bar in the country and we’re a staple in the neighborhood of the West Village.” The bar’s permanent spot at 438 Hudson Street was a previous home to Cubbyhole, who had moved out in 1990. Cannistraci found herself “seeking refuge” from the rain as she walked along Hudson Street one day, and decided to enter Cubbyhole. After ordering a drink and a cup of coffee, she mentioned to the bartender that she was searching for a job, which led to her being hired immediately. “If it hadn’t rained that day, Henrietta’s wouldn’t be open,” Cannistraci admits (Swalec).

According to Cannistraci, “the lesbian scene in the early ‘90s was wild, with underground, after-hours clubs where you could find yourself dancing alongside Madonna and David Bowie” (Swalec). “Dyked New York: The Space Between Geographical Imagination and Materialization of Lesbian-Queer Bars and Neighborhoods” reiterates this notion in their interviews with queer women, claiming there was a “greater number of venues for white women, particularly those that are well advertised and in central locations,” in the 90s (Giesecking Chapter 4). Other lesbian bars such as the Duchess (101 Seventh Avenue South and Grove Street), Meow Mix (269 E Houston Street), Crazy Nannie’s (32 7th Avenue South), and Rubyfruit (531 Hudson Street) and many others, were popular destinations, however all of them were closed by the 2000s (Giesecking Chapter 4). 438 Hudson Street, a prime location in the Village, had no problem attracting customers when Cannistraci and her two business partners, Minnie Rivera and Joey D’Angelo, opened that night, putting in 18-hour work days. ““It was a lipstick lesbian scene; Madonna and Sandra Bernhard were the models,” Cannistraci remembers. ‘Lesbians were coming out of the closet. It was cool to be a lesbian. It helped the business, of course—Henrietta’s was a big part of that trend’” (Long).

4. CONTEMPORARY TOURISMS

As the 2000s approached, to keep ‘liabilities’ away from the Village, residents of Greenwich Village adopted models of order for police interference. This included, “police crackdowns on minor infractions like noise and loitering,” which maintained the anti-violence initiative (Hanhardt 24). Young, queer folks with unconventional behavior were often interpreted as ‘rowdy’, which was considered a form of violence according to the Christopher Street Patrol. They explained “public drinking, rowdiness, and noisemaking,” was incriminating and this criminality often plagued “LGBT/queer youth and transgender women” (Hanhardt 184). This type of residential ire that results in police crackdowns, additionally parallels with the resistance residents used in terms of tourisms. When reviewing the interaction between local and lesbian tourists in Eresis, Lesbos, for example, Venetia Kantsa recalls the hostilities of the villagers towards the visiting lesbians, noting the local’s urgency to end lesbian tourism and promote ‘good’ tourisms—tourists with similar morality to the residents (Kantas 41). Locals and tourists are often divided, figuratively and physically, through means of ownership power and safety issues, too. This interference that works to highlight the stake of property as a means of queer exclusion uses the “us” versus “them” rhetoric to disperse queerness in ‘claimed’ space (Kantsa 36). While international queer tourism has recently made its way into academia, much of the literature analyzes the local campaigns aimed to destroy gay and lesbian tourist destinations.

Local property owners’ responses to emerging queer tourist destinations leave these spaces in a dilemma. Queer folks are drawn to certain destinations because of their histories, advertisements, etc., while the local population heavily rejects their presence. Borrowing from

Henri Lefebvre's terminology on urbanity, historical pasts and ideologies produce the politics of spaces, and interacting with these spatial ideologies may deter queer folks. Spaces that are advertised as 'queer' can become unclear and mislead the queer tourist population when spaces seemingly present themselves as safe, but the demographic within the space produce heteronormative performances instead. Jerimiah Moss, author of *Vanishing New York* (2017), has a section dedicated to gentrifiers. Gentrification is not only a "simple shifting of one urban population to another," but also about "class—and the places where class intersects with race and other factors, like education and sexual orientation—its always about the imbalance of power" (35). His sentiment works in terms of one population coming in and dominating its previous occupants:

Gentrifiers always have more social power than the people whose spaces they infiltrate. It may be the power of race, typically whiteness. It may be the power of class, which can sometimes be less visible. Seldom mentioned but important to note is the fact that many middle-class and affluent people of color are gentrifiers too, often in lower-income neighborhoods of color. When talking about gentrification, we must keep intersectionality in mind. (Moss 321)

Spatially, these social implications produce residential aggression. The resistant behavior begins to necessitate conformity, especially when queer bodies enter the space. For example, as spaces begin to develop new ideologies based on whatever the dominant presence of normative behavior is, marginalized groups begin to be pushed out of their own space. The resolve of queer tourist spaces seems ephemeral, from local resistance, and yet, queer travel appears to rapidly continue.

The capitalistic desire to produce queer tourism literature also makes its way into scholarly works (Paur 2002). Much of the conflict revolves around government, nongovernmental organizations interventions and church protests, highlighting detrimental and alluring aspects of international queer travel. Dereka Rushbrook (2002) argues that designated queer tourist attractions are “visiting zones of deviance and excess to transgress social norms,” offering a type of “bourgeois voyeurism” that advertises the ‘Other’ as entertainment and exoticism (185). This means queer spaces can often draw in non-queer individuals, which can destabilize the purpose of these bars. Rushbrook identifies “queer spaces” as “space that is potentially less exclusionary than the predominantly white and non-working-class gay and lesbian zones” (184). She emphasizes ‘straight tourists’ consumption of queer space and how it “shapes the evolution of these spaces,” while also affecting the “everyday lives of the gays who inhabit them” (184). Meaning that non-queer illusions potentially subvert spaces that queer folks utilize.

“Bourgeois voyeurism” carried itself into the postindustrial New York where the local government deployed areas, such as Greenwich Village, in “marketing and development schemes” (Rushbrook 187). This interaction of queer tourist and resident, however, poses a local dilemma in the Village pertaining to its notable gay and lesbian bars. As the West Village, historically and financially markets itself as the ‘gay’ neighborhood and home to the Stonewall Inn, bar owners find a way to cater to both locals and tourists as patrons, while strategizing to sustain their businesses, considering gay and lesbian bars always risk closure, based on the various personal pieces and documentaries that cover this topic. The West Village also differentiates itself from other literature on queer tourism, as it is historically rich in queer culture, the final destination of June’s Pride Parade, and well-funded through the Rainbow

Pilgrimage tourist campaign, a part of New York City's tourist site, unlike other tourist-driven geographies, whose residents are hostile towards the queer community because of their differing morality.

Questioning whether tourism inscribes "exclusionary practices" on queer space, Rushbrook cites geographers' viewpoints regarding "(hetero)sexing of space" (Rushbrook 200). This means heterosexual acts appear "invisible and natural public space as heterosexual." Non-heterosexuals, in this case, interpret a space as straight, and therefore "police their own performativity" because "safe access to that space is contingent on the appearance of being straight" (200). With marketing for the Village, straight presence certainly follows. From the same *NYC Go's* "Insider Guide" video on the West Village that I referenced with Cannistraci, a comedian from Murray Hill claims, "and you don't have to be gay to do it. It's gay and straight tourists, anything goes," in reference to visiting the Village. There have been a multitude of articles, from *Bustle*⁸, *Telegraph*⁹, *Huffington Post*¹⁰, *New York Times*¹¹, and others, dedicated to addressing straight presence at gay pride events. I have also witnessed this presence at New York City's Pride Parade, where popular shirts worn by seemingly straight men state: "Only gay for today," or other similar notions stating that they are here for the "party," but are not actually gay. The idea that straight presence complicates the potentiality of queer space because of the 'contingency' to appear straight, as a safety measure, is an example of the of "cosmopolitan

⁸ Brighe, Mari. "10 Rules Cisgender Straight People Attending Pride Should Follow." *Bustle*, June 2016.

⁹ Welsh, Kaite. "What's the Hettiquette? A Straight Person's Guide to Gay Pride." *The Telegraph*, 8 July 2017.

¹⁰ Robertson, Brandan. "Why Pride? An Explanation For Straight People." *Huffington Post*, 2 June 2017.

¹¹ Burton, Krista. "Is Pride Still for Queer People Like Me?" *The New York Times*, 17 June 2017.

consumption” that Rushbrook urges queer folks should observe (184). Rushbrook cites Aaron Betsky in her article, who claims that these queer spaces are compromised the moment they begin, considering “their power became useful for advertising, lifestyles, and the occupation of real estate” (184).

CHAPTER 5: THE STONEWALL HIERARCHY

With the Village being a heavy tourist area, queer culture transforms from “an introverted, closed, private space” into these visible advertised areas, and because of this, “gay bars are increasingly obliged to label themselves” (Rushbrook 194). The 2009 NYC visitor’s guide, for example, under the Rainbow Pilgrimage, urges tourists staying in New York City to visit what is now the Stonewall National Monument, across the street from the actual Stonewall Inn bar. After providing minimal background on the Riots, a suggestion that queer historical mentioning is enough to draw in a crowd, no matter how insignificant or inaccurate, the site also names the Duplex and Hangar as notable gay bars to visit. It is here that the Stonewall Inn determines itself as an establishment reminiscent of queer history, and implies desire for tourists to experience this. This desire that the site expands upon also implies an established marketing strategy for the bar. Stonewall’s hierarchal position influences the attention on Christopher Street by providing access to a building that was central to the queer activism that began the gay liberation movement in the United States. With this, we can then think about Stonewall as the archetype for queer bars in the Village. As noted on the same visitor’s guide to the West Village website, Tree, a bar tender at Stonewall urges, “If you’re in the West Village, you have to stop at Stonewall for a drink. This is where it started.”

Stonewall not only draws tourist crowds in, but also profits from its neighboring bars during Pride month. Businesses, and especially banks, can understand the capital benefits to LGBTQ acceptance and the overwhelming amount of publicity they can obtain by participating. The cheap advertising banks acquire from those attending the Pride Parade is exceptional. When attending the 2017 Pride Parade in New York, it seemed to me that everyone was waving TD Banks' rainbow flags, or sporting their stickers. Based off of the NYC Pride Parade march rates for 2017, the standard float cost for a "corporate organization, corporate LGBT affinity group, or franchisee of a corporate organization" costs \$5,100¹²: a small price to pay.

When you own a queer bar, your space already serves as an outlet for queer folks, in terms of providing a space designated for a particular group of people, so queer bars tend to capitalize on that. As of June 2017, Stonewall's deal with Brooklyn Brewery produced the "Stonewall Inn Wit" beer to be sold by Stonewall, Brooklyn Brewery, and neighboring bars during the month of June. Personally, while visiting the gay bar, Duplex, in June, a bartender introduced me to the beer and informed me that "a lot of the gay bars were getting it in." Its premise is to "celebrate [Stonewall's] history and the establishment of The Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative," which is a non-profit organization "dedicated to providing educational, strategic and financial assistance to grassroots organizations" in the LGBTQ community (Stonewall Inn Gives Back Initiative). Brooklyn Brewery's sponsorship of the non-profit implies that the beer's proceeds gives back to the initiative, due to the language and description of the beer, however, this is actually undeterminable (Brooklyn Brewery). In addition to this, the Stonewall Inn Gives

¹² As long as the corporation is registered before February 6, the price of the float is \$5,100. After the "early bird" date, the price of a float raises to \$8,000.

Back Initiative has also benefitted from ticket sales of musical artists¹³. Stonewall, aside from its own organization, has teamed up with other non-profits in the past. This November, the bar's Facebook page announced a collaboration with the Matthew Shepard Foundation, an organization trying to "Erase Hate" (MattShepardFDN). Tickets were sold for the foundation and the event highlighted its "drag performances, readings, live music, and a chance to meet Judy and Dennis Shepard."¹⁴ With these examples in mind, we can note that the strategy of linking a non-profit to a bar's revenue seems to be making its way into the marketing strategies of numerous contemporary queer bars. Queer bars, it seems, are using non-profits as a way to ease the capitalization of queer culture, while also giving them a means to survive.

In theorizing the benefits of businesses, specifically queer bars, the overall goal of partnering with non-profits seems to improve the financial gain that a bar is unable to provide individually. The first benefit comes from advertisement: bars can now add that they are working with a non-profit, and in the case of the queer bar, this non-profit will probably address an issue pertaining to queer folks¹⁵, and the probability that a queer bar's patrons would be interested in this is potentially high. Stonewall Inn, for example, has also worked with James Felton Keith and hosted an event during his run for US Congress¹⁶. Though it is not a non-profit event, it shows their desire to work with individuals that support LGBTQ. Additionally, the advertisement is now produced by two different entities, the queer bar itself, and the organization they intend on

¹³ The Stonewall Inn Facebook page posted a Charitybuzz link on November 10, 2017 to win tickets to Carly Rae Jepsen's show.

¹⁴ The Stonewall Inn Facebook page shared the Matthew Shepard Foundation's event on November 16, 2017.

¹⁵ The brand alignment, or in this case, the social issue both the bar and organization aim to improve, would be the first aspect both would acknowledge in order to work together. According to the 2015 Corporate Partner Survey, "Brand and Values Alignment" was the most important factor when collaborating.

¹⁶ Stonewall Inn. "Alphabet Equality: JFK 4 NYC LGBTQ". Facebook, 13 November 2017.

working with. This could theoretically increase the overall donation revenue once the event happens, and if the bar is getting a certain percentage of this, it will perceptibly magnify their overall profits and thus, impact the business and provoke them to continue working with non-profits in the future. Another example would be CLAGS, the Center for LGBTQ Studies. This organization has used the space at Stonewall on multiple occasions for fundraising. CLAGS offers a magnitude of benefits to individuals in and outside of academia through their fellowships, awards, and certificates¹⁷ and programming¹⁸. That said, their organization thrives on funds and Stonewall's role seems to assist CLAGS greatly. For example, in the summer of 2015 CLAGS hosted a "Pre-Pride Fundraiser Party," offering an evening of "prizes, performances, dancing, and drinks," that also encouraged individuals to purchase a CLAGS membership (CLAGS). Stonewall has also hosted CLAGS' "QUEERaganza: CLAGS @ Stonewall" party, where a variety of shows took place for a \$10 cover charge that promised access to the shows, as well as a membership to CLAGS for the year.

The results of the advertisement could furthermore play a huge role in the relationship between non-profit and bar. Another example coming to mind is the October 2017 rainbow flag hanging at the Stonewall National Monument. It would have been the first time the flag was placed at the monument and protected by the National Parks Department, and the event attracted over 1,300 people on Facebook, according to the event's page¹⁹. The Public Relations company, Gorenstein Publicity, posted the event and their description indicated that Broadway

¹⁷ CLAGS currently offers a magnitude of scholarships and awards for academics and non-academics. Information can be found on their website under the fellowships, awards, and certificates section.

¹⁸ CLAGS offers events throughout the academic year. Their programming can be found on their website's event's archive.

¹⁹ Information found under Gorenstein Publicity's events on their Facebook page, "Rainbow Flag to Fly Permanently in NYC" from October 11, 2017.

Cares/Equity Fight AIDS, the AIDS fundraising non-profit, would be partnering with Gay USA for the event. The Stonewall Inn Facebook page also reminded followers of the flag hanging the day before, and tagged their actual bar in post, even though it was happening outside of their establishment, along with the national monument. This event did not go as planned, however, since the Parks department backed out last minute²⁰. Regardless of this fact, Gorenstein Publicity's idea to include a non-profit in the event was a public relation move that was advertised on Facebook to enhance the general turnout of the event. While there is no way to know for sure, it seems safe to assume that the continuous efforts of Stonewall to partner with organizations is benefitting them financially.

CHAPTER 6: LESBIAN BAR TACTICS

Henrietta Hudson and Cubbyhole have their own strategies for marketing queer histories, as their location is not as prime as Christopher Street. One advantage that Henrietta Hudson has, though, during the Pride Parade is the after party on the pier, where parade goers could potentially pass the bar's street to get to the pier. In another interview²¹ with Cannistraci, she notes the excitement for the Pride Parade each year. Henrietta Hudson's homage to queer activism mentioned in the interview explains the "Occupy Hudson Street" theme of the bar during Pride week, which the Cannistraci notes pays "tribute to the wave of women who visit for Pride every year." To follow the theme, \$10 cocktails are promoted; the "Equaltini" is described as a combination of "vodka, ginger liqueur, grapefruit juice, seltzer and a dash of lavender

²⁰ The city's flag, instead, replaced the federal flag, according to ABC New York.

²¹ Swalec, Andrea. "Owner of Village Lesbian Celebrates her 28th Pride Week." *DNAinfo*, 24 June 2013.

bitters.” It is unclear if the lesbian bar partakes in any other thematic actions during Occupy Hudson Street, besides capitalizing on the energy that Pride month exerts. As for Cubbyhole, it is marketed on “NYC Pride: 20 Historic LGBT sites”²² and according to *Thirsty Mag*, the bar also offers drink specials²³.

The activist group NYC Dyke Bar Takeover hosted a ‘Dyke Bar Walking Tour’ in June 2017, an event that was sponsored by Cubbyhole and Henrietta Hudson. The tour guide was Nic Rathert, a member of the NYC Dyke Bar Takeover. The Facebook event description read: “Where have all the dyke bars gone? Check out this historic tour of dyke spaces lost. Tour starts at Cubbyhole.” In partnering with NYC Dyke Bar Takeover, Cubbyhole and Henrietta Hudson (Lisa Cannistraci, Minerva Rivera) were able to capitalize on “queer history/herstory/hystory of New York City streets,” and also provoke a conversation with whoever decided to go on the walking tour about the disappearance of these New York City lesbian bars. Ironically, the event’s description on Facebook underscores the change in Cubbyhole’s own business model, the tour starting at a bar that used to identify itself as a lesbian space but now classifies itself as a “Neighborhood Fusion Bar” that has been “straight friendly since 1994” (however, New York City’s tourism site refers to Cubbyhole as a lesbian bar). That said, starting a tour of “dyke spaces lost” at Cubbyhole seems fitting. In order to access this queer history, attendees must purchase tickets that come with a free drink voucher. Along the tour, the buildings that the Duchess, Bonnie & Clyde’s, Crazy Nanny’s once occupied were visited, according to Melissa Anderson, who explained the tour in *The Village Voice*.

²² Information found on *Curbed New York*’s website.

²³ Tielmann, Alana. “17 LGBT Bars in NYC to Celebrate Pride.” *Thirsty Mag*, 18 June, 2017.

The scarce number of lesbian bars, Arlene Stein explains in *Vice's* documentary, *Searching for the Last Lesbian Bars in America*, is because, “gay men have access to more economic capital as a whole. They tend to live in neighborhoods where those bars are located.” Lesbians, on the other hand, do not. With this in mind, patrons of this historical tour are encouraged to hang out in Cubbyhole and Henrietta Hudson after their exploration, in order to do what NYC Dyke Bar Takeover implores: “to combat the death of the dyke bar.” Anderson explained, in her article, that her and the other members of the walking tour, “were enough to keep this space alive,” in reference to Henrietta Hudson, their ending point on the walking tour (Anderson). There is a clear and persistent message here: without such patronage, Cubbyhole and Henrietta Hudson will be subject to the same fate as the rest of the historical dyke spaces on the tour, lost and relegated to a specific and quickly disappearing queer history.

One of the other factors mentioned for the disappearance of the dyke bar, according to Anderson’s experience at the walking tour, is the disinterest lesbians have in leaving the house to indulge in nightlife. However, understanding that Henrietta Hudson hosts DJ nights and parties every week is proof that their lesbian bar serves an active demographic. The most obvious fact here, is that though there are only a handful of lesbian bars in New York City, the two in the West Village have stayed alive since the 90s. Anderson questions, “Is it now preferable to stay in and gorge on Orange Is the New Black or set up a HER profile?” This is a similar notion to what Arlene Stein explains in the documentary. According to Stein, there is “some truth” to the U-Haul theory, the idea that lesbians settle down instantly with one another and become homebodies.

Lesbians are more likely to couple pretty quickly, and to see themselves in relation to long term commitment. Gay men are better at separating sex and love and seeing short term sexual liaisons as how they want to live their lives. (Samson)

While there may be some truth to the stereotype, lesbians are often involved in the gentrification of neighborhoods densely populated with them, because of the commodities they bring in their neighborhood, and this shows their activity. Tamar Rothenberg's contribution to *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (1994) encourages scholars to include lesbian congregation in pre-gentrifying areas around the United States—something only gay men are blamed for in other works. Using the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Park Slope, Brooklyn, Rothenberg considers lesbians as a factor in the progress of gentrification by arguing against the works of Lauria and Knopp (1985), Castells (1983), and Wolf (1978). Rothenberg notes that Lauria, Knopp and Wolf claim that “lesbians neither concentrate residentially nor demonstrate any connection to gentrification,” (Rothenberg 165). Castells argues that instead of looking at sexuality, we must look at gender and classify the spatial territories for gays because men are more dominant, whereas women are not (Rothenberg 166). Based on salaries between men and women, there is the notion that because women tend to make less annually, they, whether coupled or not, are more likely to live without “formal geographic boundaries,” according to Wolf (Rothenberg 166). Rothenberg intervenes, however, and claims that these areas can still technically qualify as “contiguous” and therefore, are in part lesbian neighborhoods. Considering the time difference from when Wolf published the article to when Rothenberg did, the fifteen-year gap concluded that these lesbian areas “followed similar trends towards gentrification” (168).

Turning toward Park Slope, the neighborhood heavily examined in her article, Rothenberg states that in the 90s it had “the heaviest concentration of lesbians in the US” (169). In order to better understand the dynamics of the dense lesbian population in the neighborhood, Rothenberg’s methods focus on interviews with the residents who had lived there from one to eighteen years, including store owners, and mentions that the interviewees were mostly white, with the exception of two non-white individuals. After conducting the interviews, there was a hesitance toward using the word lesbian “community” in regard to Prospect Park residents, and Rothenberg decided to contemplate its infinite possibilities. Community, she argues, could equate to “neighborhood,” however, using Benedict Anderson’s definition, community can be “imagined,” or a “comradeship” regardless of whether the neighbors know each other, much of which tends to happen in urban spaces (171). Realizing that her interview methods should stray from using the term, Rothenberg decided to leave “community” open for discussion with the next set of interviewees. The conclusions drawn from each interview suggested that there is “spatial significance of the lesbian ‘community’ in Park Slope” (173). Rothenberg offers insight into the “social networks,” mentioning the different types of lesbian groups that operate in the neighborhood: The Prospect Park Women’s Softball League, the Brooklyn Women’s Martial Arts, and also the Social Activities for Lesbians. Additionally, this left lesbians with a sense of comfortability, established connections and an idea of who is walking around the neighborhood and how well they know other residents.

As one of the most desirable factors of queer space, safety is the greater concern in these types of ‘communities’. Rothenberg’s interviewees spoke of the safety they felt walking down the street and how they did not want to compromise this when being priced out of their neighborhood, as Park Slope rapidly gentrified. When being forced to move into less expensive

areas, the dispersion led lesbians to the outskirts of Park Slope and into bordering neighborhoods, such as South Slope and Gowanus. This, Rothenberg and some interviewees claim, “expanded” the gentrification of Park Slope into these areas as well because these established social networks drew people in, including identified straight individuals. While also considered displacement, Rothenberg claims it is the same situations of “artists or moderate-income professionals: in a crude sense, victims of their own success,” meaning that a community’s networks are there for them, but also provoke a desire from the outsider, and thus leads to gentrification (178). The “supportive community” that many lesbians found in Park Slope, Rothenberg argues, is the “creation of an open lesbian—not ‘class’, but collective identity. It is the middle class in terms of its economic position, but it does not share the middle-class standard of reproduction (in all its meanings), which is heterosexist” (179). In my exploration of the West Village lesbian bars, it seems obvious to connect lesbians to the gentrified area, especially when that particular type of bar relies on the lesbian demographic to be present within that location. As Park Slope pushed for safety, so did the patrols in the West Village that Hanhardt's *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* addressed.

Before concluding, there is one more example that has recently emphasized the business model of working with non-profits. NYC Dyke Bar Takeover posted an event on Facebook for a January 2018 event titled, Dyke Night 2018 at Island to Island Brewery, which is not a queer bar, but a brewery based in Brooklyn that sometime hosts events. The event’s description reads as followed:

Join Us at Island to Island Brewery. Music, amazing queers, respect and love...

Proceeds from our event will be donated to a LGBTQ org TBD.

Island to Island Brewery will be hosting a Queer Brew Class for our beer loving queers. More information forthcoming.

Our beautiful dyke-tastic performers for DYKE NIGHT 2018: Frilucha is an all womyn, Brooklyn based band. The Frilucha Collective is responsible for producing a biannual zine entitled, *Feminism Not Chickenshit*. They were founded in 2016 and play a mix of blues, soul and jazz. DJ Andro hails from the beautiful San Francisco Bay.

As dedicated to the experience of the of the crowd as she is to her music selection, she's only satisfied if the dance floor is full. She is a member of the new NYC collective, NEON TRIBE and founder of Dyke Disco. (Dyke Nite 2018)

The Facebook page ultimately announced the non-profit, while I am not certain this happened before, after, or during the event²⁴, claiming:

Proceeds from our event will be donated to The American Indian Community House's Two-Spirit programming, an Indigenous non-profit in NYC. All funds from this event will specifically be used to support Two-Spirit community members utilizing The American Indian Community House. (Dyke Bar Takeover)

When I viewed the event sometime in December, that is when their post read: "Proceeds from our event will be donated to a LGBTQ org TBD." The fact that this event was created to revolve around a non-profit, without one actually partnering with them, seemed to provide further evidence that there are financial benefits to working with a non-profit, while additionally constructing the event as seemingly reputable. The unique issue here is that queer folks

²⁴ NYC Dyke Bar Takeover posted a day before the event stating to join them at "...8pm for our non-profit representative" (Dyke Bar Takeover).

interested in the event do not know where their money is going upfront²⁵, unless the organization was announced while tickets were still on sale. The fact is, businesses, or in this case, the Dyke Bar Takeover activist group that supports queer bar events, understands that there are additional profits to be made with the non-profit model. This strategy has been continuous with the West Village queer bars, and could certainly continue into the future.

CONCLUSION

While established bar owners in the West Village practice their new methods of financial success by navigating different types of customers, another shift in the possibility for queer space occurs. Stepping away from the West Village, there is a new queer bar dynamic that I have witnessed within the past few months. The recent turnover of Eastern Bloc, an East Village gay bar, into Club Cumming, seems to offer an unusual type of business plan, and possibly a different way of thinking about the future of newly formed queer bars. Before dissecting Club Cumming, it is important to note that while it has not been the subject of this paper, the East Village relates to the West Village in terms of gentrification. Moss explains in the first chapter of *Vanishing New York*, that the East Village began to gentrify in the 90s as a direct result of changes to Manhattan in the previous two decades:

In the late 1970s and '80s, under Mayor Ed Koch, City Hall's goal became to re-create New York, making it friendly to big businesses, tourists, real estate developers, and upscale professionals...Where early gentrification had been driven by middle-class people

²⁵ I use "upfront" here because throughout this essay there are no actual figures available to me that expose what percentage of patron's money is going to non-profits and to bars from their collaboration.

looking to move into affordable and diverse areas, now the city brought in big real estate developers and corporations with generous tax abatements and other government subsidies... This may have been the first time that gentrification was publicly called a “plan” and its racist, classist aim clearly spelled out. (37)

To add to this, Moss claims that Mindy Thompson’s “root shock,” a trauma one experiences when their space is destroyed by gentrification, is what has happened to him and other residents in the East Village (26). The East Village also caters to tourists and, as Moss emphasizes, people who may live in New York but are not originally from the neighborhood. In his first chapter, Moss describes such tourists as “basic bros,” or young, male gentrifiers who drive the bar business in the East Village (20). Moss cites Sarah Schulman who also alludes to this emerging group: “This new crew... came not to join or to blend in or to learn and evolve, but to homogenize” (22). “Basic bros” are unlike tourists in the sense that they have, in a very real way, rooted themselves in this neighborhood. They are also disparate from other New Yorkers in the sense that they wish to recreate the established culture of New York, and in particular the East Village. By their very existence in this neighborhood and in the bars they frequent, then, they are fundamentally changing and disrupting these spaces. While I have personally encountered these “basic bros” at many East Village bars, including 13th Step, Augurs Well, and Vbar (now named Colibri), Club Cumming seems to avoid or simply not attract them. So, in a city and neighborhood that is changing, how does a new, seemingly insignificant gay bar manage to maintain its queer demographic? Club Cumming, it seems, does not follow the models or methods described in this thesis.

In October 2017, Alan Cumming bought Eastern Bloc and envisioned his new club to be much like the after parties he would throw in his dressing room while he was doing the

Broadway play, *Cabaret*. The club's lineup offers repetition on certain days of the week where patrons can watch drag and/or musical performances, dance, and knit²⁶. Their happy hour is buy one, get one free, and regardless of that, their beers are underpriced at around \$5. After witnessing Daphne Always, a trans, drag performer and self-described, "Chanteuse, Empath, Lady, Philosopher," perform at Club Cumming one Friday night, I felt safety and community from the space—without having to pay a cover charge or an astronomical amount to drink and be entertained (Daphne Always).

Cumming, in an interview with *Lonely Planet*, admits: "I've always wanted to make people talk to each other instead of looking at their phones," and "to have a local bar that is home for artists and those who love them, that's important to me." Based on his business methods, Cumming's bar prices and entertainment lineup seemingly attract a queer population much like himself, and his sentiment does seem genuine. There are private fundraising events that Cumming and other celebrities participate in, but the general public would not typically join, or be allowed to enter on those nights. The support of local and professional entertainment offers an interesting opportunity that, much like the other queer bars throughout this paper, portrays to consumers where their finances are going. Club Cumming even offers the opportunity to knit, a task done at a bar that does not typically involve drinking. The queer spaces I have acknowledged throughout this thesis exclude or deter certain queer individuals for two reasons: not everyone is looking for nightlife, which potentially offers drinking and hyper-sexual situations, and because minors are unable to attend. Queer spaces are limited when it comes to lounging or consuming, unless you are going to places such as the local LGBT Center, so the

²⁶ Club Cumming's Facebook page posts monthly flyers with their lineups.

suggestion to dedicate time and space to knitting, a task much different from the typical bar offerings, seems to propose an additional, unique direction for queer entertainment.

For these reasons, I believe Club Cumming can potentially offer a new model for the New York City queer bar. In fact, Club Cumming seems to diverge from the practices of the other queer bars described in this thesis in its methods: Club Cumming is not advertised on tourist websites or New York City's website, it does not actively partner with existing queer bars or attempt to drive business through partnerships with nonprofits, and, notably, it's storefront is dark, minimalist, and nameless. Walking past Club Cumming, it appears inconsequential, and, for tourists and "basic bros," it is.

In the same ways that Club Cumming differentiates from the other queer bars described in this paper, through free entertainment, low drink prices, and an absence of vigorous branding and marketing, a concern for its sustainability and profits is reasonable. Regardless, Club Cumming still serves as a viable model for maintaining a commitment to a queer demographic in a changing and tourist-driven city, and it offers a starting ground for further research. Is it possible that queer spaces will always be at a loss, whether financially or in terms of demographic? With the current state of New York City, there is clearly a tendency for those operating queer bars to focus on this financial loss, catering to tourists and non-queer patrons in order to drive revenue, thus relegating their once queer spaces to repurposed artifacts. The hope, though, is that existing and future queer bars will find a balance between these two driving business strategies, melding a commitment to a local, queer, artist demographic with necessary marketing and programming. Whether or not Club Cumming continues to cater to queer New Yorkers at low prices, it still marks a moment in time for the queer bar and the potential for learning and adapting a valuable, more nuanced business strategy.

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