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Sexuality and the city are longtime and global bedfellows. “Bangkok, Singapore, Hanoi and Delhi are culturally and politically disparate places, distant from the gay capitals of America, Europe or Australia,” notes Aldrich (2004, p. 1731), as he takes us on a quick tour. “Each nevertheless demonstrates the city as a catalyst for homosexual activity.” This alliance has taken many forms. “The city has shaped the homosexual from molly-houses in early modern London to the culture of ‘fairies’ and ‘wolves’ in working-class New York in the early twentieth century, from the carnivalesque tradition in Rio to the ‘multicentered geography’ of Los Angeles and the cohabitation of traditions in Thailand and Vietnam” (p. 1731).¹

American sociologists entered the conversation in the early twentieth century by way of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. “The city was as much a sexual laboratory as a social one,”

Heap (2003, p. 458) remarks in his review. In fact, “by 1938, Chicago sociologists’ association of homosexuality with particular urban spaces was so complete that Professor Burgess could expect students...to provide an affirmative answer to the true-false exam question, ‘In large cities, homosexual individuals tend to congregate rather than remain separate from each other’” (p. 467).

Sexuality does not have a singular spatial expression—nor has it ever. The quotidian decisions of people who are going about their daily lives cohere, with and without intentions, into diverse trends that scholars have tried to identify. Our objective in this chapter is to review how geographies of sexuality in the United States have fluctuated in form and meaning across three periods of sexual history—what I call the closet, coming out, and post-gay eras.

18.1 The Closet Era (1870—World War II): “Scattered Gay Places”

The homosexual as a “species,” to borrow an analogy from Foucault (1978), was born around 1870. Sex between men and sex between women occurred prior to then, of course, since sexual behavior itself is timeless. But an association between bodily acts and an identity—in the way we think about it today—did not always exist. “As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them” (p. 43). It was in the

¹ There are cross-national differences in how sexuality and the city are linked. See Knopp (1998) for a comparative study of Minneapolis, Edinburgh, London, and Sydney. Other examples include Cape Town, South Africa (Tucker 2009); a twenty-city comparison within Germany (Drever 2004); London, England (Houlbrook 2005); a comparison of London and Birmingham, UK (Collins 2004); Newcastle, UK (Casey 2004); Paris, France (Sibalis 2004); Sydney, Australia (Markwell 2002; Faro and Wotherspoon 2000); Toronto, Canada (Murray 1979); and Vancouver, Canada (Lo and Healy 2000).

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nineteenth-century that the “homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood” (p. 43). Medical officials began to use sexuality to summarize a person’s entire profile: “Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality.” This gave the modern homosexual a “soul”: “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (p. 43).

Capitalism conspired in the transition from sex to sexuality. Seventeenth century colonial white families were self-sufficient economies, and their households contained all production-related activities that they needed to farm the land. Sex at this time furthered the goals of procreation, and while homosexual *behavior* existed, a gay or lesbian *identity* did not. Gay men and lesbians as distinct types of people are “a product of history” (D’Emilio 1993, p. 468). This economic system began to decline in the mid-1800s as wage labor gained traction and altered social norms of sex away from “the ‘imperative’ to procreate” (p. 470). A capitalist logic “created conditions that allowed some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex” (p. 470). By the late twentieth century, large numbers of men and women were able “to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity” (p. 468). During these years, especially from 1860–1892, “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality” emerged as distinct concepts in sexology, psychology, and the medical sciences as practitioners sorted people into sexual categories (Dean 2014).

These arguments are fairly familiar, but how they connect to the city is not as well known. Enter geographer Larry Knopp, who argues that the industrial revolution and market enterprise were the engines of an urban gay identity. “Industrialism, through the separation of home from workplace and the creation of separate, gendered spheres of production, reproduction, and

male-female experiences, created the ‘personal’ space within which it became possible for human beings to imagine themselves as ‘private’ creatures with ‘individual’ sexual identities” (Knopp 1992, pp. 663–664). A strict division of labor at home and in the workplace “left little room for nonheterosexual arrangements” (p. 664). The “assumption of universal heterosexuality” remained mostly unchallenged, since “sexual dissidents” feared sanctions like social stigma and physical violence (p. 663).

I say “most unchallenged” deliberately. Industrial capitalism contained contradictions that allowed individuals who desired others of the same sex to find one another. Knopp (1992) continues, “One strategy for surviving the contradiction between private experience [imagining yourself as gay or lesbian] and public demands for conformity [the pressure to live your life as a married heterosexual person] was the construction, very discreetly, of social spaces in which dominant gender and sexual codings were suspended” (p. 664). Men formed underground networks to pursue their same-sex desires in commodity form (anonymous public places like bars and baths), while women organized their interactions in the domestic sphere, along with a limited number of work and educational arenas. “Over time,” Knopp concludes, “some of these spaces became permanent, and provided the material basis for more complex personal interactions and the creation of fully developed alternative communities and identities” (p. 664). In this way, gay identity was fashioned as struggles over space, and its expression varied by gender and along a continuum from public to private.

Consider New York as an example. A remarkably complex gay male world emerged in this city between 1890 and the start of the Second World War as bohemian rebellions inspired men to develop their own commercial establishments. Chauncey (1994, p. 23) characterizes the city at this time as a “topography of gay meeting places”—or “scattered ‘gay places,’” to borrow another visual image from urban planner Forsyth (2001, p. 343). These bars, cabarets, theaters, public parks and other cruising areas, restrooms, and even the streets themselves were located

in progressive parts of the city, like Greenwich Village for white gay men or Harlem for blacks, which had reputations for “flouting bourgeois convention” (p. 227). Men exploited the anonymity of urban life as they explored their same-sex desires. Even “normal” men were permitted to have sex with other men—especially those who were seen as “fairies”—without any moral condemnation, provided that they “maintained a masculine demeanor and played (or claimed to play) only the ‘masculine,’ or insertive, role in the sexual encounter—so long, that is, as they...did not allow their bodies to be sexually penetrated.” If they met these conditions, then “neither they, the fairies, nor the working-class public considered *them* [the normal men] to be queer” (p. 66).² None of these individuals “set the tone” (p. 228) of the neighborhood, however, which is why it would be a mistake to say that the scattered gay places of the closet era were based in gay neighborhoods as we think about that idea today.

Urban histories of women’s “romantic friendships,” (Rupp 2001) as they were called, are harder to find. Literacy rates for women lagged behind those for men (Faderman 1999, p. 56), and this has resulted in fewer written records to study. In addition, nineteenth century women had restricted access “to both wage-earning jobs and public spaces where they could form same-sex subcultures parallel to those among men” (Dean 2014, p. 58). Even existing are not always easy to interpret. It is difficult to distinguish “women’s affectionate companionship from sexual, specifically genital, relations,” especially since women’s romantic friendships “ran the gamut from friendship and companionship to erotic sexual relationships” (p. 58). For these reasons, it is

“historically complicated” (p. 58) to neatly align sexual labels, behaviors, and identities. That said, nineteenth century romantic friendships were “fundamental to the proto-lesbian identities and subcultures that would emerge in the twentieth century” (p. 58). Labels such as “fiery man-eaters” (Friedan 1963, p. 80), “the lesbian” (p. 18), and “the mannish lesbian/congenital invert” (Newton 1993b, p. 291) were circulating by the 1920s, and they all denoted “the presence of a menacing female monster” (p. 18). These charges were designed “to enforce heterosexuality and traditional gender roles among women” (p. 69). But some individuals re-appropriated these terms “to create spaces, discourses, and identities for consciously lesbian women” (p. 69). In doing so, they helped “to form lesbian subcultures in American culture at this time” (p. 69). Kennedy and Davis (1993) document one such working-class and racially diverse community that thrived in Buffalo, New York. Here, women cultivated social networks in private house parties, which became hotbeds of lesbian life. Many women used these social gatherings to craft “cultures of resistance” (p. 2) and find relief from the well of loneliness (Hall 1928) that burdened so many of their lives. The results were often transformative. “I wasn’t concentrating on my school work, ‘cause I was so enthused and so happy,” one woman recalled, while another added:

We wound up at this bar. Now previous to this I had never been to a gay bar. I didn’t even know they existed. It was a Friday night and that was the big night...And we walked in and I thought, my God, this is really something. I couldn’t believe it...[I] don’t think there were any straight people in that bar that night. (quoted in Ghaziani 2014b, p. 14)³

As this discussion shows, I do not use the imagery of the closet to suggest that there was an *absence* of queer life in the prewar years. Three popular myths compel many of us to mistakenly

² Fairies were the ones who were stigmatized in this social world, although they were “publicly tolerated [as] womanlike men” (p. 60). Terms like “normal men” and “fairies,” along with strict specifications for sexual roles, suggest the primacy of gender in this historical context. Note as well that “‘normal’ men, who are also called ‘trade’ by their fairy...sexual partners, of this period are not to be thought of as ‘heterosexual,’ at least not yet, as these ‘normal’ men could engage in sexual activity with other men without the cultural opprobrium of the heterosexual/homosexual system” (p. 60).

³ Similar to the fairies, homosexual women were also seen as “‘female inverts,’ as ‘inversion’ of the female character into that of a male is what it took in sexology’s discourse for a woman to pursue another woman, as supposedly only a man would” (p. 59).

believe that this was the case: the myth of isolation (anti-gay bigotry compelled queer people to live solitary lives); invisibility (even if a queer world existed, it was impossible for anyone to find it); and internalization (queer people internalized societal views of homosexuality as a sickness and sin). “All three myths about prewar gay history are represented in the image of the closet,” Chauncey (1994, p. 6) writes. “Before Stonewall (let alone before World War II), it is often said, gay people lived in a closet that kept them isolated, invisible, and vulnerable to anti-gay ideology” (p. 6). But this is not true. Like Chauncey, I use the “closet era” as a way to think about queer social and spatial expressions during the years prior to World War II. Gay men and women “appropriated public spaces not identified as gay...in order to construct a gay city in the midst of (and often invisible to) to normative city” (p. 23). Institutional growth of queer subcultures unfolded slowly in these years. The year 1931, however, produced a pivot when a New York-based newspaper featured an exposé on “gay meeting places” (p. 23). A year later, the movie *Call Her Savage* showcased Greenwich’s gay scene. By this time, “the Village became noted as the home of ‘pansies’ and ‘lesbians’” (p. 235). But “gay men and women [still] had to fight for space, even in the Village” (p. 227). In 1936, a medical journal published the “Degenerates of Greenwich Village,” an article that announced the Village was “now the Mecca for...perverts” (p. 234). Amid these and other sensational headlines, a world-altering event unfolded that, in its wake, would stamp an indelible imprint across the queer metropolis.

18.2 The Coming Out Era (World War II—1997): Gayborhoods Form (1940s) and Flourish (1970s)

World War II was “a nationwide ‘coming out’ experience” (D’Emilio and Freedman 1997, p. 289), and it ushered in a new sexual era. The war deposited young men and women into cities with major military bases, places like Chicago,

Washington DC, Seattle, San Francisco, San Diego, Philadelphia, New York, Miami, and New Orleans. These areas swelled with servicemen and women who were discharged on the grounds of their real or perceived homosexuality. The war and its discharges “led directly to dawning realization by homosexuals of their numbers, which in turn led to the formation of the post-war self-conception of gays as a quasi-ethnic minority” (Wright 1999, p. 173). The population of San Francisco, for example, had declined during the 1930s—but it grew by more than 125,000 between 1940 and 1950. Census data from 1950 to 1960 show that the number of single-person households in the city doubled following the war and accounted for 38% of the total residential units (D’Emilio 1989, p. 459).

The concentration of young gay men and lesbians in urban centers altered their spatial imagination. Bars that catered to them opened in larger numbers, and over time, the first formal gay neighborhoods, or gayborhoods, emerged. The men and women who engineered this “society within a society” (Castells 1983, p. 157) did so deliberately. “Not only did they have a sexual network to preserve, they had also to win their right to exist as citizens, they had to engage in political battles, change laws, fight the police, and influence government” (p. 157). This was not an easy task. To succeed, “they [first] had to organize themselves spatially,” which enabled them “to transform their oppression into the organizational setting of political power” (p. 157). This is why the emergence of the Castro gayborhood, like so many others, “was inseparable from the development of the gay community as a social movement” and its “control of a given territory” (p. 157).

Before the war, it was against the law in many states for gays and lesbians to gather in public places, even in those bars that they called their own. However, a landmark California Supreme Court decision in 1951 ruled that “it was illegal to close down a bar simply because homosexuals were the usual customers. The first right to a public space had been won” (p. 141). The California case catapulted a national movement

to safeguard queer spaces, and it politicized the bars in particular. Activists founded the Tavern Guild in 1962 to protect themselves from police raids and organize voter registration drives in and around the bars (D’Emilio 1983, p. 189). The Guild proved pivotal for the formation of “a more stable gay neighborhood” which, in the same spirit as the politicized bar culture, attracted mostly gay men who sought “to liberate territory where a new culture and political power could be concentrated” (Doan and Higgins 2011, p. 8).

Winning the legal right to gather in public places and forming the Tavern Guild did not provide full immunity from police harassment—either in San Francisco or anywhere else in the United States. On June 28, 1969 in New York, for example, the local police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located at 53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. Compliance during these raids was often as routine as the raids themselves, but this time the bar goers and a growing crowd outside fought back, resulting in 5 days of rioting that changed the face of queer life in America. Bar owners and patrons had defended themselves at other raids in New York and elsewhere, but activists and academics remember Stonewall singularly as having “sparked the beginning of the gay liberation movement” (Bérubé 1990, p. 271); as “*the* emblematic event in modern lesbian and gay history” (Duberman 1993, p. xvii); as “that moment in time when gays and lesbians recognized all at once their mistreatment and their solidarity” (p. xvii); and as “a symbol of a new era of gay politics” (Adam 1995, p. 81).⁴

Stonewall inspired gays and lesbians to come out of the closet en masse and relocate to cities where they hoped to find similar others. This national demographic movement was called the “Great Gay Migration” (Weston 1995, p. 255), and it occurred throughout the 1970s and into the

early 1980s.⁵ San Francisco held a special place in it, but the ripple effects stretched to many other areas, including Cherry Grove, a small resort town on Fire Island; Northampton, Massachusetts; Buffalo, New York; Columbia, South Carolina; and Des Moines, Iowa.⁶ The great gay migration and gayborhoods were mutually reinforcing: gays and lesbians selected specific areas to which they relocated, and their emergent clusters affirmed a “sexual imaginary” (p. 274)—or a perception that they comprised a people and a tribe, culturally distinct from heterosexuals.

This discussion should prompt us to ask important follow up questions. Why did so many gays and lesbians move to a relatively small number of cities during the great gay migration? And once they arrived, why did they live in the same exact neighborhood? Existing research offers six classes of explanation, each of which tells us about gays as urban actors and the emergence of gayborhoods as urban forms (Table 18.1).

18.2.1 Ecology Arguments

According to ecology arguments, gay neighborhoods, like other urban districts, are “natural areas,” which Chicago School sociologists defined as “social spaces created through the ‘natural’ ecological growth of the city, rather than its planned commercial development” (Park 1926, p. 8; quoted in Heap 2003, p. 465). The size, density, and heterogeneity (Wirth 1938) of urban life incites competition over land use, and people decide where to live based on factors such as the

⁴ Another famous episode of resistance to a bar raid occurred at the Black Cat in San Francisco. See Armstrong and Crage (2006) for a discussion about why other events “failed to achieve the mythic stature of Stonewall” (p. 725).

⁵ Esther Newton describes an earlier “gay outward migration” that occurred in New York between the war and the 1960s. In this episode, “gays congregated at specific spots on the public beaches from Coney Island to Point Lookout, Riis Park, and Jones Beach,” all of which were “a string of beaches running from New York City east toward the Hamptons, a hundred miles away on the tip of Long Island” (Newton 1993a, p. 44).

⁶ Many scholars focus on the Castro district of San Francisco as a “gay mecca” (Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996; Boyd 2005; Stryker 2002). For more on gay life in smaller cities and non-urban areas, see (p. 472).

Table 18.1 The queer metropolis in the coming out era

Explanation	Gays as Urban Actors	Gay Neighborhoods as Urban Forms
Ecology	Gays and straights compete over land use, and they seek access to public transportation and jobs	Gay neighborhoods form as natural areas through processes of invasion and succession
History	Gays respond to unfolding historical conditions and contingencies	Gay neighborhoods form as historical accidents
Community	Gays seek solidarity and fellowship with others who are like them, and they want access to specific institutions	Gay neighborhoods form as more institutions concentrate in an area
Sexuality	Gays seek opportunities for sex, dating, love, and romance	Gay neighborhoods form to ease transactions in a sexual marketplace
Economics	Gays revitalize the city as they seek economic opportunities, affordable housing, and amenities	Gay neighborhoods are the outcome of urban gentrification
Politics	Gays are moral refugees who seek shelter from bigotry and bias	Gay neighborhoods form to provide a safe space from heterosexual hostilities

availability of public transportation and jobs. The city grows as spatially separated territories that form through the “invasion” and “succession” (Park and Burgess 1925; Park 1915; McKenzie 1924; Zorbaugh 1929) of various groups. In a famous diagram,

[Ernest] Burgess depicted urban growth and social organization as a set of five concentric zones, spreading outward from the Central Business District (Zone I) to the Zone in Transition (II), the Zone of Independent Workingmen’s Homes (III), the Zone of Better Residences (IV), and the Commuters’ Zone (V)...For Burgess, these zones defined an outward progression of increasing social and moral organization, in which non-normative sexualities were confined principally to the natural areas—the hoboemias, Chinatowns, vice districts, racialized ghettos, bohemian enclaves and the ‘the world of furnished rooms’—of the inner city transitional zone. Beginning from this core of sexual abnormality, Burgess implied that the further one moved away from the city’s geographic center, the closer the zone’s inhabitants approached the ideal of middle-class sexual normality. (p. 468)

The city of Chicago inspired ecology arguments, which makes it unclear what they can teach us about a place like Los Angeles, for example, that has grown without concentric zones (Kenney 2001; Halle 2003). Furthermore, natural areas focus on race, ethnicity, and social class. When Chicago sociologists addressed sexuality, they used frameworks of “sexual abnormality” or “vice districts,” and they seldom theorized the epistemological distinctiveness of sexuality (see Sedgwick 1990, pp. 75–82).

18.2.2 Historical Arguments

Proponents of historical arguments see gays as actors who respond to external conditions and contingencies that they cannot always predict in advance. These “historical accidents” (Collins 2004, p. 1792) incite gayborhoods to form, provided that they inspire similar responses among different individuals. World War II and the Stonewall riots were examples of such triggering events in the US, while the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1967 helped gayborhoods to form in cities like London, Brighton, Manchester, and Newcastle (p. 1800). Typifying this tradition is the “writing of community histories” (D’Emilio 1989, p. 456) where scholars identify the idiosyncrasies of particular places at certain moments in time.⁷

18.2.3 Community Arguments

Others assert that building a gay neighborhood is “inseparable from the development of the gay community” (Castells and Murphy 1982, p. 256). To defend this community argument, Murray (1992) debates Robert Bellah and his colleagues who, in their widely-cited book *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al. 1985), seek “to preserve the sacred term ‘community’ from application

⁷ Additional examples of historical arguments include (Duggins 2002; Stryker 2002; Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996; Heap 2009).

to what they term ‘lifestyle enclaves’” (p. 114). Murray objects on the grounds that their alternate category is “based on the ‘narcissism of similarity’ in patterns of leisure and consumption” (p. 114). He applies each of Bellah et al.’s three criteria for a “real community” (pp. 153–54; Murray 1996, p. 197)—institutional completeness; commitments among geographically clustered people that carry them beyond their private life into public investments; and a collective memory that preserves the past by recounting stories of shared suffering—to gays and lesbians and concludes, “North American gay communities fit all the criteria suggested by sociologists to define ‘community’ as well as or better than urban ethnic communities do” (p. 108).

Queer territories nurture the “institutional elaboration of a quasi-ethnic community” (Murray 1979, p. 165; Epstein 1987) by promoting a unique worldview, one that resists restrictive heterosexual norms. Participating in ritual events such as pride parades (Herrell 1993; Armstrong 2002; Bruce 2013), dyke marches (Ghaziani and Fine 2008; Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009), and street festivals that are based in gayborhoods inspires collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912) and solidarity among those who gather for it. In one study of fifty gay white men between the ages of 23 and 48 who lived in DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C., more than 80-percent expressed “a desire to be among other gay men” (Myslik 1996, p. 166) as their major reason for neighborhood selection. The wisdom is worth stating in general terms: gays migrate to their “homeland” (Weston 1995, p. 265) as a “path to membership” (Murray 1992, p. 107) in the community.⁸

The presence of particular institutions is the most prominent part of the community argument. In fact, “the existence of distinctive institutions is more salient to the identification of a community—for both insiders and outsiders—than residential segregation or concentration” (Murray 1992, p. 109). Gayborhoods are home to gay-

owned and gay-friendly bookstores, hair salons, churches, travel agencies, realtors, medical facilities, retail stores, periodicals, non-profit organizations, and political groups. This is why academics and laymen alike use phrases like “gay mecca” (Chauncey 1994, p. 245; Beemyn 1997, p. 2), “gay capital” (Browne and Bakshi 2011, p. 180) “gay village” (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, p. 49; Bell and Binnie 2004, p. 1807), and “gay ghetto” (Levine 1979; Sibalís 2004, p. 1739), among others, when they talk about gayborhoods (for review see Brown 2013). Imagine for a moment that you are an urban planner, and you want to build a gay district since they allegedly boost local economic vitality (Florida 2002) and rates of civic engagement (Usher and Morrison 2010). Would you encourage landlords to rent to gay people as a way to increase residential concentration? Or open a gay bar? Those who work in this tradition would advise you to opt for the latter.

18.2.4 Sexuality Arguments

As gays and lesbians fled to gayborhoods across the country, they discovered a treasure trove of possibilities. Sex and love were the most immediate. Building a sexual subculture has been a formative part of queer history. “Pleasure seekers” were gay male activists in the 1950s and 1960s “who felt that the well-being of homosexuals would be ensured by...quietly building and protecting spaces for homosexual socializing” (Armstrong 2002, pp. 42–43). This is an example of the sexuality argument. Proponents advance the view that “gay collective life should be primarily about the pursuit of pleasure” (p. 185). Because homosexuality is not visible on the body like race or gender, sexual minorities encounter a special challenge in finding one another—whether for a night or lifetime. Gayborhoods offer a solution to this problem. The density of gays and lesbians in specific parts of the city helps them to find each other as they pursue matters of the heart and libido.

Sociologist Edward Laumann is a well-known researcher who writes in this tradition. In 2004, he and his colleagues marshalled a wealth of

⁸ Additional examples of community arguments include (Escoffier 1975; Herrell 1993; Castells and Murphy 1982).

data—a probability sample of households from four Chicago neighborhoods, which resulted in 2114 face-to-face interviews, and a purposive sample of 160 interviews—to investigate “the set of meanings that organize sexual identities, sexual relationships, and participation in a sex market” (Laumann et al. 2004, p. 350). They advance metaphors of sex markets and sexual marketplaces to argue that “meeting and mating are fundamentally local processes” (p. 40) that are organized in distinct neighborhoods. A sex market is a broad spatial milieu within which individuals can organize their general strategy (e.g., a gayborhood), whereas a sexual marketplace is a specific venue where you can meet someone (e.g., a bar). Laumann and his colleagues conclude that sexuality is “firmly embedded within concrete spaces, cultures, social relations, and institutions” (p. 357). The results have been replicated in more recent studies which have found that “sexual desire can be a driving force in neighborhood formation” (Doan and Higgins 2011, p. 15). Even as gay bars close or relocate, sexual minorities still “visit traditional gay commercial centers” to “go the gym, get a drink, buy a book or magazine, and well, for sex” (p. 15).

18.2.5 Economic Arguments

The biggest debate in this conversation is whether economic rationalities or freedom from discrimination provides a more compelling account for why gayborhoods first formed. Those who favor the former offer three types of economic arguments: urban comforts and amenities, critical gay population size, and investment potential. These factors can steer the decisions that gays and lesbians make about where to live. For example, research shows strong correlations between the location of same-sex households and high-amenities in cities like Austin, Atlanta, Fort Lauderdale, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle, and Washington (Black et al. 2002). If we assume that some of these cities emerged as magnets during the great

migration (which we must do to approximate the past; we do not have census data on same-sex households for the coming out era), then one lesson we can draw is that urban comforts matter in queer residential decision-making. Within a given city, we also know that there are correlations between the number of same-sex residences in a neighborhood and its housing stock, especially that which is older and higher in value (Anacker and Morrow-Jones 2005, p. 390, 406). Why do same-sex households settle in areas with greater cultural offerings, amenities, and desirable housing stock? This happens because “gay households face constraints that make having or adopting children more costly than for otherwise similar heterosexuals” (p. 55). This frees up resources that they can allocate elsewhere, such as moving to a city with a beautiful natural environment, a mild climate, a neighborhood with attractive housing stock, a diverse array of restaurants, and a vibrant local arts and entertainment scene. Those who endorse such an amenities perspective “do not view gay men as special, with idiosyncratic preferences that uniquely determine their location decisions” (p. 56). On the contrary, “other wealthy households or households with low demand for housing will also locate in high amenity areas” (p. 56).⁹

A second subtype of economic arguments—“critical gay population size” (Collins 2004, p. 1791)—explains why queer districts emerge in areas that *lack* amenities: cities that do not have a remarkable climate, or neighborhoods that lack appreciable aesthetic qualities and have an inland location away from the downtown core. These traits would lead us to predict that a gayborhood will *not* form. Yet this happened with the Birmingham Gay Village in England. Once a minimum queer population density was established there, it provided a “virtuous circle” (p. 1791) which motivated more migration to the area. A

⁹ Additional examples of economic arguments include (Knopp 1990, p. 347; Florida 2002; Collins 2004, p. 1790; Cooke and Rapiano 2007, p. 296).

critical gay population offered a “high amenity value in its own right” (p. 1791).

Gentrification is the final subtype of economic arguments, and it is the most common explanation that scholars propose for why gayborhoods first formed. Marxist urban geographer Ruth Glass (1964) coined the term, and in a widely-cited review essay, sociologist Sharon Zukin (1987, p. 129) defined it as “the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use” by “private-market investment capital in downtown districts [sometimes called ‘central business districts’ or CBDs].” In the United States, federal interventions fueled a first wave of urban renewal efforts, which were a response to inner-city decline that white flight caused in the 1960s (Wilson 1987). During this wave, a group of “risk-oblivious” (Gale 1980, pp. 105–106; Kasinitz 1988, p. 175) artists, students, and design professionals, many of whom were gay (Brown-Saracino 2009; Zukin 1987; Knopp 1990, 1997), invested in “islands of renewal in seas of decay” (Berry 1985). These individuals imagined themselves as pioneers who were “taming the urban wilderness” (Smith 1986; Spain 1993, p. 158) as they searched for affordable places to live and “a residential environment where they would not encounter an atmosphere of social alienation” (Pattison 1983, pp. 88–89). Gays and other first wavers were less motivated by the promise of economic gain than by cheap housing, freedom of self-expression with impunity, a search for community, and protection from discrimination.

18.2.6 Political Arguments

The “political and social acceptance of gay individuals” (Black et al. 2002, p. 65) and access to “gay cultural and institutional life” (Knopp 1997, p. 46) interact with economic considerations as gays and lesbians decide where in the metropolis they want to live. For them, “gentrification is not only an economic response to a discriminatory housing market but also a political reaction involving the formation of a collective spatial

identity” (Ruting 2008, p. 262). The residential decisions that gay people make are informed by an area’s “reputation for tolerating non-conformity” (Chauncey 1994, p. 229). During the coming out era, gays and lesbians invested in these areas “at a financial and social *cost* that only ‘moral refugees’ are ready to pay” (Castells 1983, p. 161, emphasis added). This observation challenges a reductive view of gays and lesbians as rational, economic actors, and it brings us to the “emancipatory city thesis” (Lees 2000, p. 392; Collins 2004, p. 1799)—or political argument. One activist shared his reverie at the Berkeley gay liberation conference in 1969:

I have a recurring daydream. I imagine a place where gay people can be free. A place where there is no job discrimination, police harassment or prejudice...A place where a gay government can build the base for a flourishing gay counter-culture and city...It would mean gay territory. It would mean a gay government, a gay civil service, a county welfare department which made public assistance payments to the refugees from persecution and prejudice. (Armstrong 2002, p. 89)

Gayborhoods flourished following the Stonewall riots of 1969 as gays and lesbians from across the United States moved to them and romanticized the possibilities for freedom that they dreamed existed in these areas. Books, magazines, newspapers, television, movies, and personal contacts spread the word about these budding gay territories (Meeker 2006). “Every friend who sends a letter back from San Francisco filled with tales of city streets covered with queers builds the city’s reputation as a safe harbor for ‘gay people’” (Weston 1995, p. 262). This created a distinct “sexual geography” within the city, one in which gayborhoods shone as “a beacon of tolerance” (Weston 1995, p. 262) in a sea of heterosexual hostility. This brings us to a critical insight: gay neighborhoods are “a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression” (Lauria and Knopp 1985, p. 152).

Proponents of political arguments see gayborhoods as a type of free space or safe space. A widely-cited passage defines these areas as

particular sorts of public places in the community [that] are the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Put simply, free spaces are settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision. (Evans and Boyte [1986] 1992, p. 17)¹⁰

Gay social thinkers were active in this conversation. For example, in 1969, Carl Wittman drafted *A Gay Manifesto* in which he described his San Francisco home as a “refugee camp for homosexuals.” Gays and lesbians “formed a ghetto, out of self-protection,” in his assessment, since “straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us.” This is why so many gay and lesbian moral refugees of the era invested in the Castro. “We want to make ourselves clear: our first job is to free ourselves; that means clearing our head of the garbage that’s been poured into them” (Wittman 1970, pp. 67–68).

Over the years, scholars have often invoked the image of a safe space when discussing gay neighborhoods. Castells and Murphy (1982, p. 237), for example, assert that gays seek to “build up autonomous social institutions and a political organization powerful enough to

establish a ‘free commune’ beyond prejudice.” In a later piece, Castells (1983, p. 139, 168) defines gayborhoods as “liberated zones” and “free villages” where gays can “be safe together.” Similarly, in his study of the West Hollywood cityhood campaign, Forest (1995) remarks on “the emancipatory and empowering potential” of the queer metropolis: “Public spaces created by gays provide for relative safety, for the perpetuation of gay subcultures,” he says. They “provide symbols around which gay identity is centered” and enable sexual minorities “to resist [heterosexual] domination” (p. 137). During the coming out era, gayborhoods provided “a safe harbor” (Weston 1995, p. 262) and “homeland” (p. 269) for its residents. Simple personal acts like “stroll[ing] hand-in-hand or kiss[ing] in the street without embarrassment or risk of harassment” (Sibalis 2004, p. 1748) became deeply political. In fact, when we review the history of the gay and lesbian “fight against violence,” we find that “the ideal of ‘safe space’” is “fundamental to the emergent forms of LGBT identity,” and grassroots activism in defense of safe spaces has been “one means by which neighborhoods have been claimed” (Hanhardt 2008, p. 63).

18.2.7 Are Gayborhoods Ghettos?

Before we conclude this section, we should ask whether it is appropriate to use the word “ghetto,” the way Wittman and others do, when speaking of the queer metropolis. The term originated in sixteenth-century Venice, where it described an area of the city in which authorities forced Jews to live. American sociologists of the Chicago School (e.g., Wirth 1928) began to use the word in the 1920s “to designate urban districts inhabited predominately by racial, ethnic or social minorities, whether by compulsion or by choice” (Sibalis 2004, p. 1739). Within 50 years, scholars were “applying the term ‘gay ghetto’ to neighborhoods characterized by the presence of gay institutions in number, a conspicuous and locally dominant subculture that is socially isolated from the larger community, and a residential population that is

¹⁰ Pamela Allen first used this idea to explain how to build an autonomous women’s movement. She advocated working in small groups—which she called “free spaces”—where women could “think about our lives, our society and our potential for being creative individuals” (Allen 1970, p. 6). Free spaces were a solution to Betty Friedan’s “problem that had no name” (p. 19); they allowed individual women to realize that they were not alone in how they experienced their life. Sharing stories in free spaces inspired the famous slogan “the personal is political,” and it affirmed women’s collective reality in a safe space that was not occupied by men. Scholars have described these sites in numerous ways, including abeyance structures (Taylor 1989), cultural laboratories (Mueller 1994), cultures of solidarity (Fantasia 1988), movement half way houses (Morris 1984), havens (Hirsch 1990), independent spaces (Needleman 1994), protected spaces (Tétreault 1993), safe spaces (Gamson 1996), sequestered social sites (Scott 1990), and liberated zones (Fantasia and Hirsch 1995). For a review and critique of research on safe spaces, see (Polletta 1999).

substantially gay” (Levine 1979; p. 1739). Ghettos, in other words, have four defining features: institutional concentration, a locally dominant subculture, social isolation from the surrounding city, and residential segregation typically created by compulsion rather than by choice. Therefore, an urban area is a “gay ghetto” or “lavender ghetto” (Levine 1979, p. 182) if it has large numbers of gay institutions, a visible and dominant gay subculture that is socially isolated from the rest of the city, and a concentrated residential population. Based on these four features, the term gay ghetto is an apt synonym for a gayborhood—but only in the coming out era, as we will see more clearly in the next section.

In summary, ecological, historical, community, sexuality, economic, and political arguments all explain why gay neighborhoods formed and flourished in the coming out era. If we pay attention to the overlaps and intersections among these six factors, we will be able to offer a more holistic assessment not just for the initial emergence of gay neighborhoods but also why they are changing as we embark into a new post-gay world.

18.3 The Post-Gay Era (1998—Present): Gayborhoods Change

In 2007 the *New York Times* published a front-page story with a foreboding headline: “Gay enclaves face prospect of being passé.” The journalist elaborated, “These are wrenching times for San Francisco’s historic gay village, with population shifts, booming development, and a waning sense of belonging that is also being felt in gay enclaves across the nation” (Brown 2007). The two trends that motivated Brown’s story—gays moving out from urban areas that have been culturally-associated with them while more straights move into them—have created anxieties in districts across the country. For instance, on November 28, 2006, the GLBT Historical Society of Northern California hosted three standing-room only roundtable sessions around the theme “Queers in the City: GLBT Neighborhoods

and Urban Planning.” The series opened with a poignant question: “Are Gay Neighborhoods Worth Saving?” During the heated debate, board member Don Romesburg disabused the dubious assumptions of some audience members about the stability of queer spaces: “Our neighborhoods get built within particular economic, political, and cultural circumstances. When those change, so do our neighborhoods.”

In recent years, journalists, scholars, and everyday people alike have begun to wonder whether gay neighborhoods are disappearing (Doan and Higgins 2011; Usher and Morrison 2010; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014; Brown 2013). Unique commercial spaces like bars and bookstores are closing up shop, more heterosexuals are moving in, and gays and lesbians are choosing to live in other parts of the city. Demographers who analyze the US census confirm that zip codes associated with traditional gay neighborhoods are “de-concentrating” (Spring 2012, 2013): fewer same-sex households lived in them in 2010 than they did in 2000. Same-sex partner households now reside in 93% of all counties in the country (Gates and Cooke 2011), and gay life increasingly “blends with other aspects of the city” (Aldrich 2004, p. 1732). Why do so many gay and lesbian households today think outside the gayborhood box?

The answer has to do with seismic shifts in how we think about sexuality. Gay life exists “beyond the closet” (Seidman 2002, p. 6) in places like Canada (Nash 2012), the United Kingdom (Collard 1998a, b), and the United States (Ghaziani 2011)—despite the persistence of heteronormative biases in the state, societal institutions, and popular culture. This prompted British journalist Paul Burstyn to coin the phrase “post-gay” in 1994. It found an American audience 4 years later in 1998 when *Out* magazine editor James Collard used the term in the *New York Times* to argue,

We should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality—even if our opponents do. Post-gay isn’t ‘un-gay.’ It’s about taking a critical look at gay life and no longer thinking solely in terms of struggle. It’s going to a gay bar and wishing there were girls there to talk to.

He clarified the urban implications of this idea 2 months later in a separate *Newsweek* feature:

First for protection and later with understandable pride, gays have come to colonize whole neighborhoods, like West Hollywood in L.A. and Chelsea in New York City. It seems to me that the new Jerusalem gay people have been striving for all these years won't be found in a gay-only ghetto, but in a world where we are free, equal and safe to live our lives.

A similar term arrived in Canada in 2011 when Paul Aguirre-Livingston, writing for Toronto-based magazine *The Grid*, published an article entitled, "Dawn of a New Gay." He described the emergence of "a new type of gay," which he called "the post-mo," short for postmodern homosexual. What we name this new period—"beyond the closet" (Seidman 2002), "new gay" (Savin-Williams 2005; Aguirre-Livingston 2011), "post-closeted cultural context" (Dean 2014), or "post-gay" (Ghaziani 2011, 2014a, b)—matters less than our efforts to grapple with how changing meanings of sexuality affect queer geographies.¹¹

The defining and differentiating features of the post-gay era come into greater focus when we compare it with the two prior periods. The heyday of the closet was characterized by concealment (hiding who you are from your family and friends); isolation (being disconnected from networks of other gay people); feelings of shame, guilt, and fear (which stemmed from internalizing societal views about homosexuality); and duplicity (living a double life) (Seidman 2002, pp. 29–30; see also Chauncey 1994; D'Emilio 1983). The coming out era, in contrast, was typified by being open about your sexuality; by constructing a world with almost exclusively

gay social networks; and by believing that "gay is good," to allude to a culturally resonant phrase that activist Franklin Kameny coined in 1968 in an effort to mirror Stokley Carmichael's "black is beautiful" (Valocchi 1999b; Armstrong 2002). Finally, the primary feature of the post-gay era is a dramatic acceptance and ensuing assimilation (Sullivan 2007) of some segments of sexual minorities into the mainstream of American society (Ghaziani 2011). Although an impulse toward "cultural sameness" (Ghaziani 2014b) with straights has arisen several times in the history of queer politics (Armstrong 2002; D'Emilio 1983; Ghaziani 2008), the current iteration is distinct. "Gay life today *is* very different than it was just a decade or two ago" because queer people now have more options for how to live their lives and because "their lives often look more like those of conventional heterosexuals than those of the closeted homosexuals of the recent past" (Seidman 2002, p. 6). In both prior sexual eras, "individuals confronted stark choices: stay in or step out of the closet" (p. 86). Identity choices were also oppositional: "to deny or champion being gay as a core identity" (p. 86). But things are much less stark today. "As individuals live outside the closet, they have more latitude in defining themselves and the place of homosexuality in their lives" (p. 88).¹²

Public opinion that shows liberalizing attitudes toward homosexuality provides one indicator that we have arrived at the doorsteps of a new sexual era. A 2010 Gallup Poll found that "Americans' support for the moral acceptability of gay and lesbian relations crossed the symbolic 50% threshold in 2010. At the same time, the percentage calling these relations 'morally wrong' dropped to 43%, the lowest in Gallup's decade-long trend" (Saad 2010). A 2012 Pew Research

¹¹ In his *Newsweek* piece, Collard credits Burston with coining the term post-gay. The term "post-queer" has also recently entered the English lexicon, although it has a very different meaning. Anchored in queer theory (e.g., Seidman 1996), some scholars use it to argue that queer theory neglects the "institutional organization of sexuality" and the "complex developmental processes attendant to sexual identification" (Green 2002, p. 523). Others use it to critique queer theory's binary conception of the world as either queer or heteronormative (Cohen 2001; Ruffolo 2009).

¹² "Assimilation" characterizes the post-gay era—it is a social force—while "integration" is its outcome and thus a material effect. I also use assimilation instead of integration (Brown-Saracino 2011) because the latter implies a broad incorporation of sexual minorities. In a post-gay era, assimilation is sometimes "virtual" (Vaid 1995; Bullough et al. 2006), since it neglects the intersectional realities of many non-heterosexuals (Warner 1999; Dugan 2002; Valocchi 1999a).

Center poll found evidence for this acceptance in all regions of the United States and in urban and rural areas alike (Behind Gay Marriage Momentum 2012). Finally, a 2013 Washington Post-ABC News poll showed that “public support for gay marriage has hit a new high” (Cohen 2013). Fifty-eight percent of Americans now believe that it should be legal for lesbians and gay men to marry, while 36% say it should be illegal. The pollsters noticed that “public attitudes toward gay marriage are a mirror image of what they were a decade ago: in 2003, 37% favored gay nuptials, and 55% opposed them” (Cohen 2013).

These and other opinion polls are in close conversation with the legal landscape, which offers a second indicator for an ongoing post-gay shift. Some researchers use national surveys that ask about same-sex marriage, adoption rights for same-sex couples, employment non-discrimination laws, and beliefs that homosexuality is a sin to generate an “LGB Social and Political Climate Index.” They find that states with protective laws “have a much warmer climate towards LGB people” than those states without such laws (Hasenbush et al. 2014). The 2012 elections were historic in this regard.

A majority of voters in three states—51.5% in Maine, 52.4% in Maryland, and 53.7% in Washington—supported legalizing marriage for same-sex couples in statewide ballot initiatives. These electoral outcomes represent the first examples of popular majorities voting to endorse same-sex marriage in statewide initiatives. (Flores and Barclay 2013)

In addition, the year 2014 saw an “unstoppable momentum for full LGBT equality,” in the words of the Human Rights Campaign (2014). This sensibility has been gaining force throughout the post-gay era. We have witnessed the legalization of same-sex marriage in thirty-five states and the District of Columbia, the legalization of same-sex marriage in Scotland, Luxembourg, and Finland (for a total of twenty countries with marriage equality), the elimination by the US Supreme Court of a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, and President Obama signing an executive order to protect LGBT federal employees from workplace discrimination.

A third indicator that we are embarking onto a new sexual era comes from changes in social networks. A 2014 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) of 4509 randomly sampled adults 18 years of age or older across the United States found that “the number of Americans who have a close friend or family member who is gay or lesbian has increased by a factor of three over the last two decades, from 22% in 1993 to 65% today” (Coffey 2014; Jones et al. 2013). Another 2014 survey by McClatchy-Marist of 1035 randomly sampled adults 18 years of age or older across the United States found that “by 71–27%, American adults say they know someone who’s gay. That’s a dramatic change from a generation ago, when a 1999 Pew poll found that Americans said by 60–39% that they didn’t know anyone who was gay” (Kumar 2014). These changes in the composition of social networks may also account for the development of an allies movement of “politically gay” (Meyers 2008) heterosexuals.

A fourth and final indicator comes from the onset of same-sex attractions and coming out of the closet. One U.S. study found, “The average age that gay and bisexual boys had their first same-sex attractions was just before 8, while for girls it was 9, and in many cases the same-sex attractions started several years earlier” (Goodman 2013). In addition, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are coming out earlier than ever before. The same study also found, “The average coming-out age has declined from 20-something in the 1980s to somewhere around 16 today” (Goodman 2013). According to a study conducted in the U.K., the average age of coming out has fallen by more than 20 years in Britain. “The poll, which had 1536 respondents, found that lesbian, gay and bisexual people aged 60 and over came out at 37 on average. People aged 18 and under are coming out at 15 on average” (Stonewall n. d.). All of this cross-national research shows that the average age of coming out is decreasing as society becomes more accepting of LGB individuals.

It is in this dynamic context that the term post-gay acquires its many meanings. It can express a

style of self-identification, describe the tone of a specific space or an entire neighborhood, and it can capture the zeitgeist of a historical moment. Individuals who see themselves as post-gay embrace an identity that subordinates the centrality of their sexual orientation—"I'm more than just gay," they might say. They also disentangle it from a sense of militancy and struggle, feel free from persecution despite awareness that inequalities persist in the world, and prefer sexually integrated company—hence Collard's call for more straight girls in gay bars. Queer social networks today are much more mixed, include more straight people, and their interactions are driven by common aesthetic tastes and interests rather than a sense that they share an oppressed, minority group status with other gays and lesbians (Brown-Saracino 2011). This explains why some individuals see their identity as "fluid, open, or flexible," while others actively resist existing labels like "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" (Russell et al. 2009, p. 888). A post-gay space like a bar, meanwhile, is one in which "the need to clearly define and delineate our sexualities is largely deemed unnecessary" (Brown 2006, p. 136, 140), while gayborhoods no longer demand "the assertion of one identity or another. Most times they contain a majority of heterosexuals" (p. 140; Nash 2012). This is possible because "'gay' identities have outlived their usefulness" (p. 140) Think of it this way: During the coming out era, gay villages were "akin to what Rome is for Catholics: a lot of us live there and many more make the pilgrimage" (Myslik 1996,

pp. 167–168). But in a post-gay era, they are "more akin to what Jerusalem is for Jews: most of us live somewhere else, fewer of us make the pilgrimage than in the past, [and] our political power has moved elsewhere" (pp. 167–168).

None of this is to say that people no longer claim a gay or lesbian identity for themselves—they most certainly do—because sexual orientation is still a part of who we are, after all, because heterosexuality is still culturally compulsory (Rich 1980), and because sexual inequalities persist. Post-gays do not pretend that the world is a perfect place. However, with public acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex relationships at an all-time high, it is much easier for some sexual minorities to move into the mainstream and blend into its prized, multicultural mosaic in a way that renders them no different than heterosexuals. This, in turn, has consequences for the decisions they make about where to live. Gay neighborhoods historically provided sexual minorities with a safe space in an often unsafe world. But now, the world itself is becoming much safer. This is an important part of the story for why gayborhoods are de-gayng (gays and lesbians are moving out) and straightening (heterosexuals are moving in) across the United States and in many other parts of the western world. What can we predict will ultimately happen to them? In what follows, we will revisit the same explanations for why gayborhoods first formed as a way to grapple with how and why they are changing in today's post-gay era (Table 18.2).

Table 18.2 The queer metropolis in a post-gay era

Explanation	Prediction
Ecology	Gay neighborhoods will change as a result of invasions and successions
History	Gay neighborhoods will change as a result of historical accidents
Community	Gay neighborhoods will change as existing institutions close, or if new ones open in other parts of the city Gay neighborhoods will change as a function of generational cohorts, along with new individual preferences for sexually mixed social networks
Sexuality	Gay neighborhoods will change if residents no longer need them to organize their sexual and romantic transactions
Economics	Gay neighborhoods will change as a result of resurgent gentrification, municipal marketing, mayoral efforts to boost local economic growth, and tourism campaigns
Politics	Gay neighborhoods will change if non-heterosexuals no longer need them to feel safe

18.3.1 Ecology Arguments

All neighborhoods change. This is a simple fact of city life, and it is the premise of ecology arguments. Gay neighborhoods are not an exception to this most basic urban insight. “One group succeed[s] another group in a particular place in the city, just as one group of animals might succeed another on some plains” (p. 29). The process is called “invasion”—of straights into queer spaces—and “succession,” as the character and composition of a gayborhood becomes increasingly heterosexual. The conditions that incite invasions are “legion” (p. 29): they include the location of jobs, new construction projects, physical deterioration, market and real estate trends, tourism and other municipal promotion campaigns, and the building of new transportation lines. The inevitability of invasions and successions does not mean that they will transpire without conflict. Resistance is common, but its success depends on “the degree of solidarity of the present occupant” (McKenzie 1924, p. 298). The integration of gays and lesbians into the mainstream implies a decline in their solidarity, given the weakening assumption of a shared minority group identity, as we saw earlier. If this is true, then it will negatively affect the desire among sexual minorities to resist straight invasions.

18.3.2 Historical Arguments

The nascence of the post-gay era makes it tricky to offer historical arguments. One contender is the decline of manufacturing and industrial jobs and a corresponding rise of a service-sector, global economy. We know that this altered the organization of race (Wilson 1987), and it also created a new class geography (Sassen 1998, 2001). But how will it affect sexuality? To compete with a small number of powerful global cities and as manufacturing declined, secondary cities like Chicago, Miami, Manchester, Vancouver, Seattle, and Sydney have re-branded themselves as “places of culture and consumption” (Rushbrook 2002, p. 188). They now show off their stock

of ethnic spaces, which “present an ‘authentic other’ that can be commodified and consumed. City officials use queer spaces in much the same way—as “a marker of cosmopolitanism, tolerance, and diversity for the urban tourist” (p. 188). In today’s post-gay era, “queer and ethnic spaces are offered as equivalent venues for consumption at a cosmopolitan buffet” (p. 188). This is a culturally destructive move, since it “erases their individual histories and functions” (p. 188).

18.3.3 Community Arguments

Gay and lesbian businesses and organizations “anchor” (Ghaziani 2014a) certain neighborhoods in the minds of city residents, and they can bestow upon them a stable identity, despite residential fluctuations. Recall Murray’s (1992, p. 109) argument: “the existence of distinctive institutions is more salient to the identification of a community—for both insiders and outsiders—than residential segregation or concentration.” This brings us to the community argument, which predicts that gayborhoods will attenuate if existing institutions close or if new ones open in another neighborhood. For example, there were 16 gay bars in Boston and Cambridge between 1993 and 1994, but by 2007 less than half remained. This has a domino effect. “As gay bars vanish, so go bookstores, diners, and all kinds of spaces that once allowed ‘blissful public congregation,’ as sociologist Ray Oldenburg described their function in his 1989 book ‘The Great Good Place’” (Sullivan 2005). When gay and lesbian businesses leave, they “sever ties that link residents to an integrated sense of neighborhood” (Usher and Morrison 2010, p. 277).

The community argument is also sensitive to generational shifts. Post-gays are “twentysomethings” that are part of “a new generation of young gay people” who prefer “sexually mixed company.” They are skeptical about whether the “new Jerusalem” exists in a “gay-only ghetto,” and so they reject them. Younger gays and lesbians often feel that their sexual orientation is “merely secondary to our place in life”—a life that “in most ways, is not about being gay at all.”

In fact, they say that they “do not have that much in common with gay culture.” If life is not about being gay, then gayborhoods will not resonate for the next generation (Aguirre-Livingston 2011).

18.3.4 Sexuality Arguments

The sexuality argument is next, and it identifies disturbances in the function of gayborhoods as marketplaces for sexual and romantic transactions. The Internet is a big part of this story. “People still meet romantic partners in [the traditional forums of family, workplace, and neighborhoods], but it seems to be less common,” says Michael Rosenfeld. “The Internet is displacing those classic venues” as brokers of sex and romance. It is now easy to find resources about being gay on-line, which disenfranchises the gayborhood for younger individuals or those who come out later in life. Similarly, the Internet allows closeted gays and lesbians to find electronically mediated friendships and sex partners either “for virtual pleasure” or “for real-world fun” (Usher and Morrison 2010, p. 279). In fact, the Internet exerts a dominant influence in how same-sex couples have met one another since the year 2000—over 60% of couples first met in this way, prompting researchers to conclude that “the Internet seems to be displacing all other ways of meeting for same-sex couples” (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012, p. 532). On the ground, this creates a “community” that is unbounded by geography,” and it negates the need “to feel physically connected to the community they call their own” (p. 279). One study of 17 international cities asked if gay communities were “dying or just in transition” (Rosser et al. 2008, p. 588). The researchers found that in every one of them, “the virtual gay community was larger than the offline physical community” (p. 588). As a result, some condemn the Internet for creating a “diaspora of gays from traditional urban enclaves.”

18.3.5 Economic Arguments

We now arrive at economic and political explanations, the two most common explanations for

both gayborhood formation and change. Economic arguments include two subtypes: resurgent gentrification and municipal promotion campaigns. Urban redevelopment efforts in the United States proceeded in two waves. Federal renewal efforts fueled the first, as we saw earlier, and this was a response to inner-city decline that white flight caused in the 1960s. Gentrification resurged in the late 1990s in a second wave that corresponded with rising home prices. Changes in the financing system, increased privatization, and the demolition of public housing caused this second surge (Doan and Higgins 2011). Ironically, while gays and lesbians used the first-wave to build many of their urban districts, the “super-gentrifiers” (p. 7) of the second wave tend to be straights who transform gayborhoods into “visible niche markets for retail commerce and realty speculation” (Hanhardt 2008, p. 65) This process is called “resurgent gentrification,” and it prompts the “assimilation of LGBT neighborhoods” into the wider city environment (p. 6). Some gays and lesbians perceive the sexual integration that results as “the pillaging of gay culture” (p. 15) by economically-motivated straights who have little to no commitments to queer causes. In assessing the effects of resurgent gentrification in Atlanta, for example, one study found evidence of residential diffusion without an accompanied increase in support for gay rights: “Rising housing values have dispersed the LGBT population, and former LGBT neighborhoods have become less tolerant of LGBT people and the businesses that anchor the LGBT community” (p. 6). As more straights move in, gay people and their businesses report lower levels of perceived tolerance. In addition, financiers and straight newcomers prefer large chain stores which threaten “the cultural icons of queer neighborhoods” (p. 16). Although this frays the fabric of the gayborhood, the desire for a feeling of belonging to a gay community persists, and many former residents say that they would rather live in the area if they could afford it.

The second type of economic argument emphasizes municipal promotion, mayoral efforts to boost local economic growth, and citywide tourism campaigns. In the late 1990s, a group of demographers and economists created a “Gay Index”

that ranks regions in the United States based on their concentration of same-sex households. Florida (2002) has publicly championed it, and city agencies routinely use it “because of its highly touted claim to predict economic competitiveness in a global marketplace” (Hanhardt 2008, p. 63). Defining gayborhoods as “entertainment districts” (Lloyd and Clark 2001; Lloyd 2006) signals a shift in how the state perceives these areas: from a “regulatory problem” that required repression and containment in the 1970s and 1980s to a “marketing asset” in recent years (Rushbrook 2002, p. 193). Cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Manchester have a municipally marked gayborhood. They have become “the chic social and cultural centres of the city—the place to be seen, . . . regardless of one’s sexual preferences” (p. 1793, 1798). Motivated by neoliberal economic policies (Duggan 2003), such commodification of gayborhoods (Skeggs 1999; Binnie and Skeggs 2004) robs them of their cultural distinctions, leading residents and visitors to perceive them today as “locations to be experienced by the nouveau cosmopolitan citizen” (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014, p. 759)—an urban area unhinged from any particular sexual orientation.

The consumption of queer spaces is part of a “geography of cool” (Rushbrook 2002, p. 183). From the point of view of heterosexuals, this branding of gayborhoods as chic allows them “to overcome their discomfort with being ‘out of place’ in gay space” (Brown 2006, p. 133; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, p. 40). This is especially true for straight women who sometimes exploit gay men to claim a modern, cosmopolitan identity. Consider an observation that comes from the UK: “The ‘pretty gay boy’ is increasingly *the* ideal friend to take—or to be taken out by—on the scene, he is the coolest and least threatening accessory a straight girl can have” (Casey 2004, p. 454). Because straights will always outnumber gays and lesbians, queer spaces are not sustainable “unless gay households rarely moved and never sold their property to non-gay households” (Collins 2004, p. 1794). Neither is plausible, of course, and so it is only a matter of time that residential shifts and secondary business growth threaten to erase the colorful character and complexion of gay neighborhoods.

18.3.6 Political Arguments

As the above discussion implies, “gentrification and changing preferences can only provide partial explanations” for why gayborhoods are transforming; “reduced discrimination” also matters (Ruting 2008, p. 266). This brings us to the political argument. Acceptance and assimilation have expanded the queer residential imagination “beyond the gayborhood,” (Ghaziani 2014b), and greater equality has “eroded the premium that many gay men and lesbians were once willing to pay” (p. 266) to live there.

In taking a critical view of economic approaches, it is not my objective to refute their validity but rather to bring them into conversation with other forces. Consider, for example, that the same increase in tolerance that allows gays and lesbians to feel comfortable beyond the borders of gay districts also contributes to straight residents feeling more at ease living and socializing in them. Gayborhoods now are a “safe zone for heterosexual women” (Collins 2004, p. 1794), a place where they can “escape the heterosexual male gaze that sexualizes their bodies” (Casey 2004, p. 454) everywhere else in the city. They see the presence of gay people as a sign that “the city or neighborhood is relatively safe” (Florida 2002, p. xvii). Straight men are on board as well. Charles Blow captured their new sense of cool in the title of his 2010 essay in the *New York Times*: “Gay? Whatever, Dude.” Blow interviewed Michael Kimmel for his essay, who told him, “Men have gotten increasingly comfortable with the presence of, and relative equality of, ‘the other.’” This is why a gayborhood is no longer out-of-bounds for them. Furthermore, the ratio of single straight women to men in these spaces makes them especially attractive—minus all the baggage that comes with homophobia.

Straights have always lived and shopped in gayborhoods, of course, but they have become “a common site on the streets” in recent years, Dan Levy (1996) notes in his story for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Two decades of struggle for equal rights have translated into real economic and emotional progress for homosexuals—and many heterosexuals,” he explains. “If lesbians and gays no longer feel confined to a homosexual

Table 18.3 The queer metropolis across the closet, coming out, and post-gay eras

Sexual Era	Historical time	Defining features	Location patterns
Closet Era	1870—World War II	Concealment; isolation; feelings of shame, guilt, and fear; living a double life	“Scattered gay places”
Coming Out Era	World War II—1997	Being open and out about sexuality; having almost exclusively gay social networks; believing that “gay is good”	Gayborhoods form (postwar) and flourish (post-Stonewall)
Post-Gay Era	1998—Present	Acceptance of gays and lesbians by mainstream society and their assimilation into it	Existing gayborhoods de-gay and straighten

safe zone, straights are increasingly less likely to be threatened by same-sex attention. Relaxed attitudes about sexual identity have led to a greater permeability” (Levy 1996).

In summary, the relationship between sexuality and the city has evolved in subtle and striking ways as we have moved from the closet to the coming out and post-gay sexual eras (Table 18.3).

18.4 Critiques and Caveats

18.4.1 A Queer Pluralization

While some scholars cite evidence that gayborhoods are changing, others, especially geographers, have discovered the development of new types of urban formations, such as “queer-friendly districts” (Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014, p. 760). These areas are post-gay in the sense that straights are in the majority both residentially and commercially, yet “a significant presence of gay and lesbian residents, businesses, and organizations are welcome nonetheless” (p. 760). The defining feature of queer-friendly spaces is the mutual interaction among gays and straights and their attempts to “foster understanding across sexual difference” (Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009, p. 2855). One important lesson in this body of work is that we cannot characterize the metropolis as an artificial binary of gayborhoods versus all other “straight spaces” (Browne and Bakshi 2011, p. 181; Frisch 2002; Brown 2008). A “queer pluralization of sexuality” (Brown 2013, p. 1) is a more apt description, since new residential and leisure spaces are continuing to form (see p. 1216).

Not only are “queer geographies” (Browne 2006; Podmore 2013) diversifying within the

city, they are also spreading beyond it. A considerable amount of research assumes a migration away from closeted small towns to liberated big cities. To presume that sexual minorities *only* live in cities—and that non-urban contexts are deserts of queer cultures and lives—is an example of a “compulsion to urbanism,” one that “codifies the metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making” (Herring 2010). Here we see a challenge to another binary—urban versus rural—that demands “migration [away] from wicked little towns” to the city, which becomes “the sole locus for queer community, refuge, and security” (Herring 2010). Herring calls this “metronormativity.” As an alternative, he offers a “queer anti-urbanism,” or the ways in which rural gays and lesbians challenge this homogenizing impulse.¹³

18.4.2 The Gendered Metropolis

Another caveat to consider is the ways in which queer spaces include some while excluding others. Gender is one such example and a key differentiator in the spatial expressions of sexuality. There is an astonishing diversity of queer spaces, urban and rural alike, yet our public conversations about them emphasize the experiences of gay men. In doing so, we erase the lives of lesbians. Castells (1983, p. 140) set the terms of debate. “Lesbians, unlike gay men, tend not to concentrate in a given territory,” he claimed, and so they “do not acquire a geographical basis.”

¹³ For additional research on queer communities in the country, see (Gray 2009; Forsyth 1997; Bell and Valentine 1995; Phillips et al. 2000). See also research on queer communities in the suburbs: (Brekhus 2003; Lynch 1992; Tongson 2011; Langford 2000; Hodge 1995).

The culprit was a key difference in how men and women relate to space. “Men have sought to dominate, and one expression of this domination has been spatial.” Women, on the other hand, have “rarely had these territorial aspirations.” When gay men struggle “to liberate themselves from cultural and sexual oppression, they need a physical space from which to strike out.” This is because gay men are men. “The same desire for spatial superiority has driven male-dominated cultures to send astronauts to the moon and to explore the galaxy.” The situation is different for women. Lesbians “tend to create their own rich, inner world,” one that “attaches more importance to relationships.” Mapping these biologically deterministic signposts onto the streets of a city, Castells concludes that lesbians are “placeless,” that “we can hardly speak of lesbian territory,” and that “there is little influence by lesbians on the space of the city.”

Although gender accounts for patterns that sweep from gayborhoods to entire galaxies, Castells paints a curiously barren landscape for lesbians. A number of scholars have rejected the “simplistic assumptions” (Binnie and Valentine 1999, p. 176) and “the lie” (Mitchell 2000, p. 193) that lesbians are placeless, that they lack a geographical basis, or that they are without territorial aspirations. Distinct “lesbian geographies” (Valentine 2000) exist—and apart from the more visible, gay male dominated districts. Consider first the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, where a local lesbian resident said, “Being a dyke and living in the Slope is like being a gay man and living in the Village” (Rothenberg 1995, p. 179). Consider next the tiny town of Northampton, Massachusetts. With its population of roughly 30,000, many consider it the most famous “lesbian mecca” and “haven” in the United States, to borrow descriptions from a 1993 *Newsweek* story: “Lesbians have a mecca, too. It’s Northampton, Mass. a.k.a. Lesbianville, U.S.A....Northampton has been a lesbian haven since the late 1970s. ‘If you’re looking for lesbians, they’re everywhere,’ said Diane Morgan,” who coordinates an annual summer festival. The town even had an openly lesbian mayor, Mary Clare Higgins, who held a near-record tenure of the political office

(six terms of 2 years each, 1999–2011). Gender clearly affects location decisions, and it gives rise to distinct “lesbian spaces” (p. 8) (Table 18.4).¹⁴

Lesbians are spatially concentrated. They share some areas with men (Provincetown, Rehoboth Beach, and the Castro), but they more often live in less urbanized places. In addition, all of their zip codes are less concentrated overall than those of gay men. Cooke and Rapiano (2007) call this the “Gay and Lesbian Exceptionalism Hypothesis”: “Lesbian migration differs from gay migration in that lesbian migration is biased toward less urbanized areas” and those that already have “a sizable partnered lesbian community” (p. 288, 296).

Why do gay men and lesbians sometimes make different residential decisions? Some scholars argue that men and women have different needs to control space, as we have already heard from Castells, while others stress women’s lack of economic power (Badgett 2001; p. 69; Adler and Brenner 1992; Taylor 2008). Although the gender wage gap (women’s earnings as a percentage of men’s) has narrowed, according to the US Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), women still earn, on average, less than men—81% of what men earned in 2012. This persistent economic inequality explains why lesbian households are located in lower-income areas. Subcultural differences also matter. Men are more influenced by sexual marketplaces and institution building and women by feminism, countercultures, and informal businesses (Brown-Saracino 2011). Then there are those scholars who emphasize family formation. Female same-sex partner households are more likely to have children, and so they have different needs for housing (Bouthillette 1997). Lesbians are also more likely to live in “less populous regions” (Cooke and Rapiano 2011, p. 295) like rural areas (Kazyak 2011, 2012; Wolfe 1979), while gay men are more likely to select bigger cities. And finally, lesbians often reject existing

¹⁴ “‘Lesbianville USA’ is racially critiqued the same as gay male counterparts. Northampton isn’t a utopia for all lesbians, either. It’s mostly a white community, with few minorities” (Kantrowitz 1993).

a thin slice of racial, gender, and class expression that is displayed within the already-narrow parameters of the “normal” (Warner 1999) and that is palatable to heterosexuals, some of whom merely “tolerate” the gay people (Walters 2014; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003) with whom they happen to share an urban space.

To end this chapter on a note of such dire limitations is not a condemnation of any particular people or place. Rather, it is an invitation for future researchers to give voice to the incredible diversity of human sexuality and its geospatial expressions. It is also an appeal, in the same breath, for those of us who call the queer metropolis our home to work together on the ground to realize a vision of full and authentic equality.

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