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# "Do you live on Spruce Street or are you straight?" The Boundaries of Philadelphia's Gayborhood and the Production of Queer Identities

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“DO YOU LIVE ON SPRUCE STREET OR ARE YOU STRAIGHT?”

THE BOUNDARIES OF PHILADELPHIA’S GAYBORHOOD AND THE PRODUCTION OF  
QUEER IDENTITIES

by

LAUREN E. MANLEY

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
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Abstract

“Do you live on Spruce Street or are you straight?”

The Boundaries of Philadelphia’s Gayborhood and the Production of Queer Identities

by

Lauren E. Manley

Adviser: Professor Sarah E. Chinn

**This thesis is an examination of queer residential and socializing patterns in Philadelphia during the 1930s through 1950s, and discussion of the relationships between geographic space, social location, and queer identity. The production and maintenance of the neighborhood known as the Gayborhood participated in the construction of a “gay” identity that was race, class, and gender specific. This specific identity formulation was maintained and mobilized by various groups for their own sense of identity and community building. Looking at other neighborhoods that also had significant queer residential and socializing populations during this period, I interrogate concepts such as identity, community, and visibility, as well as discussing the social factors involved in these geographic separations.**

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## Introduction

This thesis examines the relationships between geographic and social locations and the production of identity, by looking at queer communities in Philadelphia in the 1930s through the 1950s, and the production and maintenance of the Center City neighborhood now known as the Gayborhood. Through an examination of this history, the relationship between geographic space and queer identity is explored. The title of this paper, “Do you live on Spruce Street or are you straight?” a common queer saying in 1950s Philadelphia, implies that there was often a collapse between geographic location and queer identity.<sup>1</sup> I argue that through the production and maintenance of the Gayborhood a very specific formulation of “gay” identity was created, and that this identity was maintained and mobilized by multiple groups for their own sense of community building.

There are limited records available on Philadelphia’s queer communities prior to the 1960’s, and minimal research has been done, except for works by Marc Stein (*City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*) and the more recent (and tireless) research being done by Bob Skiba, archivist at the John J. Wilcox Jr. LGBT Archives at the William Way LGBT Community Center in Philadelphia. Therefore, I cite additional local histories to provide further information on queer movements and discourses circulating at the time, as well as to ground these discourses in an appropriate historical context.

There are many terms used throughout this paper, some of which I have attempted to define within the paper, many I have not. Overall, I frequently use the terms “gay,” “lesbian,”

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia. 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2004, 22.



and “queer” interchangeably. This practice is, in part, something that I do in my daily life; however, the choice to use “queer” while discussing a period when people would not identify as such was intentional. First, many of the individual narrators from historical texts did not necessarily identify with terms such as “gay” or “lesbian,” either throughout their lives or at the time of their interviews, but were engaged with non-heterosexual communities. For some, this non-identification was simply because they were unfamiliar with the terms “gay,” and “lesbian” as sexuality markers—this was especially true of “lesbian.” Others felt a stronger identification with other aspects of their identity, such as race or class, and therefore aligned themselves primarily with these identities. In some instances, individuals actively distanced themselves from the terms “gay” and “lesbian,” regardless of their own sexualities, because of the associations with certain types of people or ways of living. For those that did identify themselves (or were specifically identified by an author) as such, I retained those terms. Additionally, throughout the paper, I use “gay” in a couple of ways: when discussing those who were identified as such, or when discussing a particular group (those within the area now known as the Gayborhood) in comparison to other groups (those outside of the neighborhood), many of whom were those that intentionally distanced themselves from those in Center City.

Throughout the paper I discuss the terms “neighborhood,” “community,” and “identity” as relational. The first chapter discusses the use of neighborhood, and my distinction between that and community. “Neighborhood” is defined here as the physical, geographic space—a space with imagined and permeable boundaries, which are established and maintained by both those within and outside of that space. “Community” refers to the social networks, sometimes sharing a physical space but not necessarily. I use the term “neighborhood-community” to address the

linkage and overlap between the two, while maintaining them as distinct ideas. Community is often imagined as revolving around a sense of shared identity and experience.

The Gayborhood is a small neighborhood in the Center City area of Philadelphia. Between the 1930s and 1950s, it became both a residential and socialization site – I use “socialization” to simultaneously discuss individuals being social (“hanging out”) and being socialized into queer communities – for certain queer communities, a place where there was “safety in numbers.”<sup>2</sup> This was a period of intense queer cultural production and identity formation in the United States. Within bars, restaurants, and parks, queer individuals came together to socialize and began establishing concepts of individual and group identity, finding strength in these shared identities, and becoming more visible. Many historians of sexuality in the United States attribute an explosion in sexual cultures and identities to the impact of World War II.<sup>3</sup> During World War II, many parts of the country saw a shift in economic, political, social and sexual discourses. The war economy created new jobs after the Depression, especially in manufacturing and military-related industries. Women were urged to “join the fight” by going to work.<sup>4</sup> In addition to producing a new wage-earning population, there was a population shift as many migrated to industrial hubs. Living autonomously, and often away from their families, was a new experience for many. Additionally, these industrial hubs were often in cities large enough to provide a level of anonymity.

These concepts of autonomy and anonymity are central to many narratives of gay and lesbian experiences during the 1940s. According to Kennedy and Davis, whereas in the 1930s

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup> See John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 23-39; Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 152.

established gay and lesbian communities were found only in certain cities (New York, San Francisco), the 1940s, saw these communities being established in most U.S. cities.<sup>5</sup> Marc Stein suggests that the “Great Gay and Lesbian Migration” began in Philadelphia in the 1940s, a time when gay and lesbian individuals flocked to the city in order to congregate in specific queer spaces, specifically Center City, as well as West Philadelphia and the Germantown/Mt. Airy areas.<sup>6</sup> Anonymity and the ability to separate work/family life from social life were often viewed as imperative for the ability to socialize within queer spaces. Center City, however, became both a socializing and residential site for certain queer communities. In other words, there was no geographic separation between the social sphere and where one lived. This lack of separation was actually seen as an asset by some. For instance, the proximity of apartments to Rittenhouse Square (a major socializing/cruising site) was viewed as an advantage.<sup>7</sup>

Although World War II was a generative period for reimagining gender and sexuality in the United States, looking at the changes that occurred in the previous decade helps to account for this productivity. The beginning of the Great Depression, the end of Prohibition, and the implementation of New Deal programs, among other factors, all participated in setting the stage for the transformations in the 1940s. Beginning from this moment, I explore how the Gayborhood was created and maintained as a “gay” space, the ways in which this space participated in the production of “gay” identity, and how this specific identity formation was utilized by various groups to create a sense of community. I will look at the changes produced through the shifts in labor and housing, the creation of the theatre district and the rise of “musical

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

bars,” the introduction of the Morals Squad and the escalation in the policing of queer communities, the ways in which queerness was sometimes commodified, creating a liminal space of conditional acceptability, and the possibilities of the bounded Gayborhood confining queerness *within* the boundaries and obfuscating queerness *outside* of the boundaries.

Although there has been some debate about the usefulness of an intersectional analysis, the primary critique being that intersectionality produces an “essentialized” subject situated within a “fixed” location, I have found it to be very useful within this analysis. Intersectionality’s efficacy relies on *how* it is being mobilized as a framework and methodology.<sup>8</sup> Intersectionality was originally introduced as a heuristic term, to highlight the problems of single-axis thinking—a “gender” analysis that assumes a “universally white” subject, a “race” analysis that assumes a “universally male” subject—it was never meant to be a “grand theory” or “standardized methodology.”<sup>9</sup> In this context, the call for intersectionality is meant to highlight the interactions between race, class, and gender dynamics within the context of queer cultural productions and the boundedness of the Gayborhood. As opposed to an exclusive focus on individual subjects and whose stories become obfuscated or “untellable”—although this is part of the project of expanding historical narratives—this invocation of intersectionality is also meant to highlight “technologies of population control.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, aside from wanting to develop historical narratives to address multiplicative identities and experiences—to illuminate the histories that have been ignored by overarching, single-axis, “visible” narratives—we also need to account for how and why these social and geographic divisions were maintained. My interest is in drawing

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<sup>8</sup> Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, “Toward a Field of Intersectional Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis,” *Signs* 38:4 (Summer 2013), 788.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 787-788.

<sup>10</sup> Dean Spade, “Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform,” *Signs* 38:4 (Summer 2013), 1031-2.

attention to the social and structural factors and processes of discrimination that contributed to the production of a primarily white, middle-class, gay male neighborhood; the ways in which this specific historical narrative becomes valued; and the ways in which this particular population becomes representative of queer communities and identity. The decisions of many lesbians and queer people of color to reside in areas outside of Center City, for instance, was not always a matter of preference (although this was true sometimes), but a coerced choice. Factors such as affordability, housing and job discrimination, the ability to be openly queer, as well as racism and sexism from the inhabitants within Center City, all participated in these residential and social patterns.

Chapter One, “The City of Neighborhoods,” explores the concept of the neighborhood, and the special relationship that the city of Philadelphia has to the neighborhood. Looking at the ways in which the role of the Philadelphia neighborhood changed during this time period, I examine the ways in which neighbors formed kinship networks, how these neighborhoods were policed to protect these networks, and how neighborhoods changed as these networks migrated around the city. Next, “‘Made Gay’: The Birth of the Gayborhood,” recounts how the area became a site for queer socialization and residence through shifts in housing and labor, its designation as an entertainment district, and the use of public parks and streets for cruising. The history provided here is partial, a mere snippet of an infinitely larger narrative. The focus on the roles of these three components (housing and labor, entertainment, and public space) is to highlight the ways in which visibility plays such a key role in identity constructions. In Chapter Three, “Outside the Boundaries,” I turn to the geographic spaces and community formations outside of the Center City neighborhood, especially in the areas of West Philly and Germantown/Mt. Airy. These spaces were demographically different than Center City, in terms

of race, class, and gender. In some instances, people also chose to inhabit these areas as a means to distance themselves from the visibility of the Center City queerness. Finally, in “Putting the ‘Gay’ in the Gayborhood,” I examine the ways in which the “gay” identity produced within and through the space of the Gayborhood was mobilized by various groups around the city.

## Chapter One: The City of Neighborhoods

*Ask a South Philadelphian where he comes from, and he'll say his corner or his parish or simply "South Philly." He will not say Philadelphia, because the connection is to the smaller entity, the community.<sup>11</sup>*

The geographic space known as “neighborhood” underwent an affective transformation in Philadelphia between the 1930s and 1950s. During this period, the boundaries of the neighborhood-community were solidified, as neighborhoods became a site for a form of kinship, and neighbors entered into a care-giving relationship. With this shift, the concept of belonging—who did and did not belong to the neighborhood-community—was cemented, and the neighborhood became viewed as something to protect. It is from this place that neighborhoods were transformed, as neighborhood-communities migrated around the city. In other words, the network/community created within these spaces/neighborhoods would move around the city together. Further in this chapter, a discussion of a West Philly area known as “the black bottom” is a prime example of this migration.

The term “neighborhood” is a core component in this thesis and merits closer analysis. In *Let the People Decide*, Robert Fisher states that while people have an understanding of their own neighborhoods, “they can give its boundaries; and they know who belongs and who is a newcomer,” defining the term is still difficult. This difficulty stems from differences in neighborhood consciousness, interactions between neighbors, and the amount and means of contact between the neighborhood and outside groups. Fisher utilizes a definition from the anthropologist Suzanne Keller, “a locality with physical boundaries, social networks,

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Dubin, *South Philadelphia: Mummies, Memories, and the Melrose Diner* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996), xiii.

concentrated use of area facilities, and special emotional and symbolic connotations for its inhabitants.”<sup>12</sup>

This definition, however, needs to be further complicated, as it speaks to only some neighborhoods. First, the “physical boundaries,” although perhaps understood by those both within and outside of a given neighborhood, are usually quite permeable. The boundaries of an area, at least in a twentieth-century US context, are rarely designated through the use of walls or fences, but are rather imagined boundaries maintained by inhabitants on both sides. These boundaries can shift over time, as neighborhoods expand and contract—always in relation to other surrounding neighborhoods. Additionally, Keller’s definition implies a sort of conclusive and idealistic relationship between the neighborhood, inhabitants, and neighbors, which does not account for the fluctuating and tenuous aspect of these terms. In Chapter Three, my discussion of queer communities outside of the Gayborhood, I will further discuss the ways in which a given neighborhood can have social networks, and emotional or symbolic associations to the space, that are not only multiplicative but may also be unknown or invisible to each other.

Some of the confusion or uneasiness in defining “neighborhood” is produced by a frequent collapse between “neighborhood” and “community.” Although these terms clearly overlap, within this work, “neighborhood” will refer to a shared geographic space with collectively understood boundaries, and “community” will refer to the social networks and emotional or symbolic associations to that network, which may or may not share the same physical space. It is the points at which these two concepts mesh and fracture that will be one of the main foci of this work.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Fisher, *Let the People Decide: Neighborhood Organizing in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), xix.



Philadelphia has a special relationship to the “neighborhood.” Although multiple cities are known as “a city of neighborhoods,”—Boston, Chicago, New York, St. Louis—Philadelphia lays claim to the title “*the* city of neighborhoods.” Philadelphia is frequently cited as the location of the first American urban neighborhood, as well as “our nation’s oldest residential street,” Elfreth’s Alley, both in South Philly. The neighborhood now known as Queen Village – bounded by Lombard Street on the north, Washington Avenue on the south, 5<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, and Front, Catherine, Queen Street and Columbus Boulevard on the east—was originally the land of the Lenni Lenape Indian tribe. Dutch settlers claimed the area in 1664, using the Lenni Lenape name “Wiccaco,” and retained “ownership” until 1682, when it was granted to William Penn, as a means to pay back Dutch debt. Penn renamed the area Southwark, after an English suburb. With a building boom and transformations already underway, the area was designated as the District of Southwark in 1762, as part of a project to facilitate standardized street building. Although the area continued to be built up and utilized by Philadelphia, it was not officially recognized as part of the city until 1854--perhaps a factor in the ongoing contention over being labeled a “Philadelphian” or “South Philadelphian.” In the late 1970s, the area was renamed once again, as Queen Village.

Any “city of neighborhoods” moniker acknowledges the concept of multiple, individualized spaces with distinct characteristics as parts of the whole, or city. However, the marking of Philadelphia as “*the* city of neighborhoods” serves to emphasize this fracturing as a vital characteristic of the city. Whether this intricacy was usurped by Philadelphia or was agreed upon with other cities, it reveals a sense of pride in these distinct, individualized parts. This pride is emphasized repeatedly as we look to Philadelphia’s history. Noteworthy, especially as we move to some of the individual neighborhoods in Philadelphia, is the tenuous relationship

between “the city of neighborhoods” and the well-known “City of Brotherly Love” slogan. While “Brotherly Love” implies a sense of harmony and togetherness—the whole – the focus on the individualized neighborhood-parts--highlights the separation (and segregation) of the different areas. When considering some of the patterns of racial and class segregation in the city’s neighborhoods, the sense is that the “Brotherly Love” is conditional on this separation. In other words, maintenance of neighborhood boundaries (both social and physical) is imperative for the continuation of harmony and togetherness. To cross these boundaries is then cast as a transgression.

Through examining select changes in Philadelphia during the period from 1930 to 1960, I highlight three main ideas: the interconnected neighborhood-community produces a sort of kinship network; the neighborhood-community produces a sense of needing to protect this kinship network; and this inability to protect results in the transformation of the neighborhood-community. Although these themes will be discussed through a brief historical narrative, these themes are not meant to be understood as having a linear or causal relationship. In certain instances, the transformation of the neighborhood-community appears to precede the formation of a kinship network or the attempt to protect the neighborhood from so-called strangers.

In 1930, Philadelphia was ranked the third largest city in the United States, with a population of 1,950,961. The metropolitan area experienced a massive explosion in population, increasing by over 42% during the previous decade.<sup>13</sup> The thriving city focused on increasing their mass transportation systems and on building skyscrapers, considered the “twentieth-century’s mark of a city’s coming of age.” Work was beginning on the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station,

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<sup>13</sup> *Bulletin Almanac* (Philadelphia: Bulletin, annual, 1933), 105.

Lincoln Liberty Bank (now the Philadelphia National Bank), the Reserve Bank, city courthouses and the Central Post Office. Most of this development was occurring in Center City, especially along Chestnut, Broad and Market Streets.<sup>14</sup> Initially, this boom overshadowed the murmurings of global economic despair.

Philadelphia, with its variety of manufacturing industries, is said to have survived the Great Depression better than most single-industry cities. Known as the “Workshop of the World,” Philadelphia’s productions included planes, trains, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, textiles and garments, food products, and it was a center for both publishing and the US Mint.<sup>15</sup> However, even before the stock market crash, approximately ten percent of the city’s wage earners were unemployed. This increased to fifteen percent by April 1930, and then continued to rise. Governmental and community organizations, as well as contributions from wealthy Philadelphians, attempted to provide relief for the hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers and their families. By June 1932, however, these funds were depleted.<sup>16</sup> Having little hope that the city would step in to help any time soon, those in need had to rely on relatives and neighbors for help.

As neighbors took on the responsibility to care for one another, an extended kinship network was developed. This is a point when “neighborhood” and “community” collapsed into a singular entity—those with whom you shared a space also became your network, with shared facilities, and emotional or symbolic bonds, for example, through caregiving. This is not to say, however, that some of these bonds were not present before this point. Most individuals coming

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret B. Tinkcom, “Depression and War, 1929-1946” in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, edited by Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), 603.

<sup>15</sup> The Philadelphia Inquirer, *Millennium Philadelphia: The Last 100 Years* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, Inc., 1999)

<sup>16</sup> Tinkcom, *Philadelphia*, 1982, 606-612.

to Philadelphia would congregate in a given neighborhood because of ethnic, religious, or class identities. According to Dubin, “the ethnic neighborhoods of South Philadelphia were a successful adaptation by immigrants to a new land...the ethnic familiarity in the neighborhood allowed the labeling of strangers. So strangers stayed away.”<sup>17</sup> Rather, this production of caregiving networks transforms a “community” based on familiarity and sameness into one based on dependency and survival.

Throughout the 1930s, there continued to be problems with resources in Philadelphia, especially with the availability and conditions of housing. There were some improvements under S. Davis Wilson, mayor from late-1935 until 1939, who supported many New Deal projects, including the Works Progress Administration, as well as many nongovernmental housing projects. With his resignation, however, there was a conservative backlash, rejecting any proposed funding for relief and housing in the city. It was only in preparation for incoming wartime workers that housing became a city priority once again.<sup>18</sup>

With the addition of a booming, war-centered industry, Philadelphia’s economy began to bounce back.<sup>19</sup> As World War II approached, the “Workshop of the World” became the “Arsenal of America,” with production of durable goods increasing thirty-three percent by 1940, as well as payrolls increasing by twelve percent.<sup>20</sup> The city’s firms were awarded approximately one-billion dollars in defense contracts. City and state officials realized that there would be an influx of laborers to the city—and in fact, there was a call for men to be “imported” to the city in order to fulfill the increase in labor needs<sup>21</sup>--and they began to construct temporary housing units, with

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<sup>17</sup> Dubin, *South Philadelphia*, 1996, xii.

<sup>18</sup> Tinkcom, *Philadelphia*, 1982, 615.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 635.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 606-612

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 641.

8000 two-story buildings going up between 1940 and 1941.<sup>22</sup> As people began flooding the city, there was a shift from exclusively single-family residences, occasionally housing boarders, to rooming-houses with multiple individual inhabitants.

The increase in housing, however, was not enough to accommodate the increase in population. Many families left the southern and central areas of the city, moving to the northern and western areas. Racism was also a factor, as the racial demographics shifted dramatically during this period. Between 1930 and 1960, the city's black population grew by 300,000, increasing from 11.4% to 26.4% of the city's population.<sup>23</sup> Neighborhood associations, such as the Angora Civic Association in West Philadelphia, organized to keep blacks from moving into their neighborhoods. Using the pretext of "property values," they argued that they needed to protect their homes and neighborhoods from "neighborhood problems" and "the changing of communities."<sup>24</sup> Although the ACA did not use explicitly racialized language, there was a discursive connection made between black people moving into a neighborhood and the loss of white property values. In fact, by focusing their discussions on "property" rather than "people," the ACA were able to refute the claims that they were discriminating based on race. The tactics of the ACA were undeniably racist, however, as they encouraged white neighbors to use "psychological methods" to protect their homes and neighborhoods, including threatening black families that were considering moving to the neighborhood, vandalism of property, and repeatedly visiting the homes of black families who had moved in and asking them to leave.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 637.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 19.

“Blockbusting” is the idea that, if a single home on a block is sold to a black family, all of the white families on the block will be forced to move. While some real estate companies reportedly used “blockbusting” as a selling tactic—opening up other homes in an area when the white families left—others began promoting “safety” and “stability” of neighborhoods when selling to white families.<sup>26</sup> One such neighborhood that was “blockbusted” was an eastern section of West Philly known as “the black bottom.” Initially, a rather small area of West Philly, realtors began specifically advertising homes in the surrounding area to black families. In comparison to the overcrowding and poor condition of the housing in South Philly, the chance to move to the “newer” parts of the city was attractive. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the area known as “the black bottom” continued to expand west, and many white residents moved to the new suburban developments outside of West Philly.<sup>27</sup>

Neighborhoods expanded and contracted, or transformed completely. This pattern was repeated throughout Philadelphia, as different racial/ethnic/class-based communities migrated across the city, claiming different spaces as their own. Similarly, and overlapping with these patterns of racial and classed-organized migrations, self-consciously queer neighborhood-communities were formed in the city.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 22-4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two: “Made Gay”: The Birth of the Gayborhood

*“When I moved to Philadelphia, I was told there was a saying: ‘Do you live on Spruce Street or are you straight?’”<sup>28</sup>*

In 1992, at Outfest, a giant block-party festival celebrating National Coming Out Day, *City Paper*’s David Warner nonchalantly declared “It’s a beautiful day in the gayborhood!” and thus, the Gayborhood was named.<sup>29</sup> Located in the Center City section of South Philadelphia, roughly bounded between Chestnut and Pine Streets, from Broad to 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, the neighborhood has remained within these geographic parameters since at least the 1930s. Although some of the more generous descriptions of the neighborhood place it more fluidly within the southeast and southwest quadrants of Center City, including Rittenhouse and Washington Squares, the boundaries of the Gayborhood were solidified, between 2007 and 2010, as rainbow street signs were placed along the borders and throughout the neighborhood. Additionally, the area is now promoted by the city of Philadelphia as a gay tourist destination (with the trademarked slogan “Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay” on Philadelphia’s official travel website).<sup>30</sup> However, the Gayborhood was not always seen as promotable or “desirable,” but rather was viewed as the location of those deemed depraved—the perverts, the poor, and the perpetually intoxicated.<sup>31</sup>

With the ending of Prohibition, the beginning of the Great Depression, the enactment of the New Deal, booms in national infrastructure and technological advancement, and an

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<sup>28</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Skiba, “The Roots of the Gayborhood, The Eve of A Milestone,” *Hidden City Philadelphia*, accessed August 2014, <http://www.hiddencityphila.org/2014/02/the-roots-of-the-gayborhood-the-eve-of-a-milestone/>

<sup>30</sup> “Philadelphia-Get Your History Straight And Your Nightlife Gay,” *Visitphilly.com*, accessed December 2013, <http://www.visitphilly.com/c/gay/>

<sup>31</sup> Bob Skiba, *The Philadelphia Gayborhood Guru*, accessed December 2013, <http://the-gayborhoodguru.wordpress.com>

increasing worldwide power struggle, which involved frequent invasions and constantly shifting global alliances, the decade of the 1930s was a tumultuous time across the globe. As the previous chapter discussed, Philadelphia's economic shifts produced changes in the city's housing patterns, and the ways in which people thought of and relied upon their neighborhoods. The end of the decade created new jobs and brought a wave of new people to the city, predominantly younger, single, wage-workers. Often these individuals would find housing together, as roommates, in boarding houses. It was predominantly a way to save money; however, it also allowed same-sex, single individuals to cohabitate "legitimately." In addition to the shift in living arrangements, this group is accredited in historical narratives with the production of leisure time and spaces.<sup>32</sup> These particular shifts in housing and spaces for leisure and socialization played a significant role in the creation of the neighborhood now known as the Gayborhood. The neighborhood was first known as a space for queer socialization, but later, perhaps in the late-forties and definitely by the 1950s, it also became marked as a queer residential space.

The area in the 1930s was a central spot for theatre and entertainment, with seven of the ten most popular theatres located in the neighborhood. Earlier in the century, Oscar Hammerstein noted that most people would not go north of Market Street "to hear even the greatest singers,"<sup>33</sup> a point emphasized by the closure of two of the three theatres outside of the boundaries by the 1940s. Although these theatres were predominantly places for music, plays, and film, some of the theatres began featuring burlesque performances, in order to endure the financial instability of the Depression. As the theatre district became more contained, and the type of entertainment

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<sup>32</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> The Philadelphia Inquirer, *Millennium Philadelphia*, 1999.



changed, the neighborhood was further transformed. According to Bob Skiba, the Forrest Theater, located on Walnut and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, “changed the tone of the neighborhood. Restaurants catering to the theatre patrons sprung up...”<sup>34</sup> These restaurants and nightspots, also called “music bars” or “entertainment bars,” became unofficial “gay” spaces — “appears straight but sufficiently active to make it worthwhile.”<sup>35</sup> One such establishment, the Venture Inn, currently a gay bar in the Gayborhood, was established as a tea room for “New Women” and bohemian circles in 1919, became a restaurant in 1931, and finally transitioned into a “musical bar” after World War II. Although the first public mention of the Venture Inn having gay clientele was not until 1962, it is frequently noted as one of the oldest gay bars in Philadelphia, at latest by the 1950s and perhaps earlier<sup>36</sup>

These “musical” or “entertainment bars,” which were, but were not, “gay spaces,” played an important role in queer cultural formations, and not just in Philadelphia. Debra, one of the narrators in Kennedy & Davis’ history of Buffalo, in describing the entertainment bars of the 1940s, stated that, “I knew it wasn’t [a gay bar] but you did meet a lot of gay people there... Naturally if you didn’t know anything about gay people you wouldn’t know if they were gay or not.” Kennedy and Davis continue, “although [they] were not gay spaces in the sense that gays and lesbians could not be open about who they were, they did provide a space where lesbians could be comfortable.”<sup>37</sup> This complex grey area appeared as a common aspect of gay and lesbian bar life. There was a dualism in the ability to inhabit a space and to be comfortable and safe in certain bars, as long as one’s behavior was not too visible as “gay.”<sup>38</sup> Being too

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<sup>34</sup> Skiba, *The Philadelphia Gayborhood Guru*.

<sup>35</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 70.

<sup>36</sup> Skiba, *The Philadelphia Gayborhood Guru*

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 1994, 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

visible meant acting in ways that would draw attention from the outside, whether neighbors or the police, which could result in physical violence, frequent harassment by the police, and the loss of a liquor license. This brings up a crucial aspect of what is meant when discussing “visibility”—“visible” to whom? Linda Alcoff discusses how invisible identities will highlight “visible markers” when mobilizing politically, as in markers that will be legible to those “outside” of the group, suggesting that visibility in this context (and in the context of being “too visible”) is dependent upon the terms of others.<sup>39</sup> In the example of “entertainment bars,” however, Debra alludes to an “in-group” visibility, or invisible visibility. George Chauncey discusses the use of these “in-group” markers in his discussion of attire in New York, with certain colors or articles of clothing being read as a “marker” by other homosexuals or individuals “in the know.”<sup>40</sup> Although there was some evidence that there were “markers” in Philadelphia during this period, these tended to take the form of transgressing normative gender (feminine attire/behavior in men, masculine in women) and therefore, were most likely visible to those “outside” as well. Most of the narrators spoke more about the use of (discreet) word of mouth to identify spaces where gay men and lesbians congregated.<sup>41</sup>

Most of the bar owners in the 1940s were heterosexual and, as Kennedy and Davis point out, most of the establishments were opened as business enterprises, not out of sympathy for gay and lesbian communities.<sup>42</sup> Frequently a bar was “made gay” when business was lagging. At this point, a few gays or lesbians would venture into the bar and, if accepted, a few more would come. Eventually, enough people would come to the bar that it would transition into a “gay

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<sup>39</sup> Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford UP, 2006), 6.

<sup>40</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 52.

<sup>41</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 1994, 40.

space.”<sup>43</sup> Stein, as well as Kennedy and Davis, indicate that these “gay spaces” were vital for gays and lesbians to find each other in the 1940s – for socialization and the formation of friendships and intimate relationships.

Many of the establishments that queer communities frequented were connected to organized crime.<sup>44</sup> Philadelphia, as well as other cities, saw a rise in organized crime activity and political corruption beginning in the 1930s. After Prohibition ended, bootleggers in Philadelphia “maintain[ed] their dominance by whatever means necessary,” turning to gambling, prostitution, and drugs, as well as continuing to operate nightclubs and restaurants. Partnerships between organized crime, the police, and politicians was solidified and public awareness of these activities increased, as many of Philadelphia’s newspapers began reporting on these arrangements.<sup>45</sup> In the next couple of decades, organized crime syndicates were very involved in the running of bars and restaurants frequented by queer customers, either directly or indirectly, and their relationships to the police allowed them to avoid closure and regulate raids. Police raids were used as a means to detain, question, entrap, and arrest owners, employees, and customers. Establishments frequented by queer clientele were viewed as hotbeds of vice and deviance—a viewpoint that was compounded by the close ties to organized crime and the connections with prostitution, gambling, and illegal drugs. The most common charge was “disorderly conduct,” as well as charges such as solicitation, endangering a minor, and sodomy. Even if not charged, lesbians and gay men were still at risk for blackmail, verbal or physical assault by the police, and exposure to their families and employers, among other ramifications.<sup>46</sup> The role of the bar owner

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Tinkcom, *Philadelphia*, 1982, 627-30.

<sup>46</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 50-51.

was crucial to these spaces staying open, and often the clientele became dependent on these owners for a sense of protection, especially from the police or violence from the neighborhood that might draw the attention of the police.<sup>47</sup>

The increase in “musical bars,” as well as the growing presence of other organized crime activities (prostitution, gambling, and drugs) transformed the area into a location known for vice and depravity. Similar to the pattern that was discussed in chapter one, as “undesirables” began to inhabit the area, the families that previously lived in the area began to move out. The housing that was now opened up was frequently in disrepair. In 1950, for example, 70,000 dwellings in South Philadelphia were reported as being dilapidated or lacking necessary facilities, such as a bathroom. Marc Stein points to a series of “Renaissance” or “renewal” projects (what we would now call gentrification), beginning in the 1950s, as an explanation for the gay residential patterns in Center City,

As scholars of other cities have noted, gay men played significant roles in early stages of gentrification. Attracted to areas that had relatively cheap and aesthetically appealing housing; that were near valued social, economic, and cultural institutions; and that were close to other areas of gay concentration, gay men became owners, landlords, and tenants in the gentrification process.<sup>48</sup>

Several of Stein’s interviewees agreed with this idea, arguing that “gays were smart...why not live where the theaters are and the restaurants and the movies?...Because gays like things nicer, just have better taste...Gay boys move in, there goes the neighborhood, there goes the real estate value.”<sup>49</sup> Some suggested that some landlords in the area even liked having

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<sup>47</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California Press, 2003), 63-4.

<sup>48</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

gay tenants “because they were clean and they would fix the place up. They would paint it, they would wallpaper it, they would decorate it.”<sup>50</sup>

Several of Stein’s narrators indicated that one of the perks of cruising in Washington and Rittenhouse Squares, both near to the neighborhood, was that many of the men in the park also lived nearby, providing a public space to meet someone with close proximity to a private space (and therefore less risk of violence).<sup>51</sup> Parks as sites of queer socialization and cruising in Philadelphia, specifically Washington Square and Rittenhouse Square, predate World War II and the bar scenes.<sup>52</sup> Jane Jacobs’ 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, for example, discusses the decades-long reputation of Washington Square as “Philadelphia’s pervert park...an unmanageable vice and crime problem.”<sup>53</sup>

The streets themselves were also an active site for cruising and socialization. The more active streets generally changed over time, especially as police presence increased, but three particular spots in Center City were noted as remaining the most popular over decades: Spruce Street, the Locust Strip (roughly running between 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Broad Street), and the Merry-Go-Round (an area where cars and pedestrians circled Spruce, 18<sup>th</sup>, Delancey and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets).<sup>54</sup> For gay men the streets produced a hypervisibility, whereas lesbians were “seen” as invisible on the streets. Both gay and lesbian narrators suggested that this (in)visibility created a space conducive to meeting other queers.<sup>55</sup> On the streets and within parks, without the “protection” of bar owners, there were high risks presented by both the police and “straights” that would

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 94-97.

sometimes target the more well-known sites.<sup>56</sup> Lesbians and gay men, however, continued to cruise and socialize on the streets, despite the risk, because street life was often easier to find than the bars.<sup>57</sup> The existence of cruising in parks and on the streets is important to note, as it not only reveals a claiming of businesses and residences as “gay” space, but also the streets themselves.

Queer communities reached new levels of visibility in the late 1940’s and 1950s. As certain locations such as Rittenhouse and Washington Squares became known as places to “meet people,” communities were formed. Individuals who were generally less- or invisible as “gay,” became more visible as such through the act of sharing this space. For example, lesbians sometimes became more visible when they were with gay men. As most lesbians tended to be less visible in public spaces than gay men, it was through their association that they became recognizable. This increased visibility, however, was dependent upon race, ethnicity, class, gender, and place. More masculine-presenting women were already more visible than more feminine-presenting women because of their transgression of normative gender roles. Additionally, queer people of color were differently visible depending on the racial/ethnic composition of a space.<sup>58</sup>

Within this period we also see the beginning of certain groups reaching a “tipping point” of sorts—acknowledging that they would be labeled as “deviant,” and embracing this label instead of attempting to dodge it. The act of claiming, and sometimes preferring, spaces such as these streets and parks, away from the doors, passwords, and protection of the bars and private residences, is itself a form of resistance. The preference for public space was based on multiple

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 96, 98.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 86.

factors including availability without the constraint of business hours or during periods when friendly businesses were lacking, the lack of surveillance on touching, and the ability to access these spaces when underage.<sup>59</sup> While some individuals stated that public space maintained their invisibility and anonymity, others felt that it created heightened visibility and publicity. This increased visibility was controlled by several social and political factions, through simultaneous forms of “acceptability” and suppression.

There was the temporary illusion of acceptance when queerness was viewed as a form of entertainment (especially by presumed heterosexuals), as a way for struggling business owners to make money, or, in later years, as a draw for tourism. The earlier “musical” bars, often having effeminate men or drag queens as performers, became an extension of the theatre outing experience for some heterosexual patrons. Later, the acceptance of queer clientele enabled failing businesses to remain open. This “acceptance,” however, hinged on the continuation of this commodification and could be rescinded at any time. In other words, queerness could be “accepted” if it was viewed as profitable, whether financially (bars, housing) or socially, as a means to contain queerness in a certain time and space, but this “acceptability” was always conditional.

Aside from the suspended disapproval found within the “musical” bars, another liminal space was the annual Mummers’ Parade. In Philadelphia, the Mummers’ parade was seen as “the one night of the year when (men) wearing female costumes was not incongruous nor illegal.”<sup>60</sup> Mummers’ performances in Philadelphia first began in the 1800s, however the first official parade was in 1901. The Mummers’ Parade, a heavily-costumed, fanciful, New Year’s Day

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 106.

procession along Broad Street celebrates South Philadelphian pride, “cross(ing) ethnic, religious, and gender lines...It had to do with being from South Philadelphia. It had to do with making your own fun, because you couldn’t afford to buy enjoyment.”<sup>61</sup> In *Strange Loves: A Study in Sexual Abnormalities* (1933), La Forest Potter wrote that, “for quite a number of years, the first prize has *always gone to a ‘fairy,’* made up as a woman.”<sup>62</sup> Part of this prize pattern is because women were banned from marching in the parade until 1983 and therefore, “women” were almost always “female impersonators” before this point. Additionally, there was less of a direct correlation made between cross-dressing and homosexuality, at least during the time and space of the Mummies’ Parade. Discussing John Pooler, a South Philadelphia resident who began marching at eight years old in 1934, Murray Dubin writes,

men and boys dressing up as women has been routine with the Mummies’ Parade for more than a hundred years. Pooler’s parents had no qualms because boys throughout the neighborhood were dressed and parading as wenches on January 1<sup>st</sup>. His mother did draw the line, however, ‘I asked my mother about gilding my shoes gold. No way, she said. I had to get down to the dump and find an old pair of shoes, bring them home, clean them up real good, and put the gold gilt and sparkle stuff on it.’<sup>63</sup>

The implication is that wearing women’s clothing was acceptable within the time and space of the parade—you would not gild the shoes that you would have to wear on January 2<sup>nd</sup>—and that this transgression was nullified because it was “routine” or traditional. However, there were also reports, especially post-World War II, of queer New Years’ partygoers, in drag, running into and joining the Mummies’ Parade.<sup>64</sup> As the Potter quotation further establishes,

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<sup>61</sup> Dubin, *South Philadelphia*, 1996, 39.

<sup>62</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 105.

<sup>63</sup> Dubin, *South Philadelphia*, 1996, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Skiba, *The Philadelphia Gayborhood Guru*



“fairies” were winning the prize, a very specific category that marked one as both feminine-presenting and someone who engaged in homosexual activities<sup>65</sup>

The participation of gay drag queens continued after World War II, throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s. Both this New Year’s Day event and the Halloween parade were times and spaces where drag queens could walk openly through the streets of Philadelphia, “challenging everyday boundaries between the ‘private’ and the ‘public,’ between ‘women’ and ‘men,’ and between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity.’”<sup>66</sup> The massive crowds that would flock from all over to attend the parades transformed queer cultures and identities into a commodifiable spectacle. Later in the 1950s and 1960s, with the advancement of Frank Rizzo into positions of increasing power, these parades were a site of increased policing and violence.<sup>67</sup> However, in the 1940s, it was a moment when the “unacceptability” of queer visibility became temporally and spatially acceptable.

Frank Rizzo, the police officer turned mayor of Philadelphia, is one of the more well-known anti-gay figures in the city’s history. Rizzo made policing queer communities, spaces, and visibility itself, a top priority throughout his career.<sup>68</sup> Another lesser known figure was Judge James Crumlish. In 1950, Crumlish helped establish the neuropsychiatric department in the Quarter Sessions Court, and the “morals squad,” a new part of the Police Department “necessitated” by “the increasing number of sex offenders,” most of whom were charged with sodomy.<sup>69</sup> In the *Legal Intelligencer* on December 11, 1950, Crumlish explained the reasons behind the morals squad: “sexual perverts, because of lack of control, had become very bold and

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<sup>65</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 1994, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 105.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-109.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-76.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

were using public toilets and other public buildings as meeting places; they operate and communicate by instincts and signs peculiar to themselves and are ever on the alert for new recruits.”<sup>70</sup> With each of these attempts to suppress queerness, however, came more visibility.

Some additional factors in both the backlash and increased visibility were the publication of the Kinsey Reports-- *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female* (1953)— the “sex murder” panic in Philadelphia’s media culture, and the antigay political campaign known as the Lavender Scare. The publications of the Kinsey Reports made American sexuality, and especially homosexuality, more overtly visible in popular discourses. The Kinsey researchers indicated that “homosexual communities” within Philadelphia made up a large portion of their case studies, and many of the responses to the publication implicated Philadelphia as a more ‘accepting’ city.<sup>71</sup> Philadelphia newspapers became a place to refute these claims. The sensationalized “sex murder” panic from 1949 to 1955, in which the media linked male same-sex sexualities and violent crimes,<sup>72</sup> as well as the collapse between male same-sex sexualities, immorality and criminality within medical and legal press<sup>73</sup> produced the image of the criminal (male) homosexual.<sup>74</sup> A prime example of this was the killing of 12-year old Ellis Simons by 16-year old Seymour Levin, in which the brutality of Simons’ death was amplified by reports that his body was found naked, thereby marking the crime as “a sex murder.”<sup>75</sup> Throughout the trial and within the media, there was an assumption that the sexual

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<sup>70</sup> Marc Stein, “City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: The Making of Lesbian and Gay Movements in Greater Philadelphia, 1948-72” (PhD Diss, U of Pennsylvania, 1994), 70.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>72</sup> “Simons Tragedy Recalls Similar Murder Case,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 15, 1949, 3; “Police Reveal Morals Motive in Sadistic Scissor Slaying,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, January 12, 1949, 3; “Two Swarthy Strangers Sought In Ice Pick Killing,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 21, 1950, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Stein, “City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves,” 1994, 122.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>75</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 118-119.

activity was forced, contrary to some of the evidence, and that this “perversion” alone was the motive for the crime.<sup>76</sup> This homosexual “sex-angle” continued in the media portrayal of other murder cases, even when there was no evidence of such motives. In the context of these specific popular images, however, gay men and lesbians were able to “read themselves in and against the representations,” both of themselves and of each other, creating “both stronger bonds and stronger conflicts” between gay men and lesbians.<sup>77</sup> The witch-hunt-style purges in the government during the Lavender Scares added to an environment of fear, anxiety and secrecy for queers in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Between 1947 and 1950, 4,954 individuals were dismissed from the armed services and civilian agencies for being homosexual<sup>79</sup>, as well as at least 144 from the U.S. State Department, although specific numbers were either not meticulously recorded or reported.<sup>80</sup> After 1950, the search-and-purge tactics within the U.S. government escalated, as well as moving beyond Washington, D.C. and the State Department. These attacks on perceived homosexuals signaled a backlash against 1940s queer visibility. As Kennedy and Davis state, “Such active persecution...stands as an indisputable testimony to the development of lesbian and gay subculture during the 1940s. Without the increased presence of lesbians and gays in U.S. social life, there would not have been any need to target them.”<sup>81</sup>

Visibility plays a huge role in the discussion of the Gayborhood and the ways in which neighborhood, community, and identity are co-produced. Who is visible as an inhabitant of a

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<sup>76</sup> Ari Worthman, “Murder Trial of a Sex Psychopath: The Construction of Homosexuality in Mid-Twentieth Century America,” (BA Thesis, Haverford College, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 137.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-180.

<sup>79</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 140.

<sup>80</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 76.

<sup>81</sup> Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 1994, 69.

given area, and by whom? Who is visible as a member of a given identity group, and by whom? And how do these forms of visibility come together? A neighborhood identity, as well as that of its inhabitants, is generally discussed in singular terms—Little Italy, Chinatown, the rich part of town, the black or Jewish or Polish area, the gay neighborhood. However, the neighborhood now known as the Gayborhood, as well as those residing and socializing there, were not just gay, but also white, and predominantly male. Nevertheless, the neighborhood and community remained marked as “gay,” almost exclusively.

There is some debate over whether or not the Gayborhood was actually a gay neighborhood, as well as who was included in this understanding of “gay.” In Stein’s history, many of the gay male narrators rejected the idea of a gay neighborhood or gay community entirely, “Center City did, even back in the forties, tend to attract gay people...the only gay clubs that I knew of...were in Center City...but (it was) mostly straight.”<sup>82</sup> A majority of the lesbian narrators believed that the area *was* a “gay” neighborhood but disagreed about whether or not this description included lesbians. Although several agreed that there was a significant lesbian population living within Center City (about a third of lesbian homes), especially during the 1940s and early 1950s, they tended to go unnoticed.<sup>83</sup> Many lesbians, however, lived outside of the neighborhood, including in “borderline neighborhoods,” because of factors such as cost or a desire to remain private or invisible (including for job security).<sup>84</sup> The “gay ghetto” in Center City was seen as being “white and male,” so some lesbian narrators said that while they socialized there, they lived elsewhere. Many black narrators also indicated that this area was marked as “white,” and that “Most African American gay and lesbian people...if they were from

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 29-33.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 31.

Philly, they lived in the neighborhood they grew up in” or they would be in North Philly or West Philly.<sup>85</sup> The narrators discussed the racism within Center City, especially from white gay men, but segregated housing discrimination also contributed to this division. Racially restrictive agreements between homeowner associations (such as the ACA), developers, and realtors, as well as mortgage redlining, severely limited housing options.<sup>86</sup> Kendall, a white gay man who was in an interracial relationship, recounted that they “never ran into any problem about two men living together (in Center City),” but that when he went to look for an apartment, he “didn’t want Billy showing up because I thought there would be a problem...because of racism.”<sup>87</sup>

The social and structural forces that contributed to these exclusions included the cost of living for the neighborhood – especially in comparison to the affordability of other Philadelphia neighborhoods – housing and job discrimination, the ability to be openly queer, as well as racism and sexism from the inhabitants within Center City. Many lesbians and queer people of color resided in areas outside of Center City because of these factors. With these nuances in mind, we turn to some of the other sites of queer residence and socialization. These sites, primarily the Germantown/Mt. Airy area and West Philly, were also spaces of queer community and identity formations, and yet, are not marked as “gay” in the same ways that the Gayborhood is marked. The invisibility of these neighborhoods and communities, however, was not always an enforced obfuscation and silencing, but also, a self-imposed, productive invisibility.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>86</sup> Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town*, 2012, 12-15.

<sup>87</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 33.

### Chapter Three: Outside the Boundaries

*“The only part of the city that gay people ever lived in has been the Center City downtown area or something that’s fairly close to it.”<sup>88</sup>*

The Center City neighborhood now known as the Gayborhood was not the only space inhabited by queer communities, even if it is the only one recognized as such. The Gayborhood was (and is) a site of queer residence and socialization; however, much like the distinction we saw with the marking of a/the “city of neighborhoods,” the article articulation is very significant. Although the “the” is more implicit here, the naming of one neighborhood as the “Gayborhood,” literally a blending of “gay” and “neighborhood,” implies that it is the (main) site of queer communities. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, those whom resided and socialized in the neighborhood were not only gay, but also predominantly white and male. So, where was everyone else? Two other areas that are often thought of as having substantial queer formations during this period are West Philly and the Germantown/Mt. Airy area. West Philly, briefly discussed in chapter one, is west of Center City, roughly bounded by the Schuylkill River on the east and north, Baltimore Avenue and Grays Ferry Road to the south, and the city boundary to the west. Within West Philadelphia, two neighborhoods, Powelton Village and University City, are cited as neighborhoods where lesbians tended to live. Germantown/Mt. Airy are located in the northwest section of the city, north and east of Fairmount Park, and is farther away from Center City than West Philly. Germantown and Mt. Airy are actually two neighborhoods, with Mt. Airy to the east of Germantown, but frequently get collapsed and discussed interchangeably within historical accounts.

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<sup>88</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 23.

Philadelphia was one of the first cities to attempt to confront racial segregation, establishing the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter in 1951, and the resulting Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, a permanent city agency that confronted discrimination within the city.<sup>89</sup> However, the immediate effects were minimal and, as we saw in the previous chapters, racist discourses and violence amplified during this period. Much like the anti-gay backlash in response to increased queer visibility, black Philadelphians experienced retaliation in response to the increased awareness of race and racism, for example, the organization and tactics of the Angora Civic Association in West Philly; a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia in the early 1950s.<sup>90</sup> Many neighborhoods remained segregated, or “racially exclusive,” and continue to be today.

Between 1940 and 1960, Center City’s population became increasingly white. In 1940, Center City’s population was recorded as 21% African American and 22% non-Euro-American, well above the city averages. By 1960, however, these percentages dropped below the city average. A major factor in these changes had to do with the migration of various communities around the city. As discussed in Chapter One, West Philly, for example, became increasingly black, as white families moved to suburbs farther west and realtors advertised specifically to black communities. By 1950, West Philadelphia’s population had increased to 27.9% black (71.9% white) from 18.8% black (81.8% white), and by 1960, there was a jump to 52.4% black (47.2% white).<sup>91</sup> Many of the new inhabitants of West Philly were former residents of Center City. As the demographics shifted, West Philly was marked as a “black neighborhood,” but there

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<sup>89</sup> Hillary S. Kativa, "Commission on Human Relations," *Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia*, accessed December 2013, <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/people-and-places/commission-human-relations>

<sup>90</sup> Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town*, 2012, 21.

<sup>91</sup> West Philadelphia Community History Center, University Archives, University of Pennsylvania, 2009.

were fewer conversations about the (un)marking of Center City as a “white neighborhood.”

Although most of Stein’s (white) narrators did not specifically talk about race, a few referenced “a zone of class, race, sex, and sexual transition” along the southern edges of Center City, where there were biracial and multiracial households.<sup>92</sup>

Many of the African-American narrators in Stein’s narrative discussed the restrictions in travelling the city, in general, and that they were “just not as free to move around...There’s a matter of money and there’s a matter of ‘don’t come into our neighborhood’.”<sup>93</sup> This restriction extended to the Center City neighborhood, where “a kind of line of demarcation” still existed, well into the sixties, “where black gays only went north of Market and south of Pine or Lombard.”<sup>94</sup> Most of the “gay” bars were racially segregated, as well as segregated by class. “They... apparently... had a quota on the number of blacks that they would allow in there,” and “If you were very dark with real negroid features, they turned you away.” Some of the narrators reported being dismayed, assuming “that because gay people were an oppressed minority that there was more solidarity. Then of course I realized that just because you’re gay doesn’t mean you can’t have the prejudices that other white people have.”<sup>95</sup> Part of the segregation of bars was clearly due to institutionalized segregation discourses in the United States; however much of the racism discussed was an “informal” policing, by the bar owners as well as by the patrons.

As discussed above, the racial policing with the Center City neighborhood was not just in terms of the inability to access bars or housing, but also took the form of violence perpetrated by white gay men. Tyrone Smith, an African-American gay man, who lived in North Philly from the

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<sup>92</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 34.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 75.



1940s through the 1970s, stated that, “I would hear people say, ‘You don’t go on the other side of Market Street ‘cause the white faggots will beat you up.’”<sup>96</sup> Limiting access to the neighborhood, through actual or perceived violence and threats, was a symbolic restriction against membership to the community or identity. If the area known as the Gayborhood is viewed as a site of queer socialization, community and identity formations, and certain people are deterred from entering this space, are they not also being discouraged from participating in these formations? In other words, in what ways does the exclusion from particular spaces hinder the ability to participate in the production of a shared identity or sense of community?

Similarly, although there was a lesbian presence in the Center City neighborhood in the 1940s and 1950s, many of the gay men in the neighborhood either did not recognize their presence or did not consider them to be a part of the community. This statement, of course, was not always true, and there is evidence to support the formation of lesbian and gay networks. Mel Heifetz, a gay man who moved to Center City in the 1950s, suggested that, while there was gay/lesbian socialization due to a sense of a common identity or bond, many gay men and lesbians socialized for “strategic” reasons, “The women gave the appearance of being straight...Back then...you had far more contact with women. It was far more necessary to have a cover, to be part of your seemingly straight lifestyle.”<sup>97</sup> Attempting to describe the relationships between lesbians and gay men at the time is complicated, at best. There is some evidence of “mixing,” and some evidence of complete separation and disregard—“Oh yeah, women, lesbians, that’s right! Sorta forgot there was such a thing for a minute.”<sup>98</sup> Sometimes this separatist discourse was more intentional, “There were lots of gay men who really were

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 63.

sexist...They wanted to exclude women from gay bars...I was going out with someone who made a statement at a party once that he didn't like women and he didn't think they should be allowed in certain groups."<sup>99</sup> Aside from the effects of the more overt sexism of gay men in Center City, these convoluted relationships (or lack thereof) between gay men and lesbians speak to both the invisibility of queer women living within the Center City neighborhood, and the ways in which this invisibility may be related to the large concentration of queer women that chose to reside and socialize outside of the boundaries of this neighborhood.

The relationships between gay men and lesbians, and the invisibility of lesbians within the Center City neighborhood seem to be connected. Whereas lesbians could become more visible through their associations with gay men, we see above the ways in which gay men could become less visible through their associations with lesbians. Therefore, perhaps there was a productivity (at least from the point of view of certain gay men) in maintaining lesbian invisibility within the neighborhood. By maintaining this invisibility, it could be utilized by gay men as a strategy for protection from policing. This tactic, however, is certainly problematic in ways, as it figures lesbians as a tool of sorts—a tenuous positioning within the “community” formation. Invisibility was also used as a strategy by those that were less visible, such as queer women and people of color. Visibility can have a price, and therefore, the ability to be visible often speaks to a certain amount of privilege. Many of Stein's African-American and lesbian narrators discussed fears of visibility and the possible loss of jobs when discussing the preference of living and socializing in other areas of the city.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 54.

Many queer women in Philadelphia were said to have congregated in the neighborhoods of Germantown/Mt. Airy and West Philly. There were multiple reasons for this difference. Perhaps the most obvious reason was financial. Similar to the narrative of African-American migration patterns in the city, as the Center City neighborhood was increasingly redeveloped, and rents increased, many women chose to move to the more outer-areas of the city. In Stein's narrative, for instance, there seems to be a gap, between the 1940s and 1960s, of lesbian narrators who reported living in Center City, suggesting a migration in the 1950s to other areas. The neighborhoods recorded as having high concentrations of lesbians residing there were also marked as "black" or "mixed" neighborhoods. This is most likely a factor in why these areas were not recognized as being "gay" or "lesbian" neighborhoods, although they both had high-concentrations of gay and lesbian residents.

Some narrators suggested that lesbians were perhaps more dispersed than gay men. In other words, whereas gay men were assumed to cluster in a single area, it was believed that lesbians chose to live in couples or smaller groups ("nesting").<sup>100</sup> Others suggested that it was because of different socialization patterns, "gay men favored Center City (because)...Males go to bars more so they feel more comfortable if they're within walking distance..."<sup>101</sup> House parties were a space for queer socialization that did not risk public visibility, although it did necessitate some sort of previous knowledge or connection, as they were invite only. Parks, streets, bars and restaurants—the most common sites of socialization for many white, gay men—were not always as accessible for lesbians and queer people of color. Although house parties appear as a socializing institution across multiple queer communities—for instance, white, gay men in

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Center City attended house parties, often during periods when bars were unsafe or unavailable—lesbian and African-American communities seem to have stronger ties to this practice. Aside from the issue of visibility, women and people of color often faced added surveillance and discrimination within public spaces. House parties were the main form of socialization in Germantown/Mt. Airy, in part because of the geographic distance from Center City and the bars, but also to maintain a social distance from the bars. One lesbian narrator, discussing her friends that lived in the Germantown/Mt. Airy area, stated that, “Other than the bars, that was the way people got together. And a lot of people couldn’t go to the bars because they had jobs that they considered sensitive (like, teachers)...They were terrified. At some point in fact they actually sort of distanced themselves from me because they found out that I frequented the bars.”<sup>102</sup>

West Philly also had a thriving house party culture.<sup>103</sup> In the 1950’s, African American gays and lesbians started forming social clubs that met in private homes. Jay Haines, a member of the West Set social club, suggested that the preference for socializing in private homes was because “In the black community it was not accepted, gaiety. Therefore, it had to be toned down if you were going to be part of the bigger community... You had school teachers, you had government workers, you had business people. In those days, it was important that you be about trying to better your condition.”<sup>104</sup> In this sentiment, we see the wish to not be made visible as “gay”, the negotiations of (intersectional) identities, and the fear of professional repercussions and desire for upward mobility.

In order to maintain community and identity building, a form of in-group visibility was necessary. An intriguing component of this “in-group” visibility is the ways in which African-

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

American queer communities and white lesbian communities were also visible to each other. Aside from the overlap in residential space, there was overlap in socializing spaces as well. Occasionally, there were house parties that were interracial, however, there was also a shared space in “nightlife” culture. “Nightlife” culture took place in establishments that were not necessarily marked as “gay,” meaning that they also had straight clientele, but were accepting of queer people. These establishments were predominantly African-American, and were located in “borderline neighborhoods”—on the outskirts of the popular residential areas. For certain individuals, especially lesbians and queer people of color, these spaces were appealing because you could “blend in,” and “particularly appealing...to lesbians and gays who wanted to be thought of as straight...and to people who did not identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or straight.”<sup>105</sup> “Nightlife” culture provided the ability to socialize in public spaces, while lessening the risk of exposure or visibility. Rather than suggesting that these groups are therefore one group or community, I am suggesting that perhaps an awareness of multiple forms and configurations of visible queerness was necessary to maintain invisibility. Additionally, many of Stein’s African American and lesbian narrators indicated a recognition that the different forms of discrimination they faced were linked in certain ways, “If you can call this woman a bitch or whatever you’re going to call her, then you can certainly call me in a moment of anger a nigger...Prejudice is prejudice.”<sup>106</sup> The shared discrimination from Center City gay men may have also participated in the sharing of space in the West Philly and Germantown/Mt. Airy neighborhoods.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Even though these spaces may have been shared, community distinctions were made. Primarily these communities were arranged around very specific identities—at particular intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as around such social issues such as whether or not someone had the ability or desire to be “out.” While there was strong animosity between some white gay men and white lesbians, there was often less of a division within black communities. When discussing relationships between African American lesbians and gay men, narrators suggested that there was already “a sense of community, whereas there really is no entity ‘white folks.’ Most white folks will say they’re Italian or they’re Sicilian or they’re Irish...But with African American people there was always a community.”<sup>107</sup> This idea is supported by the tendency of queer African-American bars, social clubs, and house parties to be inclusive of both gay men and lesbians. In comparison, white lesbians and gay men generally socialized separately, “They had their own places...Women were not really welcome in most of the men’s bars.”<sup>108</sup> This separation was not only produced by gay men’s discrimination, as some lesbians had their “own disdain,” “we didn’t like them and they didn’t like us.”<sup>109</sup> This was less true during periods when there were less queer friendly establishments available, and these limited spaces had to be shared. However, during periods when the separation was possible, the distinctions were clear.

There are many reasons to explain why only certain groups were aligned with the area now known as the Gayborhood, and why others did not inhabit or socialize in this space. Class differences and the cost of living, as well as sexism and racism within the Center City neighborhood, participated in the production and maintenance of a predominantly white, male

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

neighborhood. The visibility of the neighborhood, and who was willing and able to be visibly “gay,” as well as the variety of queer identities and the extent to which someone identified as “homosexual,” “gay,” or “lesbian,” was also a factor in distancing from Center City. Although there were substantial queer community formations in the West Philly and Germantown/Mt. Airy areas, they were not recognized as “gay” or “lesbian” neighborhoods because of the relative invisibility of these communities. Some (predominantly lesbian) narrators did identify West Philly and Germantown/Mt. Airy as lesbian neighborhoods, however most of this identification refers to the late 1960s and 1970s, a period when lesbian feminist collective housing became more popular.<sup>110</sup> The fact that these areas were primarily viewed as “black” or “mixed” neighborhoods, returns us to the idea that a “neighborhood” can only be viewed within a single-identity category—and perhaps, that race trumps sexuality in the visibility hierarchy, with the “gay” neighborhood only being seen as such because of its unmarked whiteness. Stein notes that some of the interviewees identified as West Philly as an African American neighborhood, and “may have thought that it therefore could not also be lesbian or gay.”<sup>111</sup> The next chapter will focus on the nexus of “neighborhood,” “community,” and “identity,” especially in the context of these different sites and queer identities.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-39; 44-46.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

## Chapter Four: Putting the “Gay” in “Gayborhood”

When a neighborhood and community are collapsed, the boundaries of the neighborhood also enclose the parameters of community—who belongs and who is a “stranger.” However, the previous chapters reveal the ways in which multiple communities may inhabit a singular neighborhood and how a singular “community” can exist across multiple neighborhoods, especially when residential and socialization spaces are different. In *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, Linda Martín Alcoff discusses identities as “constituted by social contextual conditions of interaction in specific cultures at particular historical periods”<sup>112</sup> and as “positioned or located lived experiences, in which individuals and groups work to construct meaning.”<sup>113</sup> By examining the history of the creation of the bounded Gayborhood, we can see the positioning of certain queers within and outside of this geographic location, as well as the ways in which different queer communities interacted (or refrained from interacting) with other queer communities. In what ways were social and geographic locations connected and how were locational differences maintained through the boundaries of the Gayborhood? How did these divisions affect productions of identity, ideas of “gay” or “queerness” and “community,” and how do we account for the multiplicities and fragmentation in conversations of these concepts?

The linkage between social and geographic locations can be generally summarized by looking at the ability to inhabit an area. The most evident factor in this ability is financial—those who could not afford to live in the Center City neighborhood, for instance, would need to reside elsewhere. However, other connections are seen when looking at the racism and sexism (both within and outside of the area now known as the Gayborhood), as well as the capability to be

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<sup>112</sup> Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, 2006, 9.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.



visibly “gay,” without or in spite of consequence. It is imperative to note that this “ability” is not being framed as a one-way dynamic. In other words, the positioning of certain queers within and outside of different geographic locations occurs along a choice/coercion continuum of sorts, not necessarily a placement of individuals with less-power by those with more-power. As shown in the previous chapter, some individuals made the decision to live outside of the Center City neighborhood because of additional factors. Nevertheless, the trend of white, gay, middle-class males inhabiting Center City highlights this connection between geographic and social location.

The policing of the boundaries of the area now known as the Gayborhood, by both its inhabitants and social/political mechanisms, maintained the social divisions and ideas of belonging. Fisher’s assertion that those within a neighborhood “know who belongs and who is a newcomer,” suggests this understanding of belonging occurs on an intuitive level. While this can be on the level of the familiarity or recognition of a particular face, it also happens through the familiarity or recognition of social identity. In Behavior in Public Places, Erving Goffman asserts that “appropriateness” of behavior is determined by the context—both the actual space and the people in that space.<sup>114</sup> In discussing social settings and status, Goffman states that rules of trespass or rules of exclusion prevent “undesirables” from entering the space entirely. In other words, an individual’s social location(s) can be grounds for their behavior to be deemed “inappropriate” in a space. Applying this to the Center City neighborhood, the rules for “appropriate” behavior (belonging; embodying or identifying with queerness) in the neighborhood were policed both by those outside and inside of the area. We have already seen the ways in which this “appropriateness” was decided by those from within the area/community,

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<sup>114</sup> Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 3-12.

especially along racial, gender, and class lines, however, it was also monitored by those outside of the area and the queer communities involved. Beginning in the 1940s and escalating through the 1980s, there was a proliferation of popular newspaper articles on the “deviant” and “sleazy” aspects of Center City, and an ever-increasing police presence, emphasizing the growing awareness of the queer presence in the neighborhood. However, despite the continued harassment, raids, and arrests, the preservation of the Gayborhood suggests a form of indirect complicity.

The conditional “acceptability” that can be seen throughout periods of the area’s history, when certain forms of queerness were contextually acceptable in particular times and spaces-- such as the moments of the un-raided bar, the instances of revitalizing housing, or the Mummies’ Parade—also produced an attempted containment of queerness. Providing a sense of safety, however unstable, for the inhabitants reproduced this containment and the need to maintain the area’s boundaries. This containment in turn provided a sense of safety for those outside of the neighborhood-community, in creating the illusion that this was *the* site of queerness and therefore, other locations were safe from queerness. For some individuals, especially those who resided and socialized outside of Center City, the ability to alter visible queer identification by moving through different geographic locations was beneficial. Therefore, it is probable that those that wished to remain less- or invisible may also have been invested in perpetuating this Center City neighborhood-identity link.

But what happens to the “gay” subject once they leave the boundaries—literally, as they cross Spruce Street? Those who resided and socialized in areas outside of the Center City neighborhood, such as in West Philly or the Germantown/Mt. Airy area, were and were not gay-identified. Even those that self-identified as “gay” or “lesbian,” were not necessarily identifiable

as “gay,” given the centrality of geographic location to understandings of “gay” identity. If identity is produced when “individuals and groups work to construct meaning,” at least part of this work is done outside of the self and within groups, and therefore, becomes bound to visibility. In other words, assuming that identity is at least partially linked to that which is recognizable—as in, can be identified as such—invisibility produces a break or disconnect between the individual and the means for certain forms of identity-making. This is not to say that identity-making does not occur, but rather that it occurs *differently*. In other words, identity-making materializes within the context of the space and group in which the individual participates. The visibility of the inhabitants of the City Center neighborhood participated in the creation of a “gay” identity that is primarily aligned with the behaviors and social locations of those inhabitants. For those who resided and socialized in other areas, such as West Philly or Germantown/Mt. Airy, these identity formations would be different, and perhaps disconnected from the “gay” identity produced within Center City. This idea is confirmed by many of Stein’s narrators who lived outside of the area that did not want to be associated with “those people,” for fear of repercussions.

The “gay” in the Gayborhood, produced through the behaviors, experiences, and social locations of a predominantly white, middle-class, gay male population, was utilized by various individuals and groups. For the Center City gays, this particularized “gay” identity was used to police the boundaries of the area, by creating an understanding of who did and did not belong in the space. Additionally, it was used as a way to unify and empower themselves under a shared identity. For many of the queer individuals who inhabited areas outside of Center City, the “gay” identity could be reproduced as a way to distance oneself from visible queerness. In order to maintain queer lives, especially from within less privileged social locations, it was often

necessary to remain under the radar of broader social/political policing. For non-queer Philadelphians, the tangibility that this “gay” identity provided, one that could be easily recognized and geographically placed, created the illusion of safety from queerness.

Within the more recent recognition of the bounded Gayborhood by the city, queerness can be viewed as accepted and even celebrated. But this figuration of acceptance and celebration appears to parallel the liminal spaces and commodification discussed earlier. In these instances, acceptance was tenuous and celebration was a means not an endpoint. The promotion of the Gayborhood as *the* gay tourist destination on Philadelphia’s official tourism website echoes this idea. It revolves around the presence of restaurants, specialty coffee shops, and shopping--and the absence of the bathhouses and adult video stores, which began opening in the 1970s. The promotion itself becomes dependent upon the maintenance of a “respectable” form of queerness—consumer-based and sanitized.

The transition of the neighborhood from “undesirable” to promotable took decades, beginning with a wave of gentrification in the late 1960s. At this time, white, gay men started becoming homeowners and landlords, as well as tenants, in Center City. With the addition of gay landlords, there was an increase in housing availability for many gays and lesbians, especially for those who wanted to live with partners or lovers. However, with this new desirability, rents increased, and many poorer residents (mainly women and people of color) were displaced.<sup>115</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increase in the number of “seedy” establishments in the area—bathhouses, adult book and video stores, as well as a string of cabaret-style, adult-entertainment and “gentleman’s clubs.”<sup>116</sup> Attempts at mainstream gentrification attempts paused

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<sup>115</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 25-26

<sup>116</sup> Skiba, *The Philadelphia Gayborhood Guru*.

during this period, but were revived in the 1990s and continue today. Along with the establishment of new businesses (including a three-story “children’s enrichment center”), and more expensive housing, there has been a recent campaign to change the name of the neighborhood to “Midtown Village.” In the same moments that the neighborhood is being designated as “gay”—through rainbow street-signs and tourist promotion—there is move to further distance the area from its history of vice. James McManaman, president of a neighborhood merchants association (and a gay man), stated that, “We’re not taking away the Gayborhood. We’re just trying to create a brand that’s a welcoming moniker for travelers and merchants.”<sup>117</sup> As some residents and local queer businesses are starting to be pushed out, the question is what is this “brand,” which is but is not actually “gay”? And what will the ramifications be for “gay” identity?

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<sup>117</sup> Andrew Thompson, “The success of Philadelphia’s Gayborhood may be its undoing,” *Newsworks*, accessed July 2014, <http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/local/speak-easy/59855-the-success-of-philadelphias-gayborhood-may-be-its-undoing>

## Conclusion

The Philadelphia neighborhood transformed into a place for kinship-, community-, and identity-production. The immense poverty and unlivable conditions during the years of the Great Depression, and the lack of available relief, made neighbors rely on each other for their own survival. Through this shift to the role of care-giver, the neighbor became a part of a sort of kinship network, rooted in a shared geographic space. This participated in the production of the neighborhood-community, an imagined entity that aligned the sharing of space with the sharing of identity. The investments in these space-networks prompted feelings of the need to protect this entity, from deterioration and those that did not “belong.”

The Center City neighborhood now known as the Gayborhood was both one of these neighborhood-communities, and was allowed to flourish because of the existence of these neighborhood-communities. As the area changed throughout the 1930s and 1940s--with an increase in “temporary housing” and the single, wage-earner population, the transformation of the area into an entertainment district, and a wave of “undesirable” elements into the neighborhood—the existing neighborhood-communities began migrating to the northern and western parts of the city. As housing opened up, gay men (and lesbians) moved to the area, and it became recognized as a site of queer residence and socialization. As the visibility of the neighborhood increased, the boundaries of the neighborhood-community were solidified. In other words, the visible queerness attracted those with specific social locations (often white, middle-class, gay men) and deterred others. Additionally, the visibility of the neighborhood, as well as the specific inhabitants, participated in the production of a very particular understanding of “gay” identity. While certain groups, especially lesbians and queer people of color, became

invisible within the Center City framework, this invisibility could be desirable and productive, enabling communities from certain social locations to engage in queer community and identity formation. These groups became differently visible—visible within their own groups and sometimes visible to each other—and, moving into the 1960s and 1970s, this visibility increased.

There was a surge in political activity in Philadelphia beginning in the 1960s. Coming out of the Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Liberation, Gay Liberation, as well as other movements, several organizations were formed in Philadelphia, including the Black Panthers, the Gay Liberation Front, Women’s Liberation, Weathermen, and the Yippies. In September 1970, these groups came together for the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, an attempt to create alliances between leftist organizations. Although there were definitely relationships forged between the groups, there were also strong divisions produced. For instance, Huey Newton, cofounder of the Panthers, urged for a “working coalition” with the Gay Liberation and Women’s Liberation movements, while some members of the Panthers were calling the police and politicians “faggots and cocksuckers.”<sup>118</sup> There was also a lot of tension between lesbian feminists and gay men. Del Martin, founder of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), wrote in the DOB publication, the *Ladder*, that she was saying “Good Bye” to “male chauvinists of the homophile movement,” to “washroom sex and pornographic movies,” to “publications that look more like magazines for male nudist colonies,” and to a gay liberation that “would only further enslave us.”<sup>119</sup>

Aligning themselves with feminism and the women’s movement, groups such as the DOB and Radicalesbians Philadelphia distanced themselves, both vocally and spatially, from gay

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<sup>118</sup> Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*, 2004, 333.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

men. In the 1970s, there were several lesbian/feminist specific spaces that were established in West Philly and Germantown/Mt. Airy—bookstores, coffeehouses, bars, as well as community centers. Areas, such as West Philadelphia and Germantown/Mt. Airy, became locations for various queer communities. Part of this separation was because of racist, classist, and sexist discourses within the Center City neighborhood. However, for certain communities that could not or did not want to risk the consequences associated with visible queerness — social stigma, police violence, loss of jobs, ostracism from family — or did not want to be associated with that particular form of visible queerness, the geographic and social distancing was intentional. As visible “gay” identity became increasingly collapsed with the Center City neighborhood, this understanding of queerness (or more accurately, gayness), was mobilized by various factions around the city of Philadelphia. For those within the boundaries of the area now known as the Gayborhood, this understanding of “gay” identity was used to police who did and did not belong in the neighborhood-community. Groups that did not wish to be associated with queerness, used this understanding of “gay” to further distance themselves from queer identities. For various non-queer communities and institutions, the collapse of queerness and the visible, bounded gay space, allowed them to create the illusion of safety from queerness, as long as the boundaries were maintained. Similar to the race-based neighborhood conflicts, there is a sense that the separateness of neighborhood-communities is integral to maintaining the harmonious “City of Brotherly Love.” This is not intended to discount the discriminatory surveillance, harassment, and policing within certain neighborhoods, which increased over time and continues today, but speaks to the “harmony” felt within white, middle-class, predominantly heterosexual, neighborhoods by means of this containment.



When I first began this project, my intention was to tell an untold story, to make visible what was invisible. The queer histories of Philadelphia have been undertold and overshadowed by the narratives of cities such as New York City, San Francisco, and even Washington, D.C. Stories of Philadelphia's queer history – the Dewey's sit-in of April 1965, the annual Fourth of July "Reminder Day" protests in the mid-late 60s, and the political organization around the 1968 raid on the lesbian bar, Rusty's — become obscured by the Stonewall-based narrative of gay liberation. Much like the Stonewall narrative, which has also been sanitized over time, I was curious about the moments and the culture that led up to these more explosive, more "visible" (and yet, invisible) events. I was intrigued by the notion of a queer neighborhood that was able to "stay gay" for such a long period of time, and wanted to explore how it was formed and maintained, as well as what role geographic space played in identity and community formations.

In terms of uncovering and creating historical narratives, in working in community organizing and advocacy work, in establishing political projects, what will be the understanding of "gay" identity? Is attempting to expand this specific understanding "gay," to include social locations and identities beyond the white, middle-class, gay male, the appropriate course of action? This seems to have been the project for the last couple of decades—and it clearly has its benefits. However, how do we also then allow for the possibility that not everyone wants to be "visible"? Or to be "visible" in the same ways? Does visibility always participate in the production of a liminal space of conditional "acceptability"? In other words, is engaging with the terms of being recognizable to those "outside," enabling those with more privilege to set the terms of acceptability? Is invisibility a queer project? And what would that look like—in doing historical work? In advocacy work and organizing? How does one organize around that which cannot (or does not want) to be "seen"? Is it possible to momentarily make what is invisible

visible, without bringing it into this liminal space of conditional “acceptability”? It seems as if the next step would involve exploring how invisibility works. And yet to do so, within the given terms, risks voiding the productivity of these invisible projects. In other words, as opposed to being interested in unearthing (making visible) multiplicative identities and experiences, perhaps the project should be focused on how and why certain identities and experiences become visible, and the consequences of this visibility. The research done here provides just a beginning. It accomplishes more of the former project--expanding the historical narrative and beginning to discuss the factors involved in the differences of geographic spaces, identification, and community building. I am proposing that a future project should be undertaken, which would utilize a framework that begins from the idea of (in)visibility as technologies of population control, which affect distinct social locations differently.

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