

“I HAVE A SENSE THAT GAY IS DILUTING SIGNIFICANTLY.”
GAY NOSTALGIA IN A POST-GAY WORLD AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL
TRANSITIONS OF TORONTO’S CHURCH-WELLESLEY VILLAGE (1973-2023)

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Abstract

Understandings and/or experiences of being gay in Toronto have changed over the past 50 years and are now at risk of being revised or forgotten. There is a diminishment of gay villages, spaces, and organizations across North America, Western Europe and Australia. A *post-gay* period has emerged in these spaces with a recognition of greater fluidity in sexual and gendered identities. This includes Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV). The social, cultural, and political experiences of an older generation of *gay* men differ from a younger *queer* generation who no longer align themselves to *gay* identity, *gay* culture, or *gay* villages and see little need to sustain them. Changes in the built and demographic environments are also contributing to these concerns. Fears about such changes and the risk that the histories of older gay men will be lost are prompting some gay men to express nostalgia during a transitional period.

This dissertation explores perspectives about the past, present and future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) through oral histories of 27 self-identified gay men and written narratives on *Vintage Gay Toronto* (VGT) Facebook website to map the changing social, political, cultural, and spatial environment of the neighbourhood and gay Toronto. This work presents their experiences before and after the area was reconceptualized from a ghetto of segregated and predominantly gay residential space in the 1970s, a flourishing gay commercial, entertainment, and residential village by the late 1980s and 1990s, to a transitional period in which many gay men feel a lost sense of community and identity.

This research is also informed by a knowledge mobilization strategy of community engagement. It provides a step-by-step process of a Community Engagement Workshop. The

workshop generated feedback and research themes to prioritize questions for the project's oral history interviews.

Dedication

To my husband David for his love, support, and encouragement for 30 years that honours and reflects my lifetime of learning and experiences. David is the reason why I embrace life with courage, humour, and gratefulness, sharing each day with honest communication, celebrating our compatibility, remembering to compromise, and honouring our commitment. He has taught me to appreciate life in acquiring and mobilizing knowledge in a variety of ways. David has helped me recognize, value, and overcome the many early obstacles of my life to achieve a post-secondary education later in life and pursue graduate studies. I could not have done this without his ongoing motivation, reassurance, patience and love.

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Chapter 1: Introduction¹ & Theory – Where Do ‘I’ Begin?

*Nostalgia presupposes an uncritical confusion between the first, the best, and the youthful gaze (through which we view the first and the best) with which we create origins.*²

My first memories of being gay was when I was five years old. I remember I was at my family home when a man was visiting my parents. I remember thinking him very attractive and feeling something alluring I couldn't describe. I soon found myself looking at boys differently from girls. I didn't have the words to describe myself as *gay* or those experiences as *gay attraction* – I just knew that I and those experiences were shaped by the expected binary gender norms of how a man or woman (or a boy or girl) was to behave in 1960s Canada. I was traumatically rejected by my family for being gay. It shaped my identity and my experiences, both painful and joyful, ever since.

I went to my first gay bar in Toronto when I was 19 years old in 1983 with someone who became a life-long friend (see Chapter Six). We were both terrified and excited. At that time, the majority of gay bars were outside what we know today as Toronto's *Church-Wellesley Village*. Toronto's gay scene was then centred around Yonge and Wellesley streets. It consisted of a scattering of gay bars, a few bathhouses, and an important gay book shop on Yonge Street called *Glad Day*. Many of us discovered our gay and lesbian identities there through available books and educational materials, including reading *The Body Politic* newspaper and *Xtra Magazine*. This was *before* social media existed.

Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village had not been given that formal name yet. I still knew it as 'the gay ghetto' – a mostly run-down residential and low-rent commercial neighbourhood with

¹ I wish to thank Grant Campbell, one of the gay men I interviewed on 31 Jul 2023 for one of his comments that became part of the title of this dissertation.

² Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue, 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York, New York: University Press, 2019), 16.

good ‘cruising’ for gay sex. Many gays (mostly men) moved to the area during the post-war period and more continued to follow during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Many of us also discovered a connection to other gays and lesbians through social support activities at the *519 Church Street Community Centre*, which opened in 1976. It became one of the first lesbian and gay ‘identity’ and ‘cultural’ anchors directly located in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood.

Some of my darker moments of being gay were traumatic teasing being called ‘Gary the fairy’ or ‘faggot’ or ‘queer.’ *Queer* was still a derogatory, violent word used by gay-bashers, bullies and bigots. Not until 1990 did Queer Nation³ reclaim *queer* to take back identification power. The development of queer theory in the early 1990s took a direct and radical turn in our understanding of sexuality. I still call myself gay, and I am now proud of being ‘Gary the fairy,’ but my life in gay Toronto changed as Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village emerged and also changed.

I am not dispassionate about these changes. Discussions with several self-identified gay male friends living in Toronto (ranging in age from 45 to 65 years old, me included) illustrates some of these differences over the past 50 years in gay Toronto. We debated supposed gay cultural history in North America and Western Europe prior to the mid-1990s expansion of the Internet and the rise of gay/queer dating/hook-up apps such as *Grindr* or *Scruff*.

Conversations focused on when many gays and lesbians were less socially mainstream and could be different (although oppressed by a more homophobic society) while still feeling a sense of unique and more collective subcultural communities under the then non-acronym *gay and lesbian* sexual orientation umbrella. One of us expressed a sense of not feeling ‘special’ anymore

³ Queer Nation, an LGBTQ+ activist organization founded in New York City in 1990 and established in cities across North America, including Toronto, in response to increasing anti-gay violence.

when gays and lesbians were fighting for something besides same-sex marriage to be seen as supposedly ‘normal’ before blending into the seemingly ever-growing 2SLGBTQQIA+ acronym⁴ of today.

Another bemoaned the dwindling number of gay spaces, and how condo development continued to encroach on the boundaries and properties of gay establishments in The Village. One more echoed the complaint, blaming it on a younger generation of queer youth who no longer needed such gay spaces to hook up for sex or meet a potential partner or friends – and who constantly check their smartphones, oblivious to their surroundings.

This prompted another to reminisce about the bygone days’ necessity and art of ‘cruising’ for sex in spaces such as public parks and mall washrooms or porn theatres that produced mixed feelings of danger and euphoria with the risk of being caught.⁵ This was at a time when being gay was perceived as more spatially limited but less socially visible and less accepted. My gay friends and I were dwelling on utopian memories of the past. What we were experiencing is *gay nostalgia* in a changing world.

Like my gay friends, a generation of gay men in Toronto during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s have a unique (and sometimes challenged) overview of the history and development of

⁴ The acronym 2SLGBTQQIA+ represents diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions: 2S is used by some Indigenous individuals as two-spirited who embody both masculine and feminine or outside the binary concept of gender; LGB refer to sexual orientations of lesbian, gay or bisexual; T refers to gender identify that differs from sex assigned at birth; Q is an umbrella term for queer that refers to a fluid variety of non-heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities; the next Q refers to those questioning or exploring their sexual orientation or gender identities; I refers to those born with physical or biological sex characteristics not in the typical binary definitions of male or female; A can refer to asexual individuals who do not experience sexual attraction, aromantic who do not experience romantic attraction, and allies who support and advocate for 2SLGBTQQIA+ rights; + refers to the growing number of sexual orientation and gender terms. See <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-types-of-sexuality> and <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders#a-d> (accessed 22 Jan 2024).

⁵ See Alex Espinoza, *Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime* (Los Angeles, The Unnamed Press, 2019); See also York University Sociology professor Sheila Cavanaugh’s academic theatrical work, *Queer Bathroom Stories*, <https://sheila.info.yorku.ca/queer-bathroom-stories/> (accessed 22 Jan 2024). Based on interviews conducted for the award-winning book, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010).

Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village and how it has changed within the past 50 years. Fears about the disappearance of The Village and the risk that the histories and unique perspectives of these older gay men will be lost are prompting more than just my friends and I to express gay nostalgia about that previous time period.

This project explores gay nostalgia about Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) through the lens of intergenerational transitions that have occurred there within LGBTQ2+ communities.⁶ Perspectives about the past, current, and future of TCWV are provided through oral histories of 27 self-identified gay men with one who later identified as "two-spirits";⁷ written narratives on the *Vintage Gay Toronto* (VGT) Facebook website of over 1000 members; archival materials from The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives; City of Toronto Archives and Toronto Reference Library; Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University; local newspapers like *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and gay liberation publication *The Body Politic* and gay tabloid *TAB*; along with my own personal memories of gay Toronto. Archive sources include digital photos, maps, documents and articles about Toronto gay bars, bathhouses, organizations and services. These materials provide visual cues and context to the many narratives throughout this work.

I conducted 27 interviews, with 25 between July 2023 and November 2023 and two more in May 2024. I connected with one person in my social networks who referred me to four interviewees. I was connected to other individuals through word of mouth, by email contact and LinkedIn messages. I also posted a request for oral history research participants on the Vintage

⁶ This project uses the LGBTQ2+ acronym to align with the use by The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives acronym.

⁷ Emails from Samuel Lopez on 23 Jan 2024 self-identifying as "two-spirits" after originally self-identifying as a gay man, and 8 Apr 2024 stating, "We don't have gender pronouns in my language so use any." A LinkedIn message was sent 8 Oct 2023 seeking older gay men for an oral history project. An informed consent form for review was sent by email on 9 Sep 2023, signed and returned to researcher/author on 11 Sep 2023, and reviewed at interview on 27 Sep 2023.

Gay Toronto Facebook website with permission from the creator/moderator of the site.

Interviewees signed an informed consent form. Four interviewees requested to remain anonymous and two used pseudonyms. Interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes, recorded on a digital recording device. Interviews began with a request to “tell us a little bit about yourself and your connection to gay Toronto.” Interviewees were invited to participate if they had experiences socializing at any Toronto gay bars, gay establishments or gay organizations located outside the current Church-Wellesley Village prior to 1989 *and* in TCWV up to the past five years. This research criterion ensured interviewees could address the history of TCWV before and after TCWV was recognized as an LGBTQ2+ socio-cultural district, changes that have occurred in TCWV within the past 20 years, and thoughts on the future of TCWV.

Exploring the oral histories of gay men in Toronto resonates with me because of my own gay identity, memories, experiences and connection to gay culture in Toronto’s gay *spaces* (as physical location) and *places* (as meaning). This work is both an historical account and a personal story. I use an autoethnographic approach to explore gay nostalgia about gay Toronto and TCWV to augment these sources. By engaging directly with my self-identified gay peers, I am well situated to examine the social and cultural mechanisms at work in the construction of historical memories as a way of bolstering and promoting idealized visions of a gay past while also understanding the intergenerational transitions that have occurred in Toronto’s LGBTQ2+ spaces. I may be nostalgic like my gay cohort, but I am also realistic. My work avoids building a gay village hagiography with sentimental memories of a haloed, ‘simpler, more enjoyable time.’ Rather, I probe how nostalgia about gay Toronto and TCWV can be seen through an intergenerational lens with the reality of change over time.

This project also includes a knowledge mobilization strategy of community engagement to inform this research. This work draws from a community engagement workshop in collaboration with 15 community members affiliated with TCWV. Attendees were from four broad participation groups: (1) Heritage; (2) Community Organizations, Social Services, Education; (3) Business/Commercial; and (4) Health Services. Each of these participants provided feedback and research themes to prioritize in forming questions as part of my oral history interviews. A further goal of the project is to encourage historians to utilize knowledge mobilization strategies to support research impact outside of the academy.

Applying community engagement to an oral history project provides nuance to the usual research framework and research direction that may be overlooked in other oral history projects. This study seeks to contribute to new paths in gay historical scholarship using post-gay theory, nostalgia theory, memory studies, and knowledge mobilization to examine gay nostalgia and intergenerational transitions as a novel approach to studying the erosion of gay villages.

Generations, Identities & Transitions

TCWV is in a period of intergenerational transitions. I have developed a taxonomy to categorize what I have observed among three loosely successive and *overlapping* groups of what I call a *binary* generation, a *neo-queer* generation and a *fluid* generation. I want to be clear that using these generational categories applies only to those who self-identify within the LGBTQ2S+ communities and not as an overall for the various generations typically labelled Baby Boomers (1946-1964); Generation X (1965-1980); Millennials or Generation Y (1981-1996); Generation Z (1997-2012) or Generation Alpha (2010-2024)⁸ – although this project’s

⁸ Sarah Cottrell, “A Year-by-Year Guide to the Different Generations,” *Parents* (30 Jan 2024) <https://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/style/generation-names-and-years-a-cheat-sheet-for-parents/#citation-1> (accessed 27 Feb 2024).

three generations may overlap with these generally accepted categories. In making this generational distinction I refer to myself as part of the *binary generation* of lesbians and gays who remember *before* and *when* Toronto's TCWV emerged as a vibrant and important socio-cultural gay hub between approximately 1973 to 2000. They have been part of the generation *fighting* for liberation and rights, *acquiring* liberation and rights and *living* with liberation and rights while others in the LGBTQ2+ community still fight for theirs.

The *binary* generation of gays and lesbians were born into an ideologically binary world but also part of or directly influenced by the Gay Liberation Movement and The Women's Movement between the 1970s to mid-1980s. They were immersed in fighting for rights, challenging discrimination, promoting equality, and advancing societal recognition of lesbians and gays. However, this generation's greater focus on *lesbian* and *gay* identities often overlooked, ignored, or criticized bisexual, trans or other non-heteronormative identities.

One interviewee recalls talking to a gay man in the late 1970s about thinking himself bisexual:

I remember talking with him about my sexuality and saying, "I'm struggling with this." I actually had a girlfriend at the time but was doing this. So, I was exploring and said, "I thought I might be bi." He says, "No one's bi. You're either gay or straight. This bi thing is just the 'bi now gay later' attitude. You're just fence sitting." And he was adamant that I needed whatever I needed to make that leave [amused laughter] ...and was willing to offer it [amused laughter] ...back then, if you said you're bi, all you got was a sneer. I mean, it's, "Oh, yes" [in a patronizing manner].⁹

Many in the 1970s and 1980s held older ubiquitous perceptions of sex and gender through a binary lens of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, straight/gay or gay/lesbian until queer theory (formerly gay and lesbian studies) emerged in the early 1990s.

The binary generation remembers TCWV as a space where they protested for rights, and then celebrated and experienced firsthand the beginning of legal rights in Canada against

⁹ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

discrimination based on sexual orientation. For most of this generation, the identities used to describe sexual orientation were still *straight* in binary contrast to *lesbian* or *gay*. As one interviewee states, “That was all there was, gays and lesbians. The rest of the [LGBTQ2+] alphabet hadn't been invented yet or acknowledged at any rate.”¹⁰

A *neo-queer* generation emerged in the 1980s, influenced by Queer Nation when they reclaimed that older derogatory slur of queer in 1990 and formed a new identity beyond its previous usage to predominantly identify gays and lesbians. Over the next decade, queer broadened in significance, infused with a number of meanings pertaining to sexuality and gender from the narrower meaning of ‘gay or lesbian’ to include bisexual and trans individuals – particularly with the emergence of queer theory until approximately 2005.

Many of the neo-queer generation remember Toronto’s gay bar scene prior to TCWV. When TCWV emerged as a gay socio-cultural hub, they continued to see it as an important social enclave throughout the 1990s to support gays, lesbians, and now queers within TCWV throughout the decade during the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto and ongoing gay-bashing occurring throughout the city. Taking example from ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), many began moving beyond the gay confines of TCWV into mainstream to shatter assumptions about gender and sexual identities, fight back against gay and queer bashing and experience their new queerness beyond The Village.¹¹

A *fluid* generation appeared in the new millennium, born into a broader inclusion of LGBTQ2+ identities. As queer theory began to socially diffuse by approximately 2005,

¹⁰ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

¹¹ *Xtra*, “Queer Nation embraced ‘queer’ in 1990” (16 Jun 2014), <https://xtramagazine.com/power/queer-nation-embraced-queer-in-1990-61558> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

especially with increased visibility in social media,¹² a *fluid* generation grew up with an understanding of the fluidity of sex and gender¹³ mostly accepted today. The *fluid* generation continue to struggle for recognition in a new fight for social acceptance and equality similarly based on previous struggles for sexuality and gender rights. Like the Gay Liberation and Women's Movements before them, the recent 'culture wars' sees LGBTQ2+ communities now defending rights and opposing prejudice as gays and lesbians did before.¹⁴ Despite this potential for solidarity, there is still a disconnect with earlier generations.

Recent scholars have theorized about a *post-gay* period in which the social, cultural and political experiences of older gay people are arguably disregarded by a growing number of younger gays and queers who no longer align themselves with specific gay or lesbian identity, culture or space and see little need to sustain them.¹⁵ A fluid generation of younger gays and queers no longer value the history or existence of TCWV in the same way and are seeking out queer and other spaces throughout urban areas.

This significant shift in values is not isolated to TCWV alone. It reflects generational change in other gay villages across North America, Western Europe, and Australia as well. The old 'gaybourhood' supported by the binary generation is "growing gray"¹⁶ adding another element to

¹² According to developmental psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams, there was an "increased visibility of alternative sexualities in the media" current to the time he published his work in 2005. See Ritch C. Savin-Williams, *The new gay teenager* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 2005), 121, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674043138> (accessed 27 Feb 2024).

¹³ Rob Cover, *Emergent Identities*, "New post-binary sexualities and genders for a digital era," (United Kingdom, Routledge, 2019), 1-13. See also *The Guardian*, "The gender-fluid generation: young people on being male, female, or non-binary," (23 Mar 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/23/gender-fluid-generation-young-people-male-female-trans> (accessed 5 Jan 2024).

¹⁴ Sean Boynton, "As anti-LGBTQ2 hate grows in Canada, advocates say it's 'never been as scary'," *Global News* (8 Jan 2023), <https://globalnews.ca/news/9393280/canada-lgbtq-hate-trans-west-block/> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

¹⁵ Amin Ghaziani, "Post-gay collective identity construction," *Social Problems*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2011), 99-125. See also Catherine Jean Nash, "The age of the "post-mo? Toronto's gay Village and a new generation," *Geoforum*, No. 49 (2013), 251.

¹⁶ Alex Bitterman and Daniel B. Hess, "Gay ghettos growing gray: transformation of gay urban districts across North America reflects generational change," *Journal of American Culture*, Volume 39, Number 1 (2016), 55-63.

this transitional period. Many are now retired or shortly retired, continuing to live in gay villages that they have lived in all or most of their adult lives. Some continue to socialize in gay villages as seniors, others have moved away for economic reasons or care requirements in retirement. A younger fluid generation are not readily replacing in numbers the once-younger binary generation to gather in the gaybourhood.

Village Conceptualizations

What has taken us from the earlier ‘gay ghetto’ to the perceived abandonment of TCWV by the fluid generation of today? How have identities within and conceptualizations of LGBTQ2+ communities in TCWV by these generations evolved over the past 50 years? Throughout the 1960s to the early 1980s, gays and lesbians viewed the area as a segregated and predominantly gay residential space stemming from ostracism and discrimination. As I mentioned, the ghetto was mostly a run-down residential and low-rent commercial neighbourhood where mostly gay men lived to be within walking distance of the gay bars located nearby outside the Church-Wellesley area. Living in the area also provided a sense of safety and security in a society often hostile towards gays and lesbians. Residing in this concentrated gay area developed a sense of community and mutual support, reducing the risk of harassment – but, sadly, not always. Ongoing gay-bashing still continued as we shall see from the stories of some of our narrators in this project.

By the 1980s, human rights activists reconceptualized gay and lesbian identity in a social minority framework,¹⁷ transforming the area into a recognized social and commercial village.

This period also saw a cohesiveness of support and activism in the neighbourhood during the

¹⁷ In 1986, the Ontario legislature included sexual orientation under human rights protections. It took a decade later for the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation in 1996. See Evelyn Kallen, “In and Out of the Homosexual Closet: Gay/Lesbian Liberation in Canada,” *Culture*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1986). See also *CBC News*, “Timeline: Same-sex rights in Canada,” (12 Jan 2012), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/timeline-same-sex-rights-in-canada-1.1147516> (accessed 26 Jan 2024).

HIV/AIDS epidemic. Medical and social organizations like the Hassle Free Clinic and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) were established in TCWV,¹⁸ caring for and educating those within the gay community and general public. Many survivors in TCWV suffered the deaths of friends, family and partners during the HIV/AIDS crisis and recall how important these organizations were to The Village.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, The Village was firmly established as a site of LGBTQ2+ celebration of pride and political protest, accepted by, and contributing to Toronto's collective multicultural fabric - particularly during annual Pride events. At these festivities it was easier to see diversity from across the city of Toronto coming together in TCWV, but this diversity was not completely representational of the everyday life of The Village. On a day-to-day basis, walking along Church Street, eating at local restaurants, drinking at neighbourhood bars, shopping at area stores, one was more apt to see less diversity and more gay men. Economic disparities and continuing racial and gender discrimination limited resources for many to participate more regularly in The Village, along with historical patterns of racialized¹⁹ geographic and employment concentrations in Toronto. Since 2000, ongoing criticism sees the space as historically and culturally enjoyed by mostly gay, middle-class, cisgender, white men commodifying and inhabiting TCWV.

¹⁸ Hassle Free Clinic moved to 556 Church Street (upper) in 1980 offering HIV/AIDS education and prevention counselling and anonymous HIV testing when it became available in 1985. ACT moved to 66 Wellesley Street (1982- 1993), before longstanding location at 399 Church Street (1993-2015) and now at 543 Yonge Street.

¹⁹ The term "racialized" is used in this work to underscore the socially constructed nature of racial categories to signify an individual or group that has been ascribed an identity referring to historical racial categorizations.



Image 1: Still photos from video footage of Toronto Pride Day parades 1987 & 1988 showing Pride crowd diversity. Source: Brian Hardy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5qTMIys9fc> (accessed 11 Jan 2024), Photo 1, top left (1:43), Photo 2, top middle (5:19), Photo 3, top right (5:50), Photo 4, bottom left (8:38), Photo 5, middle bottom (9:15), Photo 6, bottom right (11:40).

Within the past ten years, there has been an increase in homelessness with a lack of affordable housing, street youth, open drug-use on the streets, along with vandalism and violence in TCWV.²⁰ This has prompted neighbourhood organizations to try to ‘clean up’ The Village, while community outreach organizations, such as the *519 Community Centre* continue to provide services to these street-engaged neighbours in the area.

Other changes in The Village include a dwindling of gay bars/dance clubs in the region as gay men get older and frequent such spaces less or can now integrate more easily at straight bars/dance clubs. These gay spaces are important to gay identity and many older gay men experienced the significance of ‘coming out’ in these establishments. There is also the perceived ‘de-gaying’ of neighborhood spaces with an influx of heterosexual presence. TCWV and other gay and new queer spaces throughout urban districts are seeing a “hetrification” of these spaces by straight people. Gay bars have become increasingly popular – especially among straight women – for bachelorette parties, socializing with other straight friends, and watching, even

²⁰ *The Bridge*, “Church-Wellesley residents decry growing violence,” Volume 4, Issue 7 (Aug 2023), 3.

participating in drag shows as “an appropriation of not just space, but of culture.”²¹ A shift to more hetero-inclusiveness underscores the earlier self-segregation or ‘exclusiveness’ aspects of gay neighbourhoods that many gay men remember as an important part of their socializing.

“Hyper-gentrification” of historic gay districts in places like New York City²² are a clear example of what is also happening in Toronto. Retail and housing prices continue to rise making it more difficult to maintain affordable social and residential spaces in the area. Non-gay-run businesses are increasing as wealthy straight entrepreneurs and franchises move into The Village and more gay men move out. Condo development – no longer just on the borders of the area – is now in the heart of The Village on properties of former gay establishments. Things changed.

What’s Queer About Gay?

I have opted to use *gay* to historicize the *memories, identities* and *culture* that these self-identified gay men experienced in Toronto. A key focus is on how a perceived notion of gay culture developed *historical gay identity*. Individual gay identities developed from this notion of an overarching gay identity adapted to individual contexts. This perceived gay identity is still relevant to some older gay men in Toronto today who convey their memories of gay Toronto through this historical gay identity lens. Labels such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer did not exist for most of our history. This makes it mostly impossible to know how others with such sexual and gendered desires identified in the past before the “invention of heterosexuality” to define the binary ‘homosexuality’ between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²³

²¹ John Muresianu, “Thinking Citizen Blog – “Hetrification” – Like “Gentrification” but, Well, Worse,” <https://john-muresianu.medium.com/thinking-citizen-blog-hetrification-like-gentrification-but-well-worse-3a44ab6cc44> (accessed 14 Jan 2024).

²² Jeremiah Moss, *Vanishing New York: How a Great City Lost Its Soul* (New York, Harper Collins, 2017), 6.

²³ Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007). The book was originally published in 1995 and subsequently translated and published in Portuguese, Italian, French and Spanish, winning several awards. Katz argues that the term ‘heterosexual’ was only invented and defined in contrast to deal with the perceived problem of the labeled ‘homosexual’ in the late nineteenth-century. The work was cited in 2003

Gay identity is a relatively recent concept, but same-sex desires have existed throughout history with different understandings. Our more contemporary understandings of gay identity and gay culture continue to change. Attempting to determine *gay identity* over a lifetime is the force that continues to shape it over time. The perception that there is one definitive, unchanging gay identity that is dying off with one older generation is a fallacy. Identity is influenced by a community's changing norms and expectations, but aspects of a generalized historical gay identity can remain throughout a lifetime. This is why I use *gay* and *culture* advisedly.

I am also aware that not everyone who has memories and experiences of *gay culture* may self-identify as gay and may not define themselves based on the complexity of supposed gay cultural meanings. Lesbians, bisexuals, trans, and queer individuals, including those who were simply curious, questioning, non-binary or non-labelling their sexualities are acknowledged despite the narrower use of the term gay and its focus on older men for this project.

Cultural historian Joep Leerssen addresses the complexity of culture: “Culture is not predicated, as a property or characteristic, on a given group; it is, rather, a fluid repertoire of choices that are negotiated within, between and across groups – who at best may or may not derive a subjective sense of collective identity from those choices.” It requires “self-awareness as an operative force” and is also “transgenerational” in that it requires “communication between generational cohorts” to ensure the survival of cultural elements and artifacts.²⁴

Insights into gay culture can be explained using Psychologist Edgar Schein's model of culture that presents different *levels of culture* and their significance in understanding the

by U.S. Supreme Court in *Lawrence v Texas* to overturn a Texas law banning consensual gay sex as unconstitutional.

²⁴ Joep Leerssen, “Culture, humanities, evolution: the complexity of meaning-making over time,” *Philosophical Transactions, The Royal Society* (11 Feb 2021), <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/epdf/10.1098/rstb.2020.0043> (accessed 26 Jan 2024), 2-4.

complexity of culture as a whole. Schein suggests “Artifacts” comprise the largest aspects of culture “which includes all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels.” These are the visible organizational structures and processes of culture. This level of culture contributes to cultural complexity as it is “both easy to observe and very difficult to decipher.” Meanings may vary within the given group. Schein’s next level of culture is “Espoused Beliefs and Values” as strategies, goals and philosophies held by a particular group to justify these beliefs and values. Justification in gay culture can include activism in protests and marches, and beliefs about the rights of same-sex love and marriage or values about non-heteronormative behavior. Schein’s final level of culture is “Underlying Assumptions” as the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings that motivate – at the individual and group level – actions to justify cultural existence. These assumptions are important as they can be challenged by intergenerational transitions and alter aspects of a group’s culture or erode or erase the culture completely to be forgotten in history.²⁵

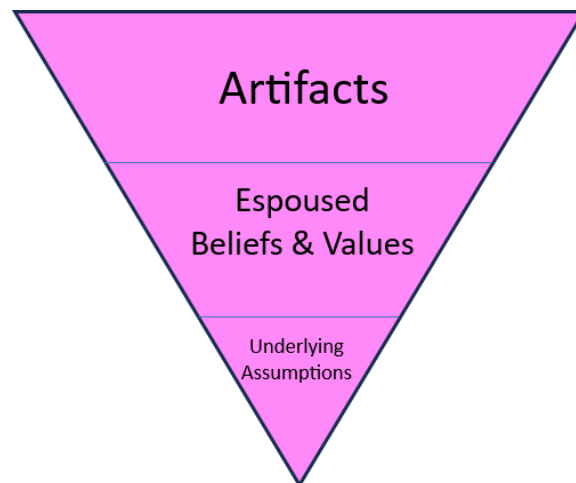


Image 2: Based on Edgar Schein’s three levels of culture. Source: Created by the author, J. Gary Myers, 18 Jan 2024 using pink triangle symbol of LGBTQ+ communities. For the history of how the pink triangle was transformed from a Nazi concentration camp badge of hate and discrimination to a recognizable symbol of gay activism, pride and community, see William Jake Newsome, *Pink Triangle Legacies: Coming Out in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 2022).

²⁵ Edgar Schein, “The Levels of Culture” in *Organizational Collaboration*, MariaLaura Di Domenico, Siv Vangen, Nik Winchester, Dev Kumar Boojihawan, Jill Mordaunt, eds. (London, Routledge, 2020), 135-143.

Given the complexities of understanding the changing meanings or assumptions underlying gay culture and its transgenerational components, the term *gay culture* is also problematic for its stereotyping potential and narrower focus that may exclude other LGBTQ2+ identities, both older and younger. I use the term with its *historical associations* that are often described by an older cohort of gay men in their narratives. I define gay culture as expressions of the following:

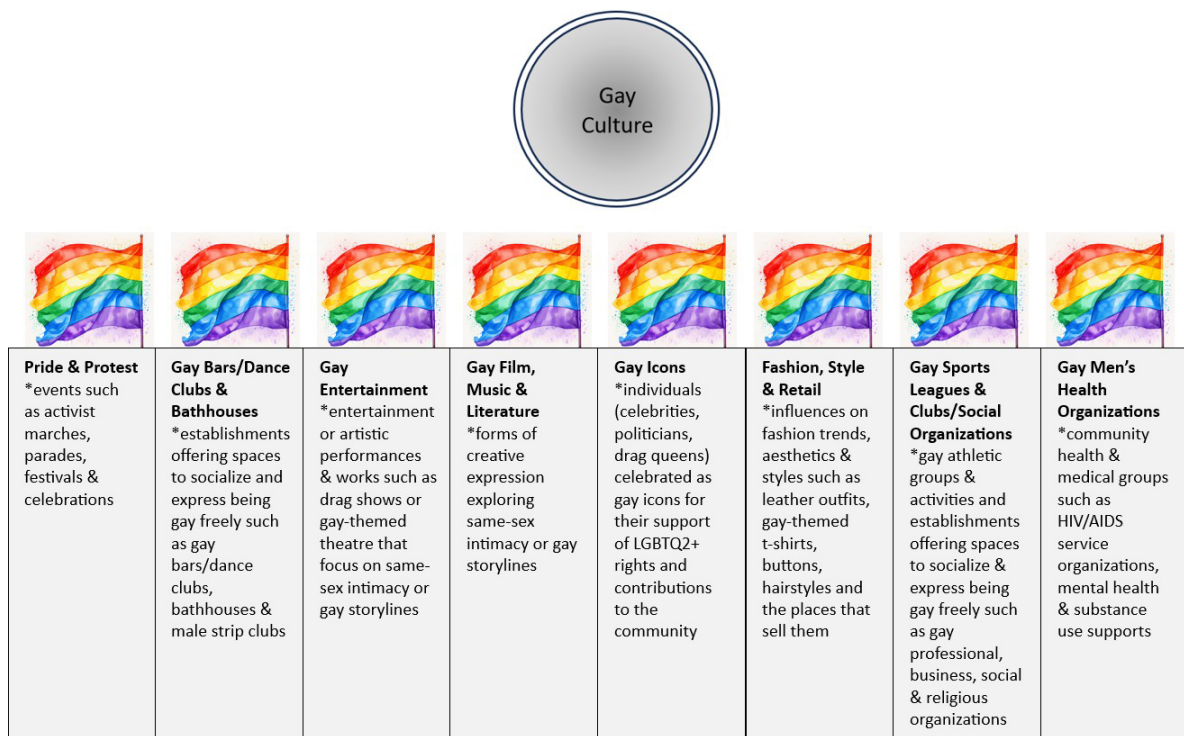


Image 3: Historical examples of gay culture and earlier Pride flag remembered by older gay men. Source: Created by the author, J. Gary Myers, 18 Jan 2024. Pride flag illustration used under the Pixabay free content license <https://pixabay.com/service/license-summary/>.

Again, in recognizing the diversity within LGBTQ2+ communities it is crucial to convey that not all individuals who identify as gay may necessarily go to Pride parades, drag shows, gay bars or gay bathhouses, other gay establishments, organizations, or even The Village itself.

I admit that exclusively using the term *gay* highlights the limitations of identity politics as contemporary queer analysis challenges fixed categories of sexual and gender identity. This also

includes the implied inclusiveness of the LGBTQ2+ acronym that the use of stand-alone *gay* may overshadow. Gay has sharper gender divisions than queer. Queer is not necessarily heterosexual or cisgender. Under the queer umbrella many younger queers seek to transcend the gender/sexuality binary. It is also important to note that there are younger individuals who self-identify as gay within the LGBTQ2+ acronym but may not understand the strong influence of growing up gay in the binary generation that continues to influence and create a subtle though relevant difference in self-identifying as gay.

It is challenging to those who have grown up with this specific notion of a historical gay identity to identify beyond this binary. We must not see the need to change names of groups with important history just for the sake of current politics. Therefore, I use *gay* as historian George Chauncey applies it: as “a historically specific social category and identity.”²⁶ I use *gay* in this sense to recover and understand these histories in their context as a generational shift in culture and language has emerged. Chauncey’s *Gay New York* explores how gay people found each other to form a community in New York City starting in the late 19th century. It is an excellent example of work that highlights gay history in the context of the spatial geography of New York. Similarly, I focus on this type of subjectivity and locality of an older generation of self-identified gay men in Toronto to preserve their historically specific gay identity and gay locations that some suggest are now being diminished or erased.

To understand the intergenerational relationship between older gay men and younger queers, it is important to define what is meant by *gay* and *queer* and *post-gay*. This is particularly important within the historical context of the evolution of language use and identity.

²⁶ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, urban culture, and the makings of the gay male world, 1890-1940* (New York, Basic Books, 1994), 26.

Semantic Scholar Robin Brontsema refers to the linguistic reclamation of hate speech as “the right of self-definition, of forging and naming one’s own existence.”²⁷ Brontsema presents the origin of the term *queer* from the Middle High German *twer* to refer to something *oblique* or *askew*. She suggests up to the end of the nineteenth century *queer* did not have a sexual connotation, referring only to a strange, odd, peculiar, or eccentric appearance of a person, place, object, or experience, including a questionable, suspicious, or dubious character.²⁸

Chauncey states that *queer* became a more common term to denote non-normative sexualities and traits in the 1910s and 1920s, pre-dating *gay* in the sexual sense, to distinguish it from the co-existing term *fairy*, and was restricted almost exclusively to male-to-male sexual activity. *Fairy* implied more effeminate and flamboyant behaviour in contrast to *queer* which implied a more perceived masculine behaviour: “The men who identified themselves as part of a distinct category of men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status usually called themselves *queer*.”²⁹ This earlier use of *queer* as a self-identifier for *sexual interest* rather than identity is another important intergenerational distinction between a 1920s generation and those in the 1970s and 1980s. Chauncey also suggests a class difference, with *fairy* referring to those primarily from the working-class and *queers* to those primarily from the middle class. Queers potentially risked more in their professional lives by displaying effeminate traits associated with *fairies*.³⁰

Brontsema points to “in-group” versus “out-group” categories to expand on Chauncey’s work to suggest that the well-defined system of “in-group” homosexual self-identities between

²⁷ Robin Brontsema, “A Queer Revolution: Reconceptualizing the Debate Over Linguistic Reclamation,” *Colorado Research in Linguistics*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2004), 2, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25810/dky3-zq57> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

²⁸ Brontsema, 2.

²⁹ Chauncey, 16.

³⁰ Chauncey, 106.

effeminate fairies and *masculine queers* were used interchangeably and without distinction by “out-group” heterosexuals. She states due to the more highly marked and visible gender nonconformity of *effeminate* fairies, they served as the stereotypical representation by “out-group” heterosexuals of *all* homosexual men: “Queers and fairies were forcibly fused into the same category, one which, because of the latter’s higher degree of visibility, equated homosexuality with femininity.”³¹ By the 1950s, queer emerged as a common insulting term used to demean men and women who were perceived to break the binary gender ‘rules’ of expected heterosexuality.

The term *gay* originates from Old High German *gāhi*, meaning *quick* or *sudden* and was adopted in Middle English from the Anglo-French *gai* referring to a sudden lighthearted pleasantness, being happily excited, keenly alive, and exuberant or brilliant in colour,³² all with a non-sexual connotation. According to Chauncey: “Originally referring simply to things pleasurable, by the seventeenth century *gay* had come to refer more specifically to a life of *immoral* pleasures and dissipation [indulgence],” but still not in reference to homosexuality until the first part of the twentieth century.³³

By the 1920s, *gay* was used by *fairies* as a safe code word, given a double meaning that only those familiar with the specific use of *gay* would understand. It was eventually adopted by earlier *queers* and by the Second World War *gay* replaced *queer* as a more popular term, especially among younger homosexuals who saw *queer* as a derogatory and pejorative label describing their homosexual interests as deviant, abnormal, and perverse.³⁴ Brontsema explains:

³¹ Brontsema, 3.

³² Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Gay” (2024), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gay#usage-2> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

³³ Chauncey, 17. Another word historically used to describe males participating in same-sex activity was a *molly*.

³⁴ Chauncey, 19.

“Like the out-group usage of *queer* only a few decades earlier, [*gay*] ignored important differences among those men [and women], coercively forging a common identity based solely upon their sexual object choice and completely disregarding the significance of gender in their self-classification.”³⁵

After the Second World War, disregarding gender differences with the use of *gay* as a self-identifier would remain in the background for the next twenty years – even during what is considered the homophile period during the 1950s to mid ‘60s. Groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis used *homophile* rather than *gay* or *lesbian* as a descriptor. They attempted to gain greater assimilationist acceptance of homosexuals and lesbians in associations across the United States and were also influential in Canada. According to historian Marc Stein, “three main U.S. homophile magazines of the 1950s and early 1960s (*ONE*, *Mattachine Review*, and *The Ladder*) published 240 items that referenced Canada and Canadians from 1953 to 1964.”³⁶ In the words of historian Jonathan Ned Katz, homophiles were “promoting the integration of the homosexual in society.”³⁷

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, younger gay liberationists were generally dismissive and often condemning of earlier homophile activists and saw them as “painfully accommodationist” to heterosexuals.³⁸ With uneasy intergenerational relations (foreshadowing future intergenerational gay and queer differences), younger homosexuals rejected the homophile goal of mere acceptance and proudly adopted and ‘outed’ the previously safe code word of *gay*, advocating for public disclosure of one’s sexual identity, calling for complete liberation, and

³⁵ Brontsema, 4.

³⁶ Marc Stein, “Introduction to Canada in the U.S. Homophile Press, 1953-64,” *Out History* (2024), <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/us-homophile/canada-intro> (accessed 20 Jan 2024).

³⁷ Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A. – A Documentary* (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 426.

³⁸ Terence Kissack, *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender History in America*, Vol. 1, Marc Stein, ed. (Detroit, Michigan, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2004), 435.

seeing *homophiles*, as Elizabeth Armstrong explains, as “an obstacle to the Gay Liberation Movement’s construction of an alternative that truly serves and liberates its people.”³⁹

In 1970, Carl Wittman published *A Gay Manifesto* which was readily adopted by the Gay Liberation Movement. It quickly became a gay activist guide that urged no apologies for same-sex desire and sexual activity, calling on gays to free themselves: “come out everywhere; initiate self-defense and political activity; [and] initiate counter community institutions.” Wittman urged gays to turn gay ghettos dominated by straight exploitation by landlords, police, and capitalists who “make money off us” into “free territory” where gays “set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our own energies to improve our lives.”⁴⁰ Although the document was speaking “from the gay male viewpoint” it encouraged “the emergence of a lesbian liberation voice.”⁴¹ However, just as there were also intergenerational divisions, there were also gender, racial, and class divisions over liberation goals for gay men and lesbians. This was due to over-representation by higher-educated, middle-class, white, cisgender, gay men who tended to dominate the political agenda.⁴²

The growing women’s movement of the 1970s attracted most women active earlier in gay liberation groups, leading to the development of the lesbian feminist movement,⁴³ and the greater use of the phrase *lesbian* and/or *gay* began to distinguish expanding social and cultural spaces and expressions. Although *gay* as a self-identifying identity became more popular than *queer* among mostly male homosexuals in the post-war era, *queer* has become more widely adopted since the 1990s.

³⁹ Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950–1994* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002), 64.

⁴⁰ Carl Wittman, *A Gay Manifesto* (New York, N.Y., The Red Butterfly Publication, 1970), 7.

⁴¹ Wittman, 3.

⁴² Manon Tremblay, (ed.), *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver, Toronto, UBC Press, 2015), 23.

⁴³ Kissack, 437.

Queer was used to differentiate from the limiting and essentializing sexuality categories of *gay* or *lesbian* during the AIDS crisis with more inclusive educational activism beyond sexual identity categories. The public reclamation of *queer* made in 1990 by AIDS activist groups Queer Nation and ACT UP (founded in New York City) was to fight against homophobia. Queer Nation Toronto followed their action call as part of “a collection of small groups in cities across North America.”⁴⁴ According to Queer Nation Toronto member David Walberg reflecting on the confrontational group 25 years later:

I think at the time, it was very purposefully in your face both in terms of within the community and for the wider world, to use a word that was brash and radical and, at the time, new for people. Even though the word queer was used for many decades before that [as a derogatory word], it felt like the first time it had been used en masse by a group of people to self-describe...At a time when queer issues were still largely invisible and the legal system refused to take gay-bashing seriously, members of Queer Nation took matters into their own hands. They postered neighbourhoods of known bashers to let people know who was living among them; they organized late-night patrols to offer protection when they knew the police couldn't be counted on. It didn't take long for the mainstream to start noticing.⁴⁵

Queer has now expanded beyond sexual identity to be an inclusive descriptor of anything non-normative including gender, such as *genderqueer*, *genderfluid*, *abinary*, *bigender*, or *non-binary*. The development of a queer umbrella sees many younger queers transcending the gender/sexuality binary.

Queer theory, as a field of critical studies was developed in the 1990s by several queer theorists. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler aimed to deconstruct the use of binaries in defining human sexuality and gender.⁴⁶ David Halperin and Michael Warner focused on the anti-

⁴⁴ *Xtra*, “Queer Nation embraced ‘queer’ in 1990” (16 Jun 2014) <https://xtramagazine.com/power/queer-nation-embraced-queer-in-1990-61558> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

⁴⁵ *Xtra*.

⁴⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10th anniversary ed. (Florence, Routledge, 2006).

assimilationist and anti-essentialist approach to sexual identity politics that countered gay and lesbian ideals of heteronormativity in the push for same-sex marriage.⁴⁷ These scholars were influenced by French post-structuralist historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault and his work, *History of Sexuality* positing that sexuality is socially constructed.⁴⁸ In 1990, Teresa de Lauretis organized the first Queer Theory Conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz. All these scholars have contributed to a broader understanding of the fluidity of sexuality and gender and the ongoing critical focus on queer theory in academia today.

Post-Gay & Fluid

Just as there were earlier intergenerational differences between *older assimilationist homophiles* and *younger liberationists gays* from the 1950s to the 1970s, intergenerational differences emerged between *older gay liberationists* and *younger social minority rights gays* seeking equal rights (i.e., social benefits and same-sex marriage) during the 1980s and 90s. This also included *younger radical activist queers* (i.e., ACT-UP fighting for medical care during HIV/AIDS epidemic and fighting queer-bashing) in the 1990s.

⁴⁷ David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards A Gay Hagiography* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995); Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, translation by Robert Hurley (New York, Random House, 1978).



Image 4: Homophile protestors picketing the White House in 1965. Assimilationist homophiles were not known to use the more aggressive tactics of the lesbian and gay liberation movements and were criticized for attempting to ‘blend in’ to heterosexual society and being overly focused on arrests and lost jobs rather than understanding differences in sex and sexual orientation. Notice men wearing suits and ties and women wearing dresses or skirts to adhere to expected hetero gender norms. Source: Bettmann Archive, Getty Images.



Image 5: “Gay in the seventies” published in weekend Globe & Mail news special. Photo includes prominent Canadian lesbian and gay liberation activists in 1977. Source: Permission by photographer Barry Lategan re: DACS.



Image 6: Queer Nation protest in New York City, where Queer Nation was founded in 1990. Source: Permission granted for use by Tracy Litt, photographer.



Image 7: Queer Nation protest in Toronto at the intersection of Yonge and College/Carlton streets, 1991. Source: Richard Lautens/Toronto Star via Getty Images.

Gay men get married after appeal court ruling

Couple celebrates end of 20-year fight
Judges rewrite definition of marriage

TRACY TYLER
AND TRACY HUFFMAN
STAFF REPORTERS

Two gay men said "I do" yesterday, after Ontario's highest court said "they can."

Crown Attorney Michael Leshner and his long-time partner Michael Stark were married by Mr. Justice John Hamilton in a hastily arranged ceremony in the jury waiting room of a Toronto courthouse, as a crowd that included everyone from judges to janitors looked on.

Just hours before, the Ontario Court of Appeal rewrote the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, saying denying gays and lesbians the ability to marry offends their dignity, discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation and violates their equality rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

A unanimous three-judge panel, made up of Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and justices James MacPherson and Eileen Gillies, then took the issue further than any other court in the world.

Gay and lesbian marriage became legal in Ontario, effective immediately.

"Michael Leshner, will you please repeat after me," said Hamilton, as he began the short, civil ceremony. "I do solemnly declare that I do not know of any lawful impediment why I may not be joined in matrimony to Michael Clifford Stark."

Both men repeated the declaration before pledging their vows.

"I Michael, take you Michael, to be my lawful wedded spouse," said Leshner. "To have and to hold, from this day forward, whatever circumstances or experiences life may hold for us." Hamilton, an Ontario Superior Court judge, asked both men to place rings on each other's fingers, then made it official.

"By the power vested in me by

the Marriage Act, I pronounce you Michael, and you Michael — affectionately known as 'The Michaels' — to be lawfully wedded spouses."

"You are now married," said Hamilton, who later said it was "an honour" to perform the ceremony.

Leshner, 55, and Stark, 45, kissed and popped champagne.

Speaking to reporters, Leshner said he regards the court's judgment as, "Day One for millions of gays and lesbians around the world" and the culmination of a personal 20-year battle to end "legally sanctioned homophobia."

"I wanted to put a stake through that sucker," he said.

His 90-year-old mother, Ethel, who beamed and sang in her wheelchair, drew her satisfaction on a smaller scale.

"I feel wonderful, if he does.

And I'm sure he does — take a look at his face," she said.

"I can't 'rah, rah, rah.' I'm not the type of person to do that," she said. "I'm just happy my son is happy — I know he's getting a nice guy."

While Leshner and Stark are believed to be the first gay couple to wed after same-sex marriage became legal yesterday, they may not be the first gay Ontario couple to be legally married.

That distinction appears to fall to two same-sex couples who were married in a double ceremony at Toronto's Metropolitan Community Church in January, 2001.

The appeal court ordered the province to register marriage certificates issued to those couples, Kevin Bourassa and Joe Varnell and Elaine and Anne Vautour. The judges also ordered the clerk of the City of Toronto to issue marriage licences to Leshner and Stark and six other couples whose licence applications were held in abeyance pending a ruling by the



Michael Stark, left, and Michael Leshner pop champagne and kiss after their wedding ceremony yesterday. Leshner called the ruling, "Day One for millions of gays and lesbians around the world."

courts. The province and the city told the judges during a hearing in April that they would abide by whatever the appeal court decided.

Less clear is where the federal government stands.

Justice Minister Martin Cauchon told reporters yesterday he believes MPs should have a say in the debate about same-sex marriage, but the government also sees where courts across the country are heading on the issue.

The British Columbia Court of Appeal and a Quebec Superior Court judge have also ruled the common law definition of marriage violates the Charter's equality provisions, but didn't go as far as Ontario in immediately extending marriage to same-sex couples, preferring instead to give Parliament until July, 2004 to change the law.

The Ontario Court of Appeal said there's no need to wait: Changing the definition of marriage, effective immediately,

won't create any public harm.

Federal justice department spokesperson Dorette Pollard said the government has until Sept. 9 to decide whether to seek leave to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In the meantime, the government does not have the option of seeking a court injunction to stop same-sex marriages from taking place, she said.

If a further appeal to the Supreme Court is in the cards, it could return to the Court of Appeal to ask for a stay of yesterday's ruling, effectively putting it in suspension, Pollard said.

She was unable to say how that would affect same-sex marriages that have already taken place.

Opponents of same-sex marriage, however, had no difficulty expressing an opinion on yesterday's decision.

By reformulating the definition of marriage, the appeal court ignored "centuries of precedent" and rendered "ordinary Canadians' views irrelevant,"

said Derek Rogusky, a vice-president of Focus on the Family, whose interests were represented by The Association for Marriage and the Family in Ontario, an intervenor in the case.

In his decision yesterday, written not by one judge in particular but collectively as "the court," the appeal panel changed the definition of marriage from being "the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman" to "the voluntary union for life of two persons to the exclusion of all others."

A person's sense of dignity and self worth can only be enhanced by the recognition that society gives to marriage and denying people in same-sex relationships access to that most basic of institutions violates their dignity, the court said.

"The ability to marry, and to thereby participate in this fundamental societal institution, is something that most Canadians take for granted. Same-sex cou-

ples do not; they are denied access to this institution simply on the basis of their sexual orientation."

Preventing same-sex couples from marrying perpetuates the view that they are not capable of forming loving and lasting relationships and not worthy of the same respect and recognition as heterosexual couples, the court added.

It was ruling on an appeal from an Ontario Divisional Court decision last year. The Divisional Court said the common law definition of marriage as an exclusively heterosexual union was unconstitutional, but decided 2-1 to leave it up to Parliament to rewrite the law by July, 2004.

The dissenting judge in that case, Mr. Justice Harry LaForme, who would have changed the definition immediately, attended yesterday's ceremony.

In its 60-page decision yesterday, the judges systematically disposed of Ottawa's arguments for preserving marriage as a heterosexual domain, saying they were filled with irrelevancies, stereotypes and "circular reasoning."

The government argued that marriage has always been understood as a special kind of monogamous institution that brings the sexes together for the purposes of procreating, raising children and companionship.

That isn't something that lawmakers dreamed up; it predates the law, the government said.

Who invented the concept of marriage doesn't matter, the court said; What does is how gays and lesbians fare under a legal regime that excludes them from the institution.

The government was avoiding the main issue by arguing that marriage "just is" heterosexual and benefits society as a whole, the court said.

"The couples are not seeking to abolish the institution of marriage," wrote the judges. "They are seeking access to it."

WITH FILES FROM MARY GORDON

Image 8: Some older gay liberationists criticized those seeking same-sex marriage as following heteronormative expectations. Despite this criticism, thousands of same-sex couples were legally married across the country as provincial Superior Courts and finally the Canadian Federal Government ruled the previous definition of marriage violated the Canadian Charter's equality rights. Source: Toronto Star (11 June 2003), A4.

Such intergenerational differences in a *post-gay* world continue to occur between an older binary generation of gay men fearing a loss of cultural identity and community and the younger fluid generation of queers today living in a post-gay world.

British journalist and activist Paul Burston coined the term *post-gay* in 1994. It became popular in academic discussions at the 1998 Post-Gay Symposium sponsored by *Out* magazine and the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. *Out* magazine editor, James Collard wrote a 1998 *Newsweek* article, "Leaving the gay ghetto" in which he expressed, as a gay man, his preference to live and socialize in "mixed" neighbourhoods and clubs rather than a gay

village and homogenous gay clubs. Collard defined post-gay as “simply a critique of gay politics and gay culture by gay people, for gay people.”⁴⁹

Since then, *post-gay* theory, also known as *post-closet* or *post-mo* theory, has attained academic legitimacy and debated by queer theorists and sexuality scholars - but approached from different perspectives. Sociologists Benjamin Kampler and Catherine Connell suggest with these different approaches “there is significant confusion inherent in the use of the term”⁵⁰ as indicated by the following examples:

Sociologist and sexuality theorist Steven Seidman in his work on the rise and fall of “the closet” in gay history revealed how the “the closet” status had changed by the end of the twentieth-century. Seidman refers to “post-closet” in which contemporary gays and lesbians have moved beyond hiding their sexuality. Seidman suggests there is less stigma due to a profound shift in the broader acceptance of gays and lesbians in society. By the new millennium, the closet was no longer the defining feature of conveying gay sexuality.⁵¹ ‘Coming out of the closet’ as a gay identity tool and earlier rite of passage for many up to the 1990s still casts a shadow on this now older generation of gay men, but cultural changes by 2000 made this sexuality assertion less important.

Sociologist James Joseph Dean specifically uses “post-closeted” to point to the changing behaviours and attitudes of gay people *and* straight people. Aligned with Seidman, Dean states gay people no longer need to “come out” about their sexuality to show their pride, and there is an

⁴⁹ James Collard, “Leaving the gay ghetto,” *Newsweek*, Vol. 132, No. 7 (17 Aug 1998), 53.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Kampler and Catherine Connell, “The post-gay debates: Competing visions of the future of homosexualities,” *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 12, No. 12 (2018).

⁵¹ Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York and London, Routledge Press, 2002).

increasing recognition among straight people that they do not need to take for granted their sexuality as “normal, natural, or rightly ideal.”⁵²

In 2005, developmental psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams talked about “the new gay teenager” and reflected how a younger generation were more nonchalant about gender and sexual fluidity, not adhering to binary identity labels of masculine/feminine, gay/lesbian or bisexual.⁵³ Those ‘new gay teenagers’ are adults today and contributing to social media. Along with a new generation of teenagers they are filling the internet with online posts and videos openly and boldly discussing the fluidity of gender and sexuality adopted by what I call the *fluid generation*.

Urban Sexualities Scholar Amin Ghaziani argues that a greater emphasis on similarities between gays and straights, such as marriage, has created a “post-gay” culture that no longer necessitates the existence of specific gay geographical spaces. This is not just a phenomenon of younger queers not living in or frequenting gay villages anymore. Since 2000, more gays and lesbians have also integrated into “mainstream” neighbourhoods and heterogeneous social contexts⁵⁴ – including those who used to live and socialize more in TCWV.

More recently, Geographer Catherine Nash, focused on geographies of gay identity in her work on Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. Nash draws from these post-gay theories – or as she says, “post-mo” (for post-homosexual) – to include intergenerational identity differences combined with earlier examples of not being culturally, socially, or residentially confined to the geographical space of a gay village. She explains: “Emerging social and political identities such as ‘post-gay’, ‘queer’ and ‘trans’ mark a fundamental break from post-world war II gay and

⁵² James Joseph Dean, “Being Straight in a Post-Closeted Culture,” *Contexts*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2015), 69.

⁵³ Ritch C. Savin-Williams, *The new gay teenager* (Boston, Harvard University Press, 2005), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674043138> (accessed 27 Feb 2024).

⁵⁴ Amin Ghaziani, (2011), 99-125.

lesbian identities posited as inherently stable and fixed over the course of a lifetime...Such post-mo sensibilities surface in and utilize new and alternative social landscapes (from more ‘traditional’ spaces such as the gay Village to alternative downtown locations), contributing to the transformative processes reordering Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods.”⁵⁵ It is this last definition that this project uses to define post-gay to present the intergenerational differences between an older binary generation of gay men and younger fluid queers lacking essentialist affiliation with any gay space or culture.

A Tinge of Nostalgia

Earlier scholars writing about nostalgia were rather doubtful about the efficacy of applying nostalgia to history research. Nostalgia was considered ideological.⁵⁶ It was seen as an inauthentic, political, and pop-culturally commodified historicity.⁵⁷ An overly emotional attempt to hold on to or reshape the present with futile feelings of making today ‘great again.’ Nostalgia was “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition.”⁵⁸ Even a betrayal of history.⁵⁹

More recent scholars challenge these notions by calling attention to nostalgia’s critical potential as an interpretive tool.⁶⁰ They challenge us to see nostalgia as a way of producing historical consciousness.⁶¹ Nostalgia can take an important and prominent place in historical

⁵⁵ Catherine Jean Nash, (2013), 251.

⁵⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), 23.

⁵⁷ David Lowenthal, “Nostalgia tells it like it wasn’t,” in Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (eds) *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1989), 21.

⁵⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1994), 44.

⁵⁹ Leo Spitzer, “Back Through the Future: Nostalgic Memory and Critical Memory in a Refuge from Nazism,” in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds) *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, New Hampshire, University Press of New England, 1999), p. 91.

⁶⁰ Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, “Nostalgia and the shapes of history,” *Memory Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), 181-184.

⁶¹ Atia and Davies, 182.

research.⁶² History scholars can also recognize the value of nostalgia and emotions as a sub-discipline of oral history to become a legitimate form of historical investigation.⁶³

Although the word nostalgia stems from two Greek words, *nostos* (return home) and *algos* (longing, suffering or grief), the word nostalgia was coined by Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688. Hofer described a combined physical and neurological wasting disease that included symptoms of “fever and lassitude that was potentially fatal if left untreated.”⁶⁴ Other symptoms listed were disturbed sleep, decrease of strength, hunger, thirst, diminished senses, heart palpitations, frequent sighs, and what Hofer forthrightly called “stupidity of the mind” that was ‘cured’ by a return to one’s homeland.⁶⁵

Nostalgia continued as a neurological diagnosis throughout the 17th and 18th centuries based on widely-travelled reproductions of Hofer’s thesis.⁶⁶ Hofer’s theory was most prominently conveyed by Swiss physician, Theodor Zwinger in a collection of notable works by medical students.⁶⁷

Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Scheuchzer further made nostalgia popular by promoting a practical cure of sending homesick patients into ‘familiar’ environments that ‘copied’ their Swiss homelands.⁶⁸ Doctors would send patients up nearby hills or towers to mimic the surroundings

⁶² Rolf Petri, “The Idea of Culture and the History of Emotions,” *Historiein*, Vol. 12 (2012), 21-37.

⁶³ Katie Holmes, “Does It Matter If She Cried? Recording Emotion and the Australian Generations Oral History Project,” *The Oral History Review* Vol. 44, No. 1 (2017), 56–76; Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan, *Listening on the Edge: Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶⁴ Atia and Davies.

⁶⁵ Johannes Hofer, “Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia,” translated by Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, 2 (1934 [original 1688]), 381.

⁶⁶ Thomas Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2018), 47.

⁶⁷ Theodor Zwinger (ed.), *Dissertatio Medica tertia de Pothopatridalgia, vom Heim-Wehe*, in *Fasciculus dissertationum medicarum selectorium* (1710), 87-111.

⁶⁸ Johan Jakob Scheuchzer, *De nostalgia. De Bononiensi Scientiarum et Artium Instituto atque Academia Commentarii*, 1 (1731), 307-313.

for which they longed to return.⁶⁹ Other Swiss doctors continued to physically prescribe opium or leeches as a cure for nostalgia.⁷⁰

By the 19th century, nostalgia evolved into a psychological disorder defined by depression and melancholy.⁷¹ By the early-to-mid 20th century it continued to be diagnosed by psychodynamic scholars and clinicians as a form of depression, grieving or psychosis.⁷² Throughout all these periods nostalgia was still equated with homesickness.

Perceptions of nostalgia evolved in the later 20th century, particularly in the 1970s. The meaning of the word began to focus on a temporal significance rather than a home-comfort significance. Longing for *home* (now viewed as separation anxiety) was replaced with a sentimental longing for *the past*. Purveyors of language – dictionaries – slowly began to pick up on this semantic shift between the 1950s and 1970s: *Webster's* defined nostalgia as homesickness in 1957⁷³ but soon added a more contemporary addition in 1961 as “a wistful or excessively sentimental, sometimes abnormal yearning for a return to or return of some real or romanticized period or irrecoverable condition or setting in the past;”⁷⁴ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* listed nostalgia as homesickness in 1951 – the updated 1964 addition defined it as a “sentimental yearning for some period of the past;”⁷⁵ and the German *Brockhaus* defining

⁶⁹ Dodman, 46.

⁷⁰ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, New York, Basic Books: 2001), xiv.

⁷¹ W.H. McCann, “Nostalgia: A review of the literature,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 38 (1941), 165-182. See also, G. Rosen, “Nostalgia: A “forgotten” psychological disorder,” *Psychological Medicine*, 5 (1975), 340-354.

⁷² I. Frost, “Homesickness and immigrant psychoses,” *Journal of Mental Science*, 84 (1938), 801-847. See also, E. Sterba, “Homesickness and the mother’s breast,” *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 14 (1940), 701-707. See also, P. Castelnuovo-Tedesco, “Reminiscence and nostalgia: The pleasure and pain of remembering.” In S.I. Greenspan & G.H. Pollack (eds.), *The course of life: Psychoanalytic contributions toward understanding personality development. Vol. III: Adulthood and the aging process* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), 104-118.

⁷³ *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, “Nostalgia,” (London, Bell, 1957), 1667.

⁷⁴ *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, “Nostalgia,” (London, Bell, 1961), 1542.

⁷⁵ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, “Nostalgia,” (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1951), 822.

“Nostalgie” in 1955 amended it in 1971 with “yearning for the past.”⁷⁶ In 1957, French dictionaries also defined nostalgia as “[h]omesickness, a wasting away caused by the desire to return to the home country,” revised in 1966 to “[a] vague sadness caused by being away from what we have known, by the feeling for a past gone.”⁷⁷

Sociologist Fred Davis is considered one of the first to closely explore nostalgia⁷⁸ during a ‘nostalgia wave’ of the 1970s. Davis concluded that nostalgia performs an important sociological function, as “collective nostalgia acts restore, at least temporarily, a sense of sociohistoric continuity with respect to that which had verged on being rendered discontinuous.”⁷⁹

Comparative Literature scholar Svetlana Boym in her acclaimed 2001 book, *The Future of Nostalgia* makes an important distinction between *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia.⁸⁰ *Restorative* nostalgia evokes positive emotions, such as fondness for a location, period of time, or activity. Happy memories of the past that restore a pleasant life experience. *Reflective* nostalgia is connected to wistful emotions of longing for a location, time, or activity. Melancholy memories that hold us back and prevent us from moving forward.

In one of her last articles before she died in 2015, Boym draws from the important seminal research of Maurice Halbwachs on “collective memory” published in 1925. Halbwachs explores how individual memories are shaped and influenced by social groups and collective experiences.⁸¹ Although Boym does not specifically refer to Halbwachs, she traces the historical

⁷⁶ *Der große Brockhaus in zwölf Bänden*, “Nostalgie,” (Wiesbaden, Brockhaus, 1955), VIII, 471; *Brockhaus-Enzyklopädie in zwanzig Bänden*, “Nostalgie,” (Wiesbaden, Brockhaus, 1971), XIII, 575.

⁷⁷ Émile Littré, “Nostalgie,” *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*, Vol. 5 (Paris, Hachette, 1957); “Nostalgie,” *Dictionnaire du français contemporain* (Paris, Larousse, 1966), 776.

⁷⁸ Tom Panelas, “Reviewed Work: Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia, by Fred Davis,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 87, No. 6 (1982), 1425-1427.

⁷⁹ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, Free Press, 1979), 104.

⁸⁰ Boym, (2001).

⁸¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992).

root of memory studies to expand her analysis of nostalgia. Boym applies this approach to nostalgia with an important outlook and future focus:

[N]ostalgia, in my view, is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future. The consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.⁸²

Recent scholars across disciplines in psychology,⁸³ anthropology,⁸⁴ sociology,⁸⁵ geography,⁸⁶ and philosophy⁸⁷ have explored and interpreted nostalgia as part of the ‘nostalgia wave’ of the 1970s, particularly in the United States with a revival of interest in the 1950s. A nostalgic craze saw pop-culture film and television shows like *American Graffiti*, *Grease*, *Happy Days*, and *Laverne & Shirley* produce a renewed interest in 1950s reading materials, fashions, and styles. This prompted other fields such as literature,⁸⁸ media,⁸⁹ and fashion studies⁹⁰ to further investigate this nostalgic trend.

With a growing focus on nostalgia, scholars recognized three basic types of nostalgia: *personal*, *collective*, and *historical*. Personal nostalgia are memories of *how I experienced this*;

⁸² Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” *Hedgehog Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2007), 8-9.

⁸³ Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (New York and London, Psychology Press, 2016).

⁸⁴ Olivia Angé, and David Berliner (eds.), *Anthropology and Nostalgia* (New York, Berghahn, 2015).

⁸⁵ Christian Karner, and Bernhard Weicht (eds), *The Commonalities of Global Crises: Markets, Communities and Nostalgia* (Basingstoke, U.K., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁸⁶ Alastair Bonnett, *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss* (London, Routledge, 2016).

⁸⁷ Jeff Malpas, “Philosophy’s Nostalgia,” in *Philosophy’s Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, Hagi Kenaan & Ilit Ferber (eds.) (Dordrecht, Springer, 2011), 87-101.

⁸⁸ Tammy Clewell (ed.), *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics* (Basingstoke, U.K., Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jennifer K. Ladino, *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press, 2012); Boym, (2001).

⁸⁹ Jilly Boyce Kay, Cat Mahoney, and Caitlin Shaw (eds.), *The Past in Visual Culture: Essays on Memory, Nostalgia and the Media* (Jefferson, N.C., MacFarland, 2017); Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham M.D., Lexington Books, 2015).

⁹⁰ Heike Jense, *Fashioning Memory: Vintage Style and Youth Culture* (London, Bloomsbury: 2015).

collective nostalgia recalls *how we experienced this*; and historical nostalgia generalizes about the past with *this is the way it was*.

Historian Peter Fritzsche argues nostalgia “is a fundamentally modern phenomenon because it depends on the notion of historical process as the continual production of the new... predicated on thoroughly modern structures of temporality.”⁹¹ Nostalgia contributes to historical investigations by acknowledging the permanence of the absence of an historical period. Fritzsche calls on us to reconsider nostalgia “not as blindness or a limitation to historical investigation, but as sightfulness that gives meaning to experiences that might otherwise have gone unremarked.”⁹² This type of nostalgic temporal comparison in the production of “the new” is also reflected in T.J. Jackson Lears’ work on the origins of antimodernism in the early 20th century and the development of contemporary consumer society. Lears highlights how nostalgia can drive resistance to modern changes and influence cultural and political movements⁹³ and view the past as a simpler, more harmonious time. I suggest understanding this temporal dynamic in gay nostalgia sheds light on intergenerational resistance to “the new” as seen with homophiles to gay liberation in the 1960s and 1970s, continuing on to the neo-queer movement in the 1980s and 1990s, and now in response to more fluid social identity and cultural changes today.

Sociologists, Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley reconfigure the maligned concept of nostalgia, moving away from a longing to return to an idealized period, by recognizing the positive dimensions of nostalgia as a form of dialogue with the past that engages and critiques history to inform the present and future.⁹⁴ Language and Social Media scholar, Niklas Salmose

⁹¹ Peter Fritzsche, “Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (Dec 2001), 1589 and 1592.

⁹² Fritzsche, 1617.

⁹³ T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2021).

⁹⁴ Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, “The Modalities of Nostalgia,” *Current Sociology*, Vol. 54 (2006), 923.

argues nostalgia is a way of dealing with the uncertainty of the present. “Romantic inclination towards the past might seem irrational, but our emotional connections to our own biographies, as well as a collective solidarity with our childhoods, traditions, imaginations, anticipations, and dreams may also be a rational response to modern instability. Nostalgia, then, appears increasingly to be a modality of its own with major potential for understanding how our now is shaped by our then, both individually and collectively.”⁹⁵ Applying these perspectives to gay nostalgia, I agree that it can facilitate a dialogue with a historical gay past to provide insight for present and future generations. Gay nostalgia as oral history also presents and compares individual biographies within a collective framework in response to intergenerational change evoking feelings of loss pertaining to gay identity, culture, and community. Gay nostalgia helps this older generation deal with the uncertainty stemming from this sense of loss in the present.

Emotion research in history was first developed in Europe in the late 1940s in the Annales School with historians Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Philippe Ariès, and, more recently, Roger Chartier. As it moved to the United States in the 1980s, more historians began to attempt to recover the history of subjectivity “and the changing experience of nostalgia,” or what historian Susan Matt calls, “trying to write history from the inside out.”⁹⁶

By the 1990s, some cultural historians shared the conviction that culture shapes emotions and varies across time and place,⁹⁷ with some invoking history as a relevant “emotional turn”⁹⁸ in the field. However, according to historian Tobias Becker, historians “with few notable

⁹⁵ Niklas Salmose, “Nostalgia Makes Us All Tick: A Special Issue on Contemporary Nostalgia,” *Humanities*, Vol. 8, No. 144, 2019, 1, DOI:10.3390/h8030144.

⁹⁶ Susan J. Matt, “Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out,” *Emotion Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2010), 118.

⁹⁷ Matt, *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Jan Plamper, William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns, (2010). “The History of Emotions: An interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns.” *History and Theory*, Vol. 49, No. 2, (2010), 237.

exceptions, contributed little to the literature on nostalgia and have all but ignored the recent trend.”⁹⁹

Becker challenges historians to contribute to the scholarly discourse by moving beyond how nostalgia has been conceptualized (a negative, uniform, catch-all, *zeitgeist* term) to become a relevant field of history research (like oral history and the history of emotions) that captures *individual* histories within the context of a historical period. Becker suggests historians have been hesitant (and often openly critical) to include nostalgia in their research as it is seen as *popular* rather than *academic* history, evoking emotions to convey history that is *unscientific*.¹⁰⁰ Becker states, “[b]y differentiating between history proper and nostalgia and accusing popular history of the latter, historians were trying to discredit it and to secure their own interpretive authority over the past.”¹⁰¹ There continues to be a dearth of history scholarship that includes a focus on nostalgia. Becker sees it as a way for nostalgic individuals and groups “to come to terms with change.”¹⁰² As history is about change over time and history research is about exploring that change, nostalgia can be a means to capture those changes in a meaningful way and accept change as a part of life while honouring what makes us nostalgic.

Gay Nostalgia, Space & Place, Emotions, Feelings and Loss

This work takes up Becker’s challenge. I throw my hat into the ring to present what I think is *gay nostalgia*. I see *gay nostalgia* as the intersections of *gay culture*, *gay identity*, and *memory* – all instilled with emotions. Nostalgia involves a complex collection of emotions and

⁹⁹ Tobias Becker, “The Meanings of Nostalgia: Genealogy and Critique,” *History and Theory*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (2018), 236.

¹⁰⁰ As Becker points out, “the research into emotions and as historians of emotion have argued, it is as wrong as it is impossible to distinguish between emotions and rationality;” See Monique Sheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is that What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2012), 193-220; Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, transl. Keith Tribe (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰¹ Becker, 249.

¹⁰² Becker, 245.

feelings such as pleasure, curiosity, anger, sadness, love, or craving. Particular to gay nostalgia are emotional experiences that can be based on feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*. Gay identity has often been periled with violence, anxiety and stigma that have been allayed when feeling safe, comfortable or welcomed. These three elements are significant in fostering both gay identity and gay culture.

It is also possible for a mix of both positive and negative emotions in the formation of gay nostalgic memories. Imagine the fear and thrill of walking into your first gay bar in the 1970s and having such a great time but losing your job because someone saw you go in and told your boss you were gay – and not having any legal recourse. Imagine marching in the Toronto bathhouse raids protest in 1981 with your best friend who died of HIV/AIDS complications by the end of the decade. Imagine being gay-bashed in the mid-1980s but saved by unarmed civilian Guardian Angels patrolling the Toronto street where the assault took place. Imagine the anxiety of going to the Hassle Free Clinic for an HIV test in the late 1980s knowing there was no cure for testing positive and the relief of finding out you tested negative.

Positive and negative emotions would have been part of these moments and memories. You remember the anguish of losing your job, but it is intertwined with how courageous you felt walking into your first gay bar with self-acceptance. You reminisce about the angry protest, but it is mixed with feeling proud marching with your best friend. You evoke the agony of gay-bashing, but it is associated with the happiness of being saved. You recall the fear of dying but the connected reprieve of testing HIV-negative. Reflecting on these moments many years later, entering your first gay bar becomes a reminder of the anger of job loss *and* the satisfaction of gay self-acceptance; the death of your friend *and* a great moment of friendship; the pain of gay-

bashing *and* the solace from Guardian Angels; the sad tremendous loss to AIDS *and* the relief of survival.

Varied emotions that drive gay nostalgia are also linked to sites that are physical as *space* and meaningful as *place*.¹⁰³ Gay nostalgia can stem from memories of space and place in which the physical locations of *space* are imbued with gay cultural significance that creates personal meaning of *place*. For example, as shown in subsequent chapters, older gay men in Toronto have memories of the former physical location of the gay district around Yonge-Wellesley before 1989 and the Church-Wellesley Village as *space and place* up to today. This also includes bars/dance clubs, bathhouses, restaurants, shops, theatres, and parks (among a variety of other sites) as locations of gay experiences and memories.

¹⁰³ Anthropologists and geographers distinguish *space* as a physical location or physical geography, while *place* is the cultural or personal meaning ascribed to a given space. See Pauline McKenzie Aucoin, "Toward an Anthropological Understanding of Space and Place, in B.B. Janz (ed.), *Place, Space and Hermeneutics*, (Berlin and New York, Springer, 2017), 396, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-52214-2_28; See also Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," in Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson. (eds.) *Philosophy in Geography*, Vol 20 (Dordrecht, Springer, 1979), 387-388, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-9394-5_19 (accessed 27 Jan 2024).

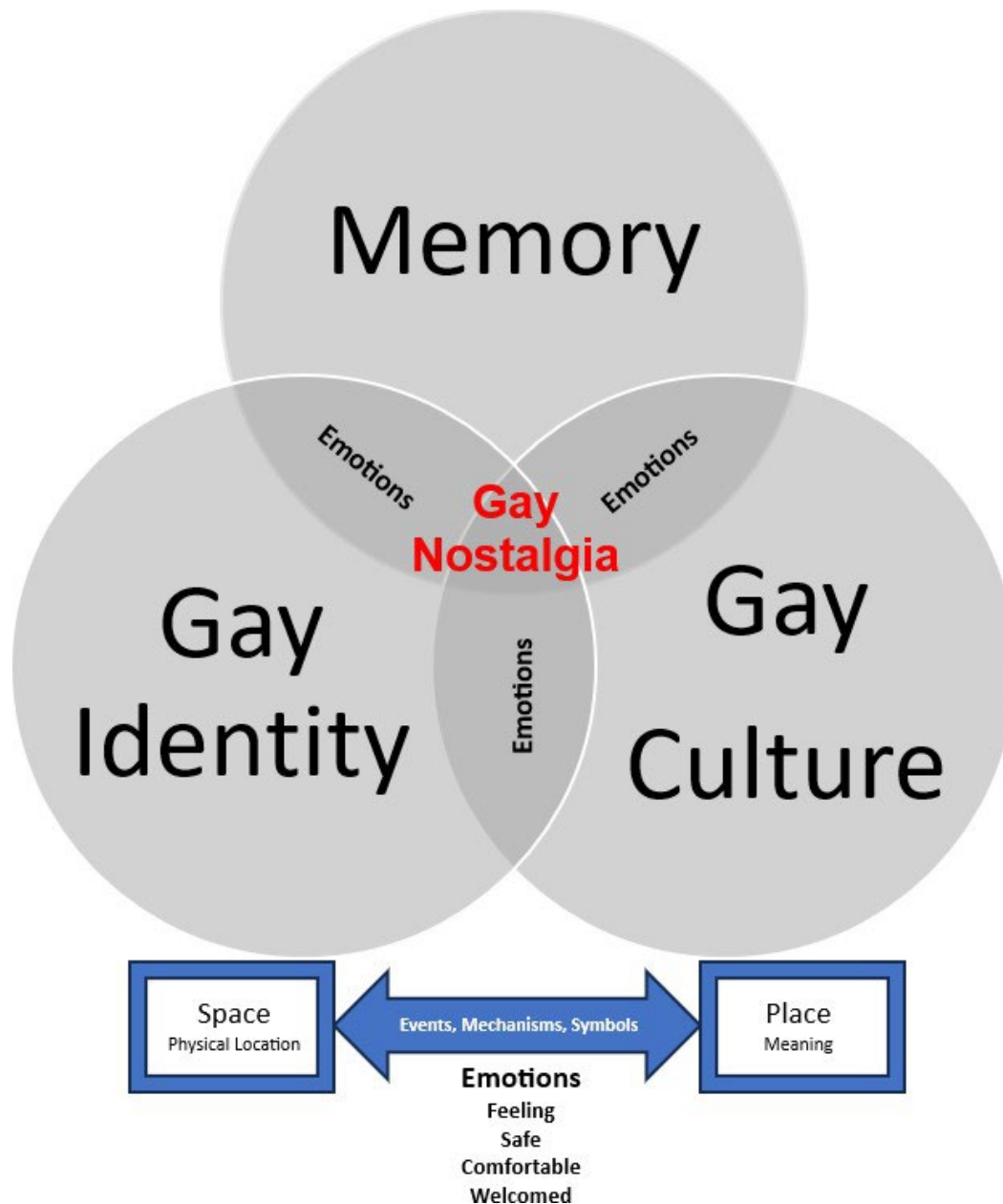


Image 9: Gay Nostalgia. Source: created by the author, J. Gary Myers, 27 Feb 2024.

Importantly, we experience *in locality* to form memories. Historian Pierre Nora called this “lieux de mémoires” or sites of memory.¹⁰⁴ These are locations where gay men felt either a

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, Vol. 26 (Spring 1989). For the full collection see Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* translated in English as *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996).

collective or individual sense of gay identity in sites of memory. For the purposes of this research Nora's concept can be aligned with historian Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities"¹⁰⁵ – beyond Anderson's original objective for the imagined construction of nations. Both 'sites of memory' and 'imagined communities' can help us understand how *gay culture* is imagined through supposed *gay* experiences, located in space and place remembered with emotion.

An imagined gay culture or 'gay community' can also conjure gay nostalgia through events, mechanisms or symbols. These include protests or festivities, socializing, entertainment, music and literature, organizations, celebrities, fashion and style, and athletics. Gay sites, events, mechanisms and symbols imbued with imagined gay cultural meaning can create personal meaning and subjectivity as *gay identity* when connected to gay culture through memory. They are recalled in the stories we tell of our gay past. The meanings attached to space and place as historical gay culture create gay histories. Gay histories create a specific *historical gay identity* that may not signify the contemporary understanding of gay within the LGBTQ2+ acronym.

It is this specific *historical gay identity* that is remembered and examined in this project to present the concept of *gay nostalgia*. It is vital that we do not overlay a contemporary notion of gay identity and experience on those of the past as if they are identical. This specific historical gay identity is fundamental to understand this particular generation when they self-identify as gay and recall places, events, mechanisms and symbols from their gay past – and more so for those who now feel a sense of loss of that historical gay identity today.

Many of the oral history narrators and Vintage Gay Toronto (VGT) posts express a sense of loss during a time of change with a lack of understanding by a younger gay and queer

¹⁰⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York and London, Verso, 2006).

generation about this loss and change. In the sense that Davies suggests, nostalgia restores a sense of sociohistoric continuity, this older generation of gay men are attempting to express their gay nostalgia as a function to temporarily create sociohistoric continuity with their past gay experiences in Toronto. Some narratives and VGT posts indicate an acknowledgement of social rights and liberation not previously experienced in their younger lives and ‘taken for granted’ by younger gays and queers today. This suggests a strong emotional connection to what may be perceived as a loss of their personal and collective experiences of gay history in Toronto.

Other narratives and posts indicate even more divisive and vehemently vitriolic statements about queer youth within a guarded gay nostalgic framework apparently stemming from a *post-gay* intergenerational shift to new queer identities. Conversely, it is important not to condemn a contemporary notion of gay or queer identity and experience as if they are compulsory to sustain from the past. However, these comments and critiques do become relevant contributions to history research, like oral history as they attempt to capture *personal*, *collective*, and *historical* gay nostalgia and evoke emotions within the context of historical periods.

We must also remember that identities, memories, spaces and places are also imperfect: they too evolve filled with individual perceptions and a range of emotions – and they can change. So too *gay* memories, *gay* identities and *gay* neighbourhoods like Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. These combinations of gay nostalgia are significant in recovering more subjective histories of older gay identities to compare to subjective histories of younger gay and queer identities. In doing so, this project seeks to establish and convey broader historical perspectives, generationally and intergenerationally – especially during this transition period between older gay men and younger queers in a post-gay world of shifting identities.

A Mostly White & Gay Male Village

This project also focuses on gay men’s experiences seeing or not seeing lesbians, trans or racialized people at gay bars or gay social spaces before 1989 and after in The Village. As mentioned, the early years of TCWV were predominantly shaped by white, cisgender, middle-class gay men. This reflected the mostly white ethno-racial composition of Toronto during the last three decades of the 20th century. White, cisgender, middle-class gay men also had the economic and social privilege of access and influence to build networks, communities, and gay male spaces. The lesbian and gay liberation movements of the 1970s and 80s saw divergent paths in which lesbian and gay spaces, particularly bars, sustained a distinct separateness – even adopting policies of *women-only* and *men-only* in these spaces.¹⁰⁶ Although both lesbians and gays established community and drop-in centres in the TCWV neighbourhood between the 1970s and early-1980s, lesbians in Toronto created their own spaces in “alternative urban locations” while gay men took “economic territorial control” with gay-owned and/or operated businesses in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village.¹⁰⁷

These spaces, while ostensibly promoting inclusivity and strength against homophobia, maintained a less-inclusive space which continued to marginalize many who identified as lesbian, bisexual, queer, trans, and racialized LGBTQ2+ individuals. This does not imply that only white, cisgender, middle-class gay men occupied these spaces (as racialized interviewees confirm). Rather, white, gay, cisgender men were the main demographic recapitulating the predominantly white ethno-racial composition of Toronto between 1971 and 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Chris Bearchell, “Bar-Hoping,” *The Body Politic* (October 1981) <https://archive.org/stream/bodypolitic77toro#page/24/mode/2up> (accessed 9 Jan 2024).

¹⁰⁷ Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray, “Lesbians in the City: Mobilities and Relational Geographies,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2015), 174-176.

This project acknowledges the challenges to these gay histories that may criticize nostalgic glimpses of The Village for its overly white, cisgender, gay male narratives. Some may argue that there is an overrepresentation of these accounts already in the history of TCWV. These gay men’s stories may be perceived as erasing trans, lesbian, bisexual and racialized histories from TCWV. This is not the case. Questions were specifically asked about experiences with these diverse individuals in Toronto’s gay scene occurring *before* and *after* TCWV became the central gay sociocultural locus by 1989.

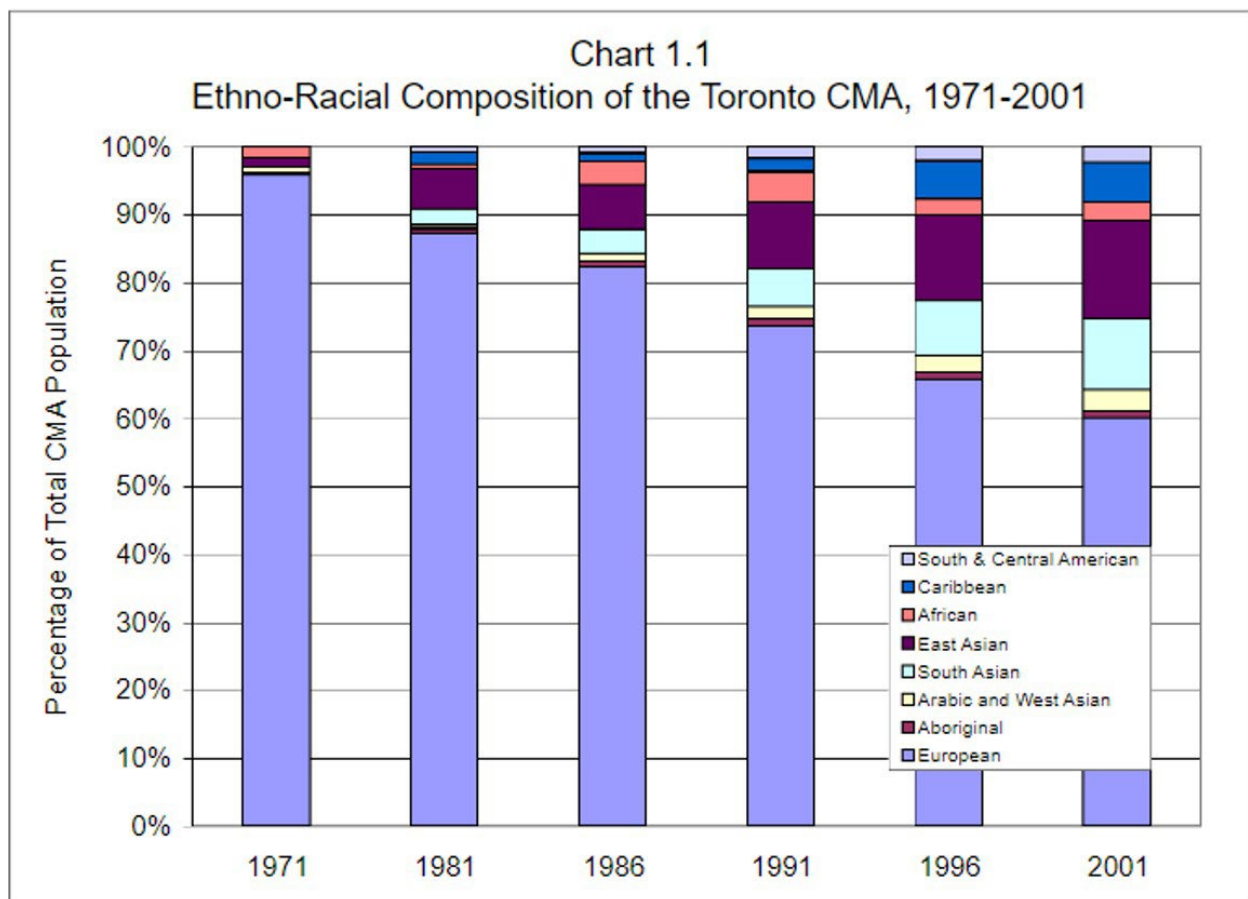


Image 10: Ethno-Racial Composition of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) based on Censuses data 1971-2001. Source: Michael Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile* (Toronto: Institute for Social Research, York University, 2006), Table 1.1. This chart is also used in *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer* (Toronto, Coach House Books, 2017); See Michael Ornstein and Tim McCaskell “The Evolving Demographics of Toronto’s Gay Village.”

Nonetheless, challenging these gay histories continue to be well documented,¹⁰⁸ and further perspectives are invited and required. This work acknowledges the importance of inclusivity to recognize the diversity of people who have been connected to (or excluded from) TCWV over its history – including lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, nonbinary, gender nonconforming and cisgender gay and straight individuals.

By focusing solely on this particular cohort of *gay men* this work explores specific *hindsight perspectives* and provides an important *reflective opportunity* to personally address this criticized history. It is with this in mind that future research can hopefully draw from this current project to broaden, address and respond to these reflective narratives by including the voices of trans, lesbian, bisexual, and further racialized gay and queer histories as a follow up to this project.

How important is it to capture the histories of an older generation of nostalgic gay men in Toronto when criticism indicates their histories do not adequately reflect the broader experiences of lesbians, bisexuals, queer, trans or racialized LGBTQ2+ individuals affiliated with the Church-Wellesley Village?

As a gay, privileged, white, cisgender, male, born in 1964 in Toronto and knowledgeable of Toronto's gay life since 1983, I connect my viewpoint to these other gay narrators who range in age from 51 to 78 years old. Some live in low-income housing; most in middle-class dwellings near or in TCWV; others in houses/condos in wealthier parts of Toronto. A few of these gay men

¹⁰⁸ Rae Daniel Rosenberg, "Negotiating Racialised (Un)Belonging: Black LGBTQ resistance in Toronto's Gay Village," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 7 (2021), 1397-1413; Shannon Brown, "Molly Wood's Bush: Settler Colonialism, Queer Activism, and Commemoration in Toronto," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2020), 290-319; Petra L. Doan, "Why Plan for the LGBTQ Community?" in Petra L. Doan (ed.), *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (United Kingdom, Routledge, 2015), 1-16; Sulaimon Giwa and Cameron Greensmith, "Race Relations and Racism in the LGBTQ Community of Toronto," *Journal of Homosexuality*, No. 59 (2012).

identify as Afro/Caribbean-Canadian; others Indo-Caribbean Canadian or Indo-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Arab-Canadian, Latino and Indigenous, and most Euro-Canadian.

In my search for gay men who can share their histories of gay Toronto I was committed to find narrators to counterbalance the history of ‘whiteness’ in Toronto’s gaybourhood. I found it challenging to find more non-white gay men who could share their memories of being gay in Toronto in the 1970s, and specifically the 1980s and 1990s, despite archival materials from this period indicating the existence of groups like ZAMI [first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality (1984-1989)]; AYA [social support group for Black gay and bisexual men throughout the 1990s, founded in 1994, and successor of Zami]; Khush [group organized to initially support South Asian Gay Men of Toronto, first named South Asian Gay Association (SAGA) and changed to Khush to include South Asian gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people (1987-1998)]; and Gay Asians Toronto [social organization for political advocacy and support of gay Asians in Toronto (1980-2002)]. After a considerable number of un-responded email requests to Black Gay Men’s Network of Ontario, Black CAP, and other known members of these earlier groups, I was fortunate that several of the gay men interviewed were able to speak to their experiences with these organizations, gay Toronto and TCWV.

Narratives of some of the racialized gay men point to why it may have been difficult to find more to share their stories of gay Toronto. Unwelcoming or arguably naive and unconscious negative attitudes of many gay white men in Toronto gay bars consequently created a sense of unbelonging towards comparable diverse groups. Prejudice was reinforced with social, political and economic power struggles not only between men and women, but also those due to systemic racism effecting racialized gays in TCWV. This translated into TCWV’s emerging gay scene

being predominantly reinforced as white and male. Some gay men may not have recognized their own prejudice or unconscious bias, but numerous lesbian, bisexual, trans, and racialized peoples certainly did.

In 1980, Terrance “Teach” Saunders was a 21-year-old Black international student from the Bahamas studying at York University when he discovered Toronto’s gay bar scene. Terrence is now retired as a certified Toronto elementary school teacher after a long and rewarding 35-year career. Fondly known as “Teach,” he recalls the racism he experienced as a Black man in TCWV early on:

We would note there were moments of discomfort in spaces where you would go to buy a drink. I remember this happening in Boots [gay dance bar (1981-2000)], and I was with a good friend of mine. You're standing up waiting. And you are standing at the bar, and you're there first. Instead of the bartender saying, “Who’s next?” automatically, they pivot to the white patron. And we would have to say things like, “You need to ask who's next?” As well as the patron who is purchasing is not saying, “No, I'm not next.” There were instances when people would say, “No, he was next” you know... They’re better now at it. But it was customary to stand in line or stand around with white patrons, and the bartenders, who were predominantly white, would just assume the white patron was first. So, those little moments of discomfort, which a lot of us never made a big thing about it, but would say, “You need to ask who's next?”¹⁰⁹

Patrick Brown was born in 1960 in Jamaica. He came to Canada in 1980 to go to college and has been part of the gay community in Toronto since 1985. He thinks back to his similar experience of being Black and going to some of the earlier gay bars in Toronto:

[D]uring that time in the Church and Wellesley area, we felt invisible. I remember several times you'd go to bars, and everybody would be there on the bar trying to get service, and the bartenders would serve the white people behind you before. And I'd have to say, “Excuse me, aren't you doing first come first serve?” And then go, “Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't see you.” And I'm like, “Really?” ...I really felt as if we were just tolerated. Because this was the gay community, and we're part of the gay community, but I didn't really feel a part of it.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Patrick Brown, 19 Oct 2023.

Andre Goh was 15 when he moved to Toronto with his family from China. He recalls going in the early 1980s to The Manatee on St. Joseph Street in Toronto, a non-licensed (no alcohol) gay bar/dance club (1970-1984) known for younger clientele, including gay teens that attracted older men primarily interested in sex:

[W]hat I found out very quickly was that the white kids didn't want to have anything to do with me. Not in a mean way. Just not interested in conversation or anything. The only people who were interested in me were over forty. Mostly white men. And after a while, it felt like, "Okay, I guess that's what I get." Eventually, there was this group of Filipinos. I say group, about two or three. Who then of course, we were like magnets to each other. And then we started connecting and then made plans to always meet on the weekends. And they introduced me to the other clubs... It was mixed, but it wasn't. Overall, it was very inclusive. Inside it was very exclusive. Cliquish. Racialized queers stuck together... Different words back then... Just did. The Blacks stuck with the Blacks; the Asians stuck with the Asians. I don't think we had very many Latinos back then. The Latinos blended in with everybody else. If you were Indigenous, you had no space because there was no voice at the time.¹¹¹

There may not have been as many visible gay Latinos in Toronto in the earlier 1980s, but Samuel Lopez remembers a growing group of them by the time he arrived in Toronto as a 19-year-old in 1987, via Montreal, from his original El Salvador. He recalls the racialization of space within gay bars like *Colby's*, a gay dance club also on St. Joseph Street (1986-2001):

Eventually I started talking to two or three Latinos. *Colby's* had something particular, the high tables with the stools, so there was one here, one there and another one there. One is where the Filipinos gathered. And so, we had our little corner too [for Latinos]. There was one for the Blacks. And those were the three tables. Everyone else, meaning the whites, they were just in the bar anywhere.¹¹²

Samuel agrees with Andre's observation that gay Latinos until the later 1980s were not often seen together, seeking to blend in:

It was a question of trying to blend in. We would not gather. There were not two Latinos together. It was like, like my brother, he would have his interaction with all white people, and he was Latino, but we were also newcomers trying to fit in society. And so, to fit in society, you're gonna become kind of white.

¹¹¹ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

¹¹² Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

Mostly, if you are being racialized, if you are on welfare, there's more interest in wanting to blend in to hide that part of your reality.¹¹³

Despite these narratives reflecting experiences of racism in gay Toronto, each of these narrators have also shared better memories of experiences in gay Toronto and TCWV. They share stories about building gay subcultural communities beyond the bars that became an important part of Toronto's LGBTQ2+ histories. They remember creating friendships and cherishing memories of being part of the past and current gaybourhoods (explored further in Chapter Three).

What's Up With Other Gaybourhoods?

It is also important to situate the current transitional period of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village within changes in similar iconic gay enclaves in major cities such as Montreal (Rue Sainte-Catherine), Vancouver (Davie Village), New York (Greenwich Village), San Francisco (The Castro), London (Old Compton Soho), Manchester (Canal Street) and Sydney (Oxford Street). Although each gay neighborhood has a distinct historical development and evolution, similar influences are contributing to changes in current gay spaces.

Urban social geographers Alison Bain and Julie Podmore suggest "new patterns of community and identity are reshaping the queer inner-city and its geographies."¹¹⁴ This reshaping away from one predominant gay village is what urban sexualities scholar, Amin Ghaziani refers to as "cultural archipelagos" in which "subgroup variations produce diverse yet distinct types of queer spaces."¹¹⁵ Ghaziani argues that spatial clusters of various LGBTQ2+

¹¹³ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

¹¹⁴ Alison L. Bain and Julie A. Podmore, "Relocating queer: Comparing suburban LGBTQ2S activisms on Vancouver's periphery," *Urban Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 7 (May 2021), 1500-1519; See also, Julie A. Podmore, "Far Beyond the Gay Village," in Bitterman, Alex, Hess, Daniel Baldwin (eds), *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods* (Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2021), 289-306.

¹¹⁵ Amin Ghaziani, "Cultural Archipelagos: New Directions in the Study of Sexuality and Space," *City & Community*, Vol.18, No. 1, (2019), 4.

communities require us to think beyond the “spatial singularity” of the gaybourhood as a necessary queer enclave for everyone.

This is not new. Queer urban and rural landscapes have been scattered, developed and transformed throughout the past century without the requirement of a central LGBTQ2+ hub. Historian Valerie Korinek explores the broader contexts of a variety of urban and rural queer communities that emerged in the Canadian prairies over the 20th century. Korinek points out in *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985*, “one did not need to move to Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal, cities that became synonymous with “gay life” (post-1969) and had visible communities and clearly demarcated gay and lesbian spaces.”¹¹⁶

These scattered variations of queer communities and identities are also affecting historic gaybourhoods in the United States. A major indicator of gay spaces are gay bars. Sociologist Gregor Mattson indicates, despite a decrease in the number of U.S. gay bars by 37% between 2007 and 2019 (pre-Covid closures) and 16% between 2019 and 2021, there are *eight times* more U.S. cities with one gay bar than there are cities with gaybourhoods.¹¹⁷ Mattson’s research indicates that many of these gay/queer bars have a greater mix of sexual, gender and race diversity and are becoming what he calls “straight-friendly.”¹¹⁸ Mattson also suggests straight bars have become more welcoming in creating mixed gay/queer-straight environments, with dancing and particularly drag performances. The broader popularity of RuPaul’s *Drag Race* has

¹¹⁶ Valerie Korinek, *Prairie Fairies* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2018), 5.

¹¹⁷ Gregor Mattson, *Who Needs Gay Bars? Bar-Hopping through America’s Endangered LGBTQ+ Places* (Stanford, California, Redwood Press, 2023), 4, 7 and 280.

¹¹⁸ Mattson, 89. The term “straight-friendly” is a twist on the older term “gay-friendly” to describe straight establishments more welcoming of LGBTQ peoples.

led to an increase in the number of ‘pop-up’ drag shows in spaces previously considered straight and in other temporary locations.¹¹⁹

In the U.K., a University College London report commissioned for the Mayor of London found that between 2006 and 2017 the number of LGBTQ+ venues in London decreased from 125 to 53, a net loss of 58%. The largest portion were gay bars at 44%. However, one of the key findings of the report is “an emerging shift towards LGBTQ+ events happening in non-LGBTQ+ venues in south-east London.”¹²⁰ This is part of the reshaping of London’s inner-city gay/queer geography. A noteworthy example of change is Manchester’s Gay Village described as a place that became “manifest in bankrupt LGBTQ+ businesses and a black hole of boarded-up premises” in which current urban redevelopment and a greater mix of more-straight-than-gay clientele and residents since 2015 is “well on their way to erasing the gaybourhood without much local resistance.”¹²¹

Finally, Social and Cultural Geographers Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray also point to ‘post-gay’ socio-cultural influences in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village to explain contemporary transformations of these gaybourhoods. “Those identifying as ‘post-gay’ (largely men) are eschewing places such as Toronto’s Gay Village and utilizing alternative locations in mixed, trendy districts, and while interested in sexual encounters with men, refuse the fixed label of ‘gay.’”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Ryan Stillwagon and Amin Ghaziani, “Queer Pop-Ups: A Cultural Innovation in Urban Life,” *City & Community*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2019), 874-895.

¹²⁰ Ben Campkin and Laura Marshall, UCL Urban Laboratory, “LGBTQ+ Cultural Infrastructure in London Night Venues, 2006-present,” [Full Report - Updated 5th July \(ucl.ac.uk\)](#) (Jul 2017), 6 and 9 (accessed 14 Jan 2024).

¹²¹ Jack Coffin, “Plateaus and afterglows: theorizing the afterlives of gayborhoods as post-places,” in Bitterman, Alex, Hess, Daniel Baldwin (eds.), *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods*, (Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2021), 381-382.

¹²² Catherine J. Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray, “LGBT Neighbourhoods and ‘New Mobilities’: Towards Understanding Transformations in Sexual and Gendered Urban Landscapes,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 38.3 (May 2014), 760.

Conveying these histories of TCWV in the context of transformations and conceptualizations is important for future generations. Urban Planning scholars Daniel Baldwin and Alex Bitterman write in *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods* that younger generations (those I refer to as the fluid generation) who did not directly participate in the fight for lesbian and gay rights in the 1970s and 1980s “may not fully grasp the importance of gay neighborhoods on LGBTQ2+ culture and lesbian and gay life.” As such, “a lack of continuity and awareness may threaten the existence and lasting value of gay neighborhoods.”¹²³

Each of these global locations indicates that TCWV is not alone in these intergenerational shifts away from gay villages. Spatiality Scholar Jack Coffin argues gay villages, like TCWV, appear to have hit what he calls a “plateau” but as they change or disappear leave an “afterglow” as “*post*-places.” Coffin states: “It means that the relational effects of a place-plateau may linger, even if the physical location disappears, as long as the experience of that place is sufficiently intense to leave enduring marks, or ‘afterimages.’”¹²⁴ I suggest these enduring afterimages or *afterglows* describe the recalled memories in gay nostalgia. When conjured with negative or mixed emotions, I call these memories a nostalgic *afterburn*, described in the next chapter.

Positionality

I am aware of my positionality and privilege along with my biases that inform my assumptions about the history of gay Toronto and the Church-Wellesley Village. Interviewing this cohort of older gay men and reading the online VGT narratives, I continually contemplated my own relationship with racism, sexism, transphobia, power and privilege as a white, middle-class, cisgender, gay man in the context of Toronto’s gay past over the past 50 years. I am not

¹²³ Alex Bitterman and Daniel Hess, “Who Are the People in Your Gayborhood? Understanding Population Change and Cultural Shifts in LGBTQ+ Neighborhoods,” in Bitterman A, Hess DB (eds.) *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods: Renaissance and Resurgence* (Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2021), 26.

¹²⁴ Coffin, 378.

only interested in gaining insight into these perspectives about these histories but also to understand my own sense of gay identity and gay culture through my own nostalgic memories aligned with this generation of older gay men.

This work defines an older generation of gay men to be those old enough to have experienced Toronto's gay life between 1973 and 2023, approximately between 50 to 90 years old. It includes those (like me) who had an opportunity to go to and remember the original bars outside today's TCWV before it was firmly established as a gay socio-cultural hub by the end of the 1980s.

This cohort are among the last of a generation to experience firsthand the decriminalization of homosexuality in Canada in 1969 (I was five years old), and see “the recriminalization of homosexuality in Canada” with an increase of police charges and bathhouse raids throughout the 1970s and 1980s.¹²⁵ Several were part of the protest against the Toronto bathhouse raids in 1981 (I came out as gay the following year and went to bathhouses in the 1980s knowing the potential risks of more police raids, and learning to have safe sex with a condom knowing the fears of contracting HIV/AIDS).

Many in the cohort were teens or young adults when they were no longer considered ‘mentally ill’ – almost overnight – when homosexuality was no longer pathologized as a mental disorder by health and social services professionals in North America.¹²⁶ (My parents sent me to a priest and psychologist when I was in my mid-teens to help ‘cure’ my ‘gay tendencies’).

¹²⁵ Tom Hooper, “Queering ’69: The Recriminalization of Homosexuality in Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (2019), 257-273. Hooper argues this decriminalization was a myth as it enabled the expanded role of the Canadian criminal justice system. According to Hooper, the supposed ‘decriminalization’ did not go far enough because of the stipulation that only two people could be present during sex. This actually gave police morality squads greater license to make arrests in gay bathhouses under the “bawdy house law” in the 1892 *Criminal Code of Canada* that police continued to use in the 1970s and 1980s.

¹²⁶ In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed the diagnosis of “homosexuality” as a mental disorder.

This was the first generation permitted to adopt children as same-sex couples and have the legal right of same-sex marriage by the late 1990s to early 2000s. (My husband and I had a commitment ceremony in 1998 before same-sex marriage was legal. We were legally married in 2004 and recently celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary. We have been together for 30 years).

This is also the first generation to be retired or retiring as “out of the closet” seniors in a world that is supposedly more open to gay seniors’ needs. (My husband and I have entered our decade for retirement and wonder how a younger generation will treat older gay men in long-term care).

I argue the intergenerational transitions occurring between older gays and younger queers – along with changes in the neighbourhood’s built and demographic environment – are initiating a new phase of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. Many gay men interviewed feel a lost sense of gay community and gay identity, expressing nostalgia about gay culture and spaces in Toronto that no longer exist.

They have also seen a change in populations frequenting establishments in TCWV within the past decade. As TCWV becomes increasingly more mixed and mainstream, this shift mirrors the greater ethnic assimilation in Toronto that occurred in the city’s districts known as *Little Italy* and *Greek Town*. In the 1920s, *Little Italy*, located around College Street, became recognized as a residential and commercial neighbourhood for Toronto’s Italian community. By 2005, “[t]he neighbourhood ha[d] become less demographically Italian, as Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, and native Anglo-Canadian residents (now almost 50 percent of the population) now predominate in the area.”¹²⁷ Like *Little Italy*, in *Greek Town* “many of the Greek people who

¹²⁷ Jason Hackworth and Josephine Rekers, “Ethnic Identity, Place Marketing and Gentrification in Toronto,” *Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto* (April 2005).

once lived on the Danforth have since left...[now] “a mixture and celebration of many different cultures in the area.”¹²⁸

Intergenerational differences are products of their times – in no way am I suggesting that things were better before or are getting worse now. We cannot be so immersed in the past that we lose connection to the present and the future. Simply, it’s about the reality of change over time. The dominant ideologies and memories of each generation shape these intergenerational views. Within each generation, the questions that we grapple with about things like our sexuality or gender are answered largely by our parents or caregivers and the educators who teach us, politicians and religious leaders who persuade us, the books we read, the music we listen to, and now the social media we interact with.

Framework

The purpose of this project is to investigate gay nostalgia with a critical lens through the histories of this particular generation of gay men in Toronto. In the pursuit of understanding the complexities and differences of gay experiences, the exploration of various and sometimes controversial perspectives from this cohort emerges in this project. The ability to view these gay experiences through varied lenses not only enriches our comprehension of diverse gay viewpoints but also constructs a framework for addressing the challenges of contemporary LGBTQ2S+ communities within the history of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village.

This work is divided into six chapters, including this first introduction and theory chapter. The next chapter (Chapter Two) focuses on earlier gay culture in Toronto from early 1970s to the end of 1980s. It presents prominent memory narratives of loosely scattered gay bars, bathhouses, organizations, or other gay social spaces before the majority of these establishments shifted from

¹²⁸ *On The Danforth*, “Is Greektown still Greek?: The Changing of Greektown through the eyes of its past and present residents,” (7 Jan 2022), <https://onthedanforth.ca/2022/01/is-greektown-still-greek/> (accessed 13 Jan 2024).

Yonge-Wellesley to the more concentrated hub of Church-Wellesley by 1989. These chapters explore the significance of these spaces and places in forming an early understanding and development of an historical gay identity from the closet to more visibility. Chapter Three presents the shifting gay geography – physically, representationally, and emotionally – with the HIV/AIDS crisis and implementation of human rights legislation for sexual orientation, and the rise of identity politics. Understandings of gay identity began to shift as neo-queer identities emerged in 1990 with Queer Nation and the development of queer theory.

Chapter Four presents the community engagement process of this project to illustrate how knowledge mobilization strategies can inform the oral history research *before* the research begins. This chapter explains the similarities and differences between Oral History and knowledge mobilization and how incorporating a Community Engagement Workshop as a knowledge mobilization tool helped formulate and prioritize relevant questions for the oral history research. A step-by-step process of the Community Engagement Workshop is described and how the most important questions suggested from these community partners took the oral history interviews in important and unexpected directions.

In Chapter Five, I explore the concept of gay community and multiple identities to consider who was seen as part of the community within TCWV, including trans people. It points to gay subcultures and their historical contexts. This chapter also looks at intergenerational differences between older gays and younger queers and conflicts that have occurred. It also takes a reflective look at what advice narrators would give their younger selves.

The last chapter includes my auto-ethnographic observations about changes in The Village and commentary on the narratives, followed by a conclusion section. As I have experienced gay Toronto and TCWV since the early 1980s and continue to do so, I am aware of how historical

memories may promote idealized visions of a gay past in Toronto that can be questioned. As a 60-year-old, I have also seen and understand the intergenerational transitions that have occurred in Toronto's LGBTQ2+ spaces. I share my own story about gay Toronto and TCWV to corroborate or challenge other narratives to address prominent topics and key themes throughout the work. It is my hope that this effort will preserve these histories and perspectives before the faces, traces, and spaces of these gay memories, gay culture, and gay identities are lost.

Chapter 2: Before the Village Rainbow (1973-1988): Gay Space & Place for a Binary Generation

Afterglows & Afterburns

Brian Hardy was 19 when he moved from the prairies to Toronto on November 13, 1978, to be part of the city's growing gay community. According to copies of his original diary entries posted on the Vintage Gay Toronto (VGT) website, Hardy stepped off the VIA rail train at Toronto's Union Station after a long 58-hour train ride from Edmonton. He did not know anyone or anything about Canada's largest city – except that he hoped to find like-minded gay men who came to the city to escape the closet of small-town life. Hardy spent his first night in the Royal York Hotel, conveniently located and (at the time) towering across the street from Union Station. The next two weeks he stayed in much less expensive accommodations at the YMCA at 40 College Street where he “learned all about the gay life real fast.”¹²⁹

Brian was not the only young gay man to learn about gay life at Toronto's College Street YMCA. David Hallman was born and raised in Waterloo, Ontario and came out in his late teenage years in this smaller city an hour-an-a-half west of Toronto. He says he was “pretty comfortable” with his sexuality early on. David was an 18-year-old undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo when he started travelling to Toronto on weekends in the early 1970s to stay at the downtown YMCA. Here he discovered a place to cruise for gay sex:

They had on the top three floors, residences, single bedrooms, very spartan, with communal showers in the corners. Each floor. And it was a huge cruising area. And I had a great time going there... It was very inexpensive... And it was just single rooms so people would leave their door ajar just like in a bathhouse and people would do the circuit around... But the hallways went around in a square and then the washrooms, the showers were in the corner. So, you could do the circuit just going around and around and around and people would leave their doors open and just like in a bathhouse, you'd look in and if eye contact was made, a gesture would be given by both parties as to whether, "Yeah, come on in" or you look away and that's a sign that you're not interested... So, it was like a

¹²⁹ Brian Hardy, “Dear Diary: July 25, 1979,” *Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website*, 24 May 2020.

bathhouse for you 24/7...And then sex would take place in people's rooms and in the showers. You had to be kind of careful. And I heard later, years later that the YMCA changed the system in such a way that people were required to keep their door closed and they had security people who would start monitoring.¹³⁰



Image 11: Central YMCA building on College Street (left), looking east from Bay Street, 1930. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1266, Item 21914.



Image 12: Central YMCA building on College Street (left), looking east from Bay Street, 1977. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 93, Item 16.

¹³⁰ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

The Toronto Central YMCA (1913-1984) no longer exists on College Street. The property was sold to the Metropolitan Toronto Police for a new police headquarters in 1988 after the construction of the Metro Central YMCA two blocks north at 20 Grosvenor Street in 1984. The current YMCA does not have residences or single rooms but still has communal showers and saunas, which are still used as cruising sites. I have visited them in person over the years. Despite the continuity of the YMCA as a site for gay cruising, both Brian and David preferred the former YMCA and recall it with gay nostalgia.

Gay nostalgia is the intersection of *gay culture*, *gay identity*, and *memory* – all instilled with emotions. *In locality* (space) we form memories that have personal and cultural meaning (place) that shape our identities and can be expressed later as nostalgia. The previous physical location of the YMCA on College Street holds nostalgic significance for both Brian and David. Their thrilling experiences of cruising and having gay sex as young men at the College Street YMCA as *space* created for them a personal meaning as *place*. These experiences formed part of their gay identity. There is also a broader cultural meaning of *place* that can be extrapolated from this location with an article in *The Body Politic* about the “Young Men’s Cruising Association”¹³¹ along with the Village People’s popular song “Y.M.C.A.” released in 1978. This tune “became a gay anthem”¹³² and part of gay culture because of similar experiences by gay men at other YMCAs across North America in the 1970s.

Although the original building no longer exists, its original location creates an “afterglow” that Coffin suggests as “post-places.” However, the location’s current identity as police

¹³¹ Michael Lynch, “Young (and old and middle-aged too) Men’s Cruising Association,” *The Body Politic* (August 1979), 39.

¹³² Cary O’Dell, “Happy Pride! How “Y.M.C.A.” Became a Gay Anthem!”, *Library of Congress Blogs* (30 Jun 2021) <https://blogs.loc.gov/now-see-hear/2021/06/happy-pride-how-y-m-c-a-became-a-gay-anthem/> (accessed 23 Feb 2024).

headquarters can also conjure gay nostalgia as a *mixed* or *negative* emotion, or what I call a nostalgic *afterburn*. A nostalgic *afterburn* can occur when a space or event is infused with memory of a damaging or *exclusionary* experience that also shapes identity and culture. Nostalgic afterburn occurs with emotional experiences when one was not feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*, but still connected to significant identity and cultural formation.¹³³

The history of the bathhouse raids by Toronto police is a good example of an *afterburn*. It became a pivotal point of gay history sparked by angry protest tinged with fear. It was an exhilarating self-conscious moment of outraged awareness mixed with the self-assured emotion of gay pride. Both Brian and David were part of the 1981 protest marches against the police raids and subsequent pride marches and events. The protest marches against the police may have been at different locations than the current police headquarters at the former YMCA, but both link an afterglow and afterburn of space and place. This link of space and place is forged through events, mechanisms or symbols that remain part of Brian and David's gay identity, gay culture and memory instilled with emotion and recalled as gay nostalgia.

Afterglows and afterburns in gay nostalgia are also influenced by the context of a time period and memories of prominent individuals, events, materials or places from that time period. Toronto's historical and pervasive moral and heteronormative expectations of "Toronto the Good"¹³⁴ sustained public discrimination against gays and lesbians throughout the 1970s. However, public allies and brave openly gay individuals exerted their influence at that time to

¹³³ My description of *afterburns* is aligned with recent research about the earlier discussed reminiscence bump

¹³⁴ The term is first associated with Toronto mayor William Holmes Howland (mayor from 1886-1888) during his campaign for morality in Toronto. See Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizen's Candidate* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973). The term stems from Toronto's reputation for a "wide acceptance of a brand of evangelical righteousness, a pride in churches, church-going, temperance endeavours and earnest Sunday observance." See, J.M.S. [James Maurice Stockford] Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, James Lorimer, 1984), 122. This moral position led to prohibition on alcohol in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and more strict liquor licensing laws post-prohibition throughout most of the twentieth century that highly regulated public drinking spaces and moral attitudes.

counter discrimination. One ally was former Toronto mayor John Sewell, a lawyer turned council member, and heterosexual defender of gay rights. He is particularly remembered for his support of gay activist George Hislop, a businessman and founder of CHAT, Community Homophile Association of Toronto (1971-1977).

As mayor, Sewell attempted to create social and civic change. The year 1978 was a promising mayoral election for Toronto's lesbians and gays – particularly following the call for gay visibility and gay liberation since the 1971 “We Demand” protest in Ottawa.¹³⁵ Gay Liberation continued to be articulated throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the popular and controversial Toronto-based gay magazine, *The Body Politic*.¹³⁶ The newly elected mayor made a speech in support of gay rights at an election rally for George Hislop who unsuccessfully ran for Toronto City Council in 1980. According to *The Body Politic*, it was a speech “that left the city in an uproar,”¹³⁷ with the mayor receiving death threats for defending Toronto's gay community.¹³⁸ Sewell's short, two-year reign was due to a split of the right-wing vote between two other mayoral candidates, with Sewell winning less than fifty percent of the vote. Sewell's and Hislop's hopeful election campaigns and disappointing losses create both gay nostalgic afterglows and afterburns.

The Body Politic was charged twice, in 1977 and 1982, with publishing obscene content. Police seizure of the magazine's subscriber list and attempts by police to close this important internationally known LGBT magazine led to public outrage. The magazine was acquitted in

¹³⁵ “We Demand” was the first demonstration by lesbian and gays in Canada held on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on 28 Aug 1971.

¹³⁶ *The Body Politic* was a Canadian monthly gay magazine published from 1971 to 1987 that played an important role in educating and encouraging visibility of the LGBT communities in Canada.

¹³⁷ *The Body Politic*, “Sewell: Toronto's Mayor One Year Later” (Feb 1980), 1.

¹³⁸ *Toronto Star*, “John Sewell proud of a lifetime of ruffling feathers” (15 Nov 2009)

https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2009/11/15/john_sewell_proud_of_a_lifetime_of_ruffling_feathers.html (accessed 17 Jan 2024).

both trials. The value of *The Body Politic* in shaping gay identity and culture along with its discriminatory treatment by police create both gay nostalgic afterglows and afterburns.

Despite Sewell's and Hislop's election runs, *The Body Politics*' trials and triumphs, and Hardy's and Hallman's YMCA adventures, "Toronto the Good" remained a conservative city throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The city's socially conservative views restricted gay identity and gay culture. This conservatism kept many gays and lesbians in the closet, thus shaping *a closeted gay identity* for most in 1970s and 1980s Toronto. Most gays and lesbians did not feel safe, comfortable or welcomed. Although gay identities and activities were pilloried and very few spaces to freely express being gay in "Toronto the Good" existed, some places emerged where gays could feel relatively safe, comfortable and welcomed.

This chapter focuses on memory narratives of early gay bars, bathhouses, organizations and other gay social spaces, events and activities in Toronto that mostly no longer exist. These examples of space and place and their connection to intergenerational transitions will be explored in detail in chapter five by "looking back and facing forward." The focus will be on how the following elements experienced in space and place developed historical gay identities within a cultural context no longer meaningful in the post-gay world of a fluid generation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of experiences from the binary generation in gay Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s.

Off to the Gay Bars

Brian's diary entries indicate he was a very social person. He soon learned about Toronto's gay scene where he met other gay men. His diary reveals that he liked Toronto's gay nightlife and went out almost every weekend and some weeknights. Part of his socializing

included getting high smoking cannabis before heading out to Toronto’s gay bars – including two of Toronto’s oldest that no longer exist.

The long-established and well-known gay bars in 1970s Toronto were the *Parkside* and *St. Charles*, both on Yonge Street. These two prominent gay spaces became gay identity anchors in the Yonge-Wellesley area as early as the 1960s. They were also spaces infused with gay cultural meanings, making them into significant gay places. Both were known for their longevity in this area up to the mid-1980s. The histories of these two establishments can help us understand how Yonge-Wellesley emerged as a known ‘gay area’ in the context of Toronto’s early gay scene and in the formation of a specific gay city district.

During the post-war years, the region of Yonge Street (just west of Toronto’s future LGBTQS+ neighbourhood) consisted of lower-end retail stores, an auto parts store, several auto dealers, cleaners (laundry), small diners and restaurants, barbershops, small branches of major Canadian banks, rooming houses in the now run-down Victorian and Edwardian homes, and low-budget hotels.¹³⁹ Two of these low-budget hotels were the *Hotel Breadalbane* and the *Grosvenor Hotel*. Lower property values in the area allowed Hyman Bolter to purchase the *Hotel Breadalbane* at 530 Yonge Street in 1945. When he died in 1949, ownership passed to his wife and four children. The Bolter’s transformed the main floor into a beer parlour known as *Parkside Tavern*.¹⁴⁰

The nearby *Grosvenor Hotel* at 489 Yonge Street was purchased in 1946 by Charles Hemstead (he later named it the *Torontonian Hotel*) along with a clock tower property across the

¹³⁹ Ontario Genealogical Society, Toronto Branch, *City Directories* <https://torontofamilyhistory.org/researching-toronto-ancestors/city-directories/> (accessed 26 Jan 2024).

¹⁴⁰ Gerald Hannon, “Epitaph for the Parkside,” *The Body Politic*, Number 62 (Apr 1980), 26.

street at 488 Yonge Street.¹⁴¹ Hemstead built a large restaurant and dining lounge to serve the neighbourhood as an accompaniment to his hotel business on the other side of Yonge and incorporated the historic clock tower¹⁴² and his name into the new establishment – the St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge. However, *Parkside* and *St. Charles* were not the only to become known for gay clientele in Toronto during the post-war era. Before these two beer taverns were known as gay bars in the 1960s, there was the *Nile Room* in the *Letros Hotel*.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1257, 11257_41057_00517

Image 13 (left): Hotel Breadalbane, c.1945 (looking northeast towards Yonge and Breadalbane streets). Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1257, Series 1057, Item 517.



Image 14 (right): Parkside Tavern, 1982 (looking northwest from Yonge and Breadalbane streets) Source: The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P(24P), Photograph Collection Box 2.

¹⁴¹ Hemstead purchased the property in 1946 and allowed Trutred Tire Company to remain on the property until the lease ended in 1948. Hemstead demolished the tire company and original Fire Hall No. 3, retaining the clock tower as indicated above. Hemstead opened the St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge in 1950.

¹⁴² The clock tower was part of the original Fire Hall No. 3, built in the 1870s. The City of Toronto retained clock tower ownership but allowed Hemstead to use and maintain it as part of his property.



Image 15 (left): Looking south on Yonge Street at southeast corner of Alexander and Yonge Streets showing Grosvenor Hotel, 1953. Note the sign on the left advertising the St. Charles at 486 Yonge St., “With Finest Chinese & American Dishes” and Hempstead’s restaurant slogan “Meet Me Under the Clock.” The clock tower (not visible in photo) is on the right across Yonge Street. Source: Toronto Reference Library, Grosvenor Hotel, James Victor Salmon, S 1-1069B.

Image 16 (right): St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge, with Hotel Torontonien (formerly Grosvenor Hotel) on left side of photo, across the street from St. Charles, 1955. Notice the sign on the side of the building showing ‘HT’ in a circle. Source: Toronto Reference Library, Fire Hall (former), James Victor Salmon, S 1-2312.

Where Were Toronto Gays Before Yonge-Wellesley?

To understand how the area centred around Yonge-Wellesley became the gay district by the 1980s, we must first focus on its connection to other areas of Toronto’s downtown known for lesbian and gay subcultures from the late 1940s. The *Nile Room* in the *Letros Hotel* was located across from the *King Edward Hotel* on King Street. Christopher Letros was a prominent restaurateur who established The *Letros Hotel* in 1947. By February 1949, the *Letros* opened the *Nile Room* cocktail lounge in the basement, equipped with a bar and piano/organ.

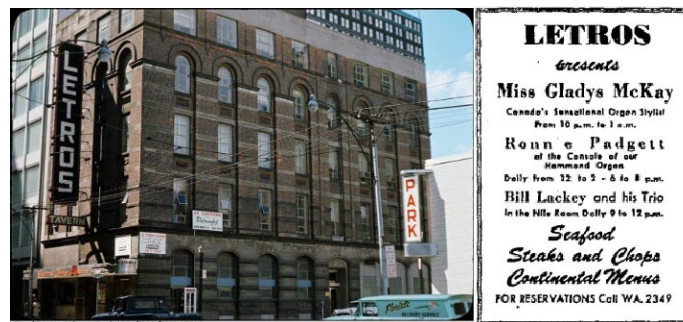


Image 17 (left): Letros Hotel & Tavern, Kings Street East and Toronto Street, 1963; Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, File 1, Item 113.

Image 18 (right): Display Ad for Nile Room at Letros, Toronto Star (4 Feb 1949), 17.

VGT members Rolf Gerd and Doug Warren remember *The Nile Room* before the *Letros Hotel* closed in 1972.¹⁴³ Gerd recalls it was “[t]he first gay bar I went to after coming to Canada (and Toronto) back in ’68...[and] I surely treasure my memory of it.” Warren, a piano player, responded to Gerd’s post, “I played in the downstairs hideaway of Letros known as ‘The Nile Room’ under the name of Doug Darrol from circa [sic] 1965-1970. I had just left ministry in the church and out of deference to my parents in the homophobic atmosphere of the ‘60s I changed my family name.” Gerd replied, “I certainly remember the piano playing – reminded me so much of the European gay bars with similar entertainment. If that was you, Doug, thank you after ½ century...”¹⁴⁴

Christine Sismondo’s important work on the history of Toronto’s gay public drinking spaces indicates that the *Nile Room* was one of the earliest gay public drinking spaces in downtown Toronto – which is corroborated by the VGT member posts included in this project. However, contrary to the commonly held assertion by many VGT members that *Dudes* (1977-1984) was the *first gay-owned and licensed* gay bar in Toronto, Sismondo’s oral histories and significant archival evidence reveals that it was actually the *Nile Room* at *Letros Hotel*. “Georgina” George Letros, the gay son of founder Christopher Letros, was managing the *Nile Room* as a gay space by 1951 and inherited the *Letros Hotel* as part of his father’s estate after Christopher Letros died suddenly at the age of 58 in 1953.¹⁴⁵

Gay patrons were also seemingly spilling over from the *Letros* to the *King Edward Hotel*, across the street, causing homophobic concern, as reported in the local tabloid, *TAB*, in

¹⁴³ ArQuives, “The Letros and St. Charles Taverns” [The Letros and St. Charles Taverns · Halloween Balls at the Letros and St. Charles Taverns · The ArQuives Digital Exhibitions](#) (accessed 26 Jan 2024).

¹⁴⁴ Rolf Gerd, and Doug Warren, Online Posts, Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 24 Mar 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Christine Sismondo, “Toronto the Gay: The Formation of A Queer Counterpublic In Public Drinking Spaces, 1947-1981, PhD diss., (York University, 2017), 61-68.

December 1961, with the newspaper headline, “King Edward Hotel Declares War on Letros Queers”:

Plagued by an overflow of homosexuals from Letros Tavern, situated directly across the road, Toronto’s popular King Edward Hotel has declared all-out war on the invading members of this limp-wrist set!

The hotel is determined to stamp out alarming encroachments designed to convert it into an annex of Letros Tavern. The hotel’s general manager, Gordon Cardy, has set up an ‘anti-queer’ army and issued firm instruction to repel the invaders at every beachhead.

The tabloid describes how hotel guests raised concerns about the presence of certain individuals in the hotel washrooms, leading to demands for action:

The crisis with the ‘third sex’ came about when hotel guests complained to the management about the number of ‘cruising pansies’ who were frequenting the washrooms, mainly the one downstairs. Guests had been bothered and insulted by the Letros refugees and they were demanding that something be done to clean up the situation. The invading ‘fags’ had, TAB learned, frequented the King Edward mainly on Friday and Saturday nights. They finally became so obnoxious, in their increasing numbers, that something had to be done.¹⁴⁶

As Sismondo points out, postwar Toronto’s lesbian and gay subcultures were bar-based.¹⁴⁷ There was a mix of gay-straight patrons in Toronto’s predominantly white city throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Bars were located in five principal areas from south to north, all centred around Yonge Street: 1) King and Toronto Streets; 2) Queen and Bay; 3) Dundas and Bay; 4) College/Carlton to Bloor; and 5) Yorkville/Bloor.

The more popular places during the post-war period that lesbians and gays frequented include:

- (King and Toronto Streets financial district) – *Letros Hotel Nile Room* at 50 King St. E. and *King Edward* cocktail bar at 37 King St. E.
- (Queen and Bay area) - *Hotel Municipal Essex Bar* at 67 Queen St. W. and the *Union House Hotel Tavern* at 71-73 Queen St. W.
- (Dundas and Bay area) - *Ford Hotel Tropical Room* at 595 Bay St. and *The Bay Hotel Public House* at 572 Bay St.

¹⁴⁶ TAB, “King Edward Hotel Declares War on Letros Queers!” (2 Dec 1961), 3.

¹⁴⁷ This primarily bar-based gay culture continued in Toronto into the 1980s. More options to connect began with the arrival of lesbian and gay sports leagues, theatre companies, music choirs and social groups.

- (College/Carlton to Bloor) – *Parkside Tavern* at 530 Yonge St. and *St. Charles Restaurant & Lounge* at 488 Yonge St.
- (Yorkville/Bloor area) - *Park Plaza Hotel King Cole Room* at 178 Bloor St. W. and *Chez Paree* at 220 Bloor St. W.

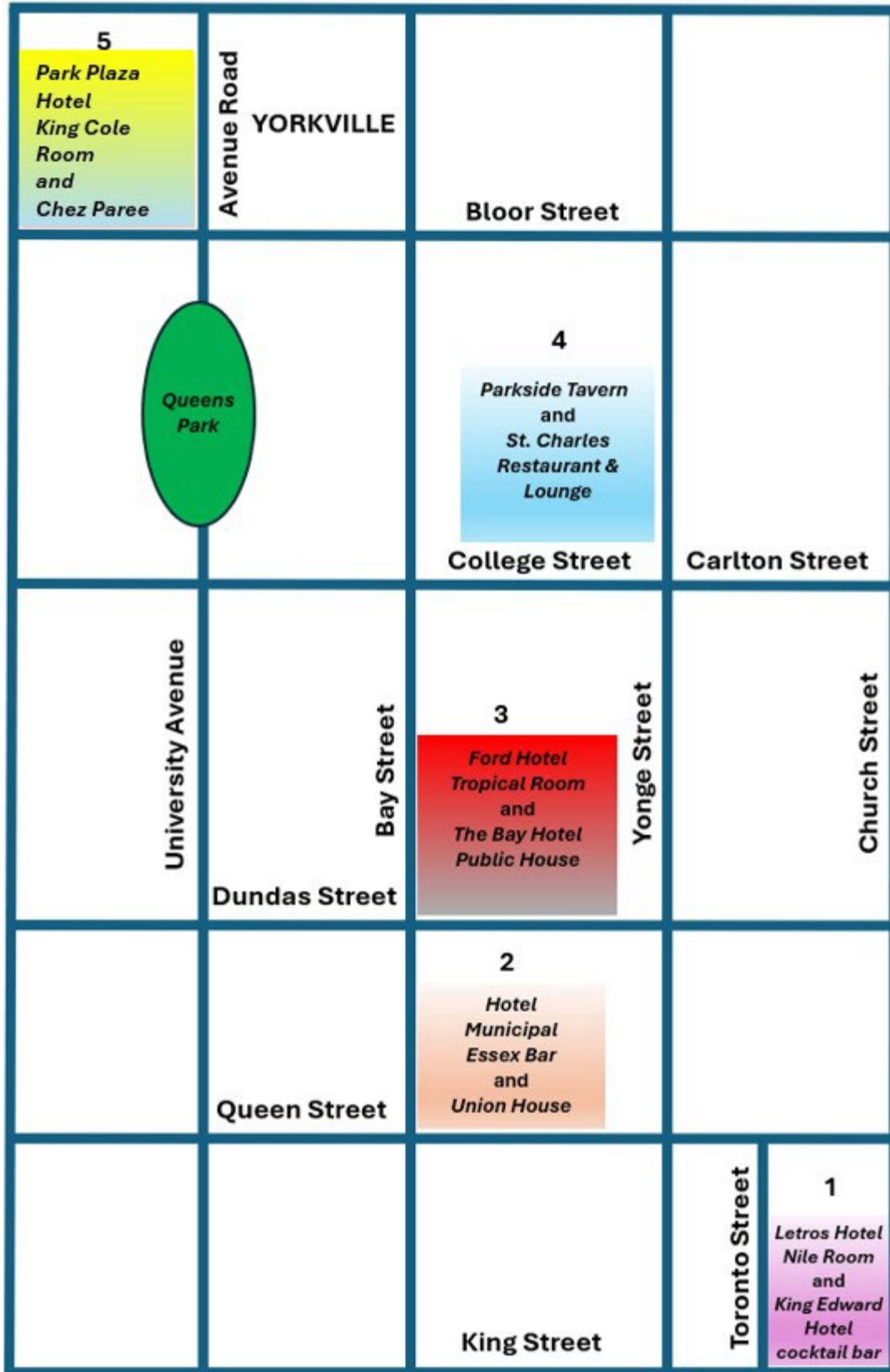


Image 19: Map of five primary post-war period (1950s & 1960s) districts in downtown Toronto with bars that lesbians and gays frequented. NOTE: This map is not exhaustive. Source: By author J. Gary Myers.

Despite these disparate locations, a 1964 newspaper article already indicated the area north of College/Carlton as the main location for gays in Toronto: “The centre of Toronto’s gay life is north from College to Bloor, east and west from Jarvis to Yonge.”¹⁴⁸ How did these different downtown locations become concentrated around the Yonge-Wellesley location and evolve into today’s recognized LGBTQ2+ Church-Wellesley Village? The answer stems from a combination of Toronto’s strict liquor-licensing laws, the construction of the Westbury Hotel on Yonge Street near College/Carlton, the proximity of *Parkside* and *St. Charles* taverns to low-rent dwellings, the construction of *City Park* apartment complex and the Toronto subway.

Battling Booze & Building Subways

Toronto has a long history of battling over booze. In the 1870s, the temperance movement and alcohol prohibition created a lasting ripple-effect on tavern licensing in the city, particularly involving the urban working class who most frequented these social spaces¹⁴⁹ – which also facilitated early post-war lesbian and gay social networks. The 1876 Crooks Act (named after Ontario MP Adam Crooks) shifted control of alcohol sales to the province and created License Inspectors, limiting the number of licenses granted for each municipality based on population, while also establishing that “all taverns be well-appointed eating houses.”¹⁵⁰ The Liquor License Board of Ontario (LLBO – established in 1927) made complicated distinctions among restaurants, taverns, clubs, dining lounges, dining rooms, and public houses, and all such establishments were required to apply for an annual permit.¹⁵¹ The *St. Charles* was licensed as a non-alcohol restaurant on the main floor and dining/cocktail lounge on the second floor.

¹⁴⁸ *Toronto Telegram*, “Society and the Homosexual” (11 Apr 1964), 7.

¹⁴⁹ M.P. Sendbuehler, “Battling ‘the bane of our cities’: class territory, and the prohibition debate in Toronto, 1877,” *Urban History Review*, No. 22, Vol. 1 (Oct 1993), 30-48.

¹⁵⁰ Jack S. Blocker Jr., David M. Fahey, and Ian R. Tyrell (eds.), *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia – Vol 1, A-L* (Santa Barbara, California, Denver, Oxford, ABC-CLIO Inc., 2003), 371.

¹⁵¹ *Globe and Mail*, “81 Cocktail Bars Seek Approval of Liquor Board” (17 Mar 1947), 23.

When Charles Hemstead sold the *Toronto Hotel* it was torn down in the mid-1950s for construction of the *Westbury Hotel* (which opened in 1957 and later became the Howard Johnson Hotel and today the Courtyard Marriott at 475 Yonge Street). The Westbury included the *Red Lion Room* bar which attracted a certain type of customer and gained an extra advantage for the *St. Charles*. Historian Jamie Bradburn explains:

The Red Lion Room soon drew a reputation for homosexual clientele, earning it the nickname ‘The Pink Pussy.’ Provincial liquor regulations ruled that beverage rooms which sold no food, like the Red Lion, had to close for an hour and a half each evening, to theoretically allow patrons to go home for dinner, or stumble to a proper restaurant. Cocktail lounges like the St. Charles sold food and could stay open.¹⁵²



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124 - f0124_f0001_d0075

Image 20: Construction site of the Westbury Hotel. St. Charles Tavern across on Yonge Street, Toronto, c. 1955. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 124, File 1, Item 75.

¹⁵² Jamie Bradburn, “Historicist: How the St. Charles Tavern went from Chinese-Food Restaurant to Popular Gay Bar” (25 Jun 2016) <https://torontoist.com/2016/06/historicist-the-st-charles-tavern/> (accessed 26 May 2021).



Image 21 (left): Westbury Hotel, 475 Yonge Street, Toronto in 1975 looking south to College Street. Notice red and white *Parkside Tavern* sign on right. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 100, Item 44.

Image 22 (right): Westbury Hotel in 1977 looking north to College Street. Notice *St. Charles* clocktower on left. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 616, Item 4.

The LLBO also required the *Parkside*, licensed as a beer parlour/beverage room, to close during dinnertime and provided a further advantage to the *St. Charles*, *Red Lion* and *Parkside* patrons could go to the *St. Charles* and order meals in the downstairs restaurant during dinnertime closings or conveniently head upstairs to the dining/cocktail lounge to continue drinking and have something to eat - all in one place. Ontario liquor license laws also prohibited women from men’s beverage rooms, like the *Red Lion* or *Parkside*. Women could only drink in rooms reserved for ladies at these establishments and could have a male escort as a “spouse or a date.”¹⁵³ Gay men would have been able to escort lady friends to furtively meet other gay men escorting lady friends in the ladies’ beverage room at *Parkside*. The LLBO also licensed the *St. Charles* as a non-gender-segregated dining/cocktail lounge. Gay male patrons could conveniently return to *Red Lion* or *Parkside* after the dinnertime curfew to a strictly enforced men-only beverage room. This physical and gendered separation regulated by alcohol and food licensing played a major part in surreptitiously and conveniently bringing gay men together at these public

¹⁵³ Alan McLeod, “What Did Ontario’s Separate Men’s And Ladies’ Beverage Rooms Look Like?” (25 Jul 2022), <https://abetterbeerblog427.com/2022/07/25/what-did-the-mens-only-and-ladies-beverages-rooms-in-ontario-looks-like/> (accessed 6 Feb 2024).

drinking establishments in this area.¹⁵⁴ When Hemstead began using the advertising slogan “Meet Me Under The Clock,” it not only transformed the clock tower at the St. Charles to a meeting place for diners in Hemstead’s time, but also (unknowingly to Hemstead) as a place and slogan for future generations of gay men over the next three decades.¹⁵⁵

Although more gay entertainment and gay social networks formed in the area at the *St. Charles*, *Parkside*, and *Red Lion* on Yonge Street, a brief and potentially first lesbian and gay precursor space specifically on Church Street’s future LGBTQ2+ Village was also established in 1964 by Rick Kerr.¹⁵⁶ Kerr, along with editor Clifford Collier¹⁵⁷ began publishing and illegally distributing a gay male tabloid named *TWO*¹⁵⁸ at 457 Church Street.¹⁵⁹ They helped run an unlicensed gay and lesbian club for same-sex dances and drag shows there named *The Melody Room*¹⁶⁰ with lesbian activist, Sara Ellen Dunlop, known as “mother.”¹⁶¹ The short-lived gay

¹⁵⁴ Rick Bébout, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in the Bar, 1969-2000* (2003), <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1977.htm> (accessed 19 Jan 2024).

¹⁵⁵ Bradburn, “Historicist.”

¹⁵⁶ Donald W. McLeod, “A Brief History of GAY: Canada’s First Gay Tabloid, 1964-1966,” (Toronto, Homewood Books, 2003), 29. Several pseudonyms were used by Richard Kerr including Edmond Kaye (as author) and Alex Edmond (as editor). The original editor Claude Collier used the pseudonym of Clifford Collier and left the role after three issues due to Kerr’s greater interest in promoting a gay physique magazine rather than a gay liberation magazine.

¹⁵⁷ McLeod, 29.

¹⁵⁸ McLeod, 28-31. *TWO* was inspired by the American early gay liberation publication ‘TWO’ (Truth Will Out) as a supplement to the magazine ‘ONE’, which began in 1953. The magazine’s content included gay interest articles, local drag revue coverage, letters to the editor, stories, and large portions of teen model physique photography. As Kerr was a photographer and owned two photography studios, RIK Art and Can Art, he sold photos and books of the photography advertised in the magazine.

¹⁵⁹ *Black Eagle* gay leather bar, one of the few gay bars remaining in the Church-Wellesley Village is currently located at 457 Church Street. Other lesbian and gay bar/restaurants that have been at this location include, *Tanks Restaurant & Tavern*; *Together Dining Lounge*; *Private Eyes Dining Lounge*; *Together Again Restaurant*; *457 Dining Lounge/Bar*; and *The Bulldog*.

¹⁶⁰ *TWO* Magazine reported, “Miss Day had the doubtful honor of becoming Miss Melody Room against nil competition” during the Halloween ball at the Melody Room in 1965. See “Halloween ’65,” *Two* (March/April 1966), Vol 9, No. 8., 2.

¹⁶¹ Rick Bébout, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in The Bar, 1969-2000* (2006), <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1971.htm> (accessed 19 Jan 2024).

publication and gay and lesbian gatherings came to an end with a fire in the building. The last publication and closure were in 1966.¹⁶²

Other unlicensed gay dance clubs that attracted gays to the College/Carlton and Yonge area in the 1960s included the *Astronaut* at 511 Yonge Street and the *Music Room* (formerly the *Maison de Lys*, and also run by ‘mother’ Sara Ellen Dunlop) at 575 Yonge Street.¹⁶³ As the area continued to be known as a place for nearby public drinking and social establishments catering exclusively to gay men, gay men continued to be drawn to living in the Church Street area. The neighbourhood north and south from Wellesley to Gerrard streets, and east and west from Jarvis to Yonge streets in the late 1960s and 70s, soon gained a reputation as the ‘gay ghetto.’

By the 1950s, the once prestigious middle/upper-class Victorian and Edwardian homes on the surrounding streets of Toronto’s future ‘gay ghetto’ and subsequent gay village had given way to poorer conditions. The social geography of the neighbourhood included both male and female working-class employees in neighbouring retail stores, mostly male business travelers staying at nearby hotels, and mid-to-lower income area residents living in poor conditions, as wealthier downtown residents moved to ‘The Burbs’ during Toronto’s post-war expansion.¹⁶⁴ The opening of the Yonge subway system in the 1950s sparked a building boom of high-rise apartments in the neighbourhood as an opportunity for the city to change the area’s rundown conditions.

¹⁶² McLeod, 28-31.

¹⁶³ *TAB*, “The Gay Set” (19 Jun 1965), 13. See also, McLeod, 281.

¹⁶⁴ John Sewell, *The shape of the suburbs: understanding Toronto’s sprawl*. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009).



Image 23: Construction of Yonge subway showing clock tower of St. Charles restaurant & dining lounge and Grosvenor Hotel (left in photo) owned by Charles Hemstead. Note the streetcars still in use on Yonge Street. Looking south-west towards Yonge Street north of College, 31 May 1951. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Series 381, File 130, Item 8307-14.

To rejuvenate the neighbourhood, old and decrepit Victorian and Edwardian homes, and the old *Northern Congregational Church* on Church Street (built in 1867) were torn down to make way for three 14-storey towers of *City Park*, bounded by Wood, Alexander, and Church streets – considered Toronto’s first modern post-war apartment complex, completed in 1957.¹⁶⁵ A significant number of gay men were known to have moved into *City Park* the year it opened, and its convenient proximity to newly opened *Red Lion Room* at the Westbury Hotel the same year, as

¹⁶⁵ Chris Bateman, “The first modern apartment complex in Toronto,” *Spacing Toronto* (26 Aug 2017) <http://spacing.ca/toronto/2017/08/26/first-modern-apartment-complex-toronto/> (accessed 26 Jan 2024).

indicated by the local gay male tabloid, *TAB*: “City Parkers have taken to the new Westbury Hotel like bees to honey.”¹⁶⁶



Image 24: The site of City Park was cleared of homes during the summer of 1954 and construction began in September 1954. The St. Charles clock tower is visible in the distance (red arrow, author’s overlay). Source: Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University, Toronto Telegram fonds, ASC03364, 1974-002/252(287).

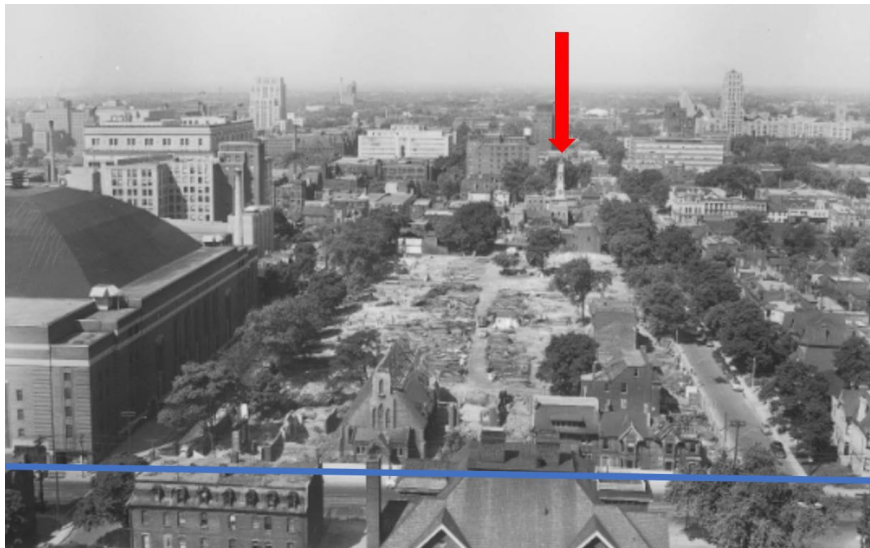


Image 25: The site of City Park construction during summer of 1954 showing Church Street (blue line, author’s overlay) and St. Charles clock tower on Yonge Street in the distance (red arrow, author’s overlay). Source: Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University, Toronto Telegram fonds, ASC52398, 1974-002/248.

¹⁶⁶ *TAB*, “Fairy-Go-Round” (8 Jun 1957), 4.

Within the 1960s and 1970s, mostly gay white men began to gentrify the neighbourhood, some moving into low-rent rooms in houses, or older walk-up apartment buildings constructed in the 1920s.¹⁶⁷ Some were able to afford *City Park* and other new apartment buildings, and some restored Victorian and Edwardian homes on streets intersecting Church Street. Almost 96 percent of the population of greater Toronto in the 1971 census was of European ancestry, and 66 percent lived in middle-income neighbourhoods. Within a decade, while still a majority of the population, those of European ancestry decreased to 87.2 percent.¹⁶⁸ The increased population of gay men and gentrification within the emerging Village corresponded with this data of young males (between 20-34 years old), white, English-speaking, and middle-class.¹⁶⁹

The 1970s saw a growing concentration of gay white men in urban apartment buildings in the area, such as *City Park*. Another was *50 Alexander Street*, a round, phallic high-rise, built in 1965 and commonly referred to by gay men as KY Tower or Vaseline Tower after the popular lubricants.¹⁷⁰ The 28-storey complex at *100 Wellesley Street*, jokingly dubbed ‘stack a fag’ or ‘stack of fags,’¹⁷¹ was built in 1971 – located next to then-named Cawthra Park (a popular gay cruising area), now Barbara Hall Park. Gay men also lived in smaller residential buildings and houses around Isabella Street like the 10-storey *Massey House* at 550 Jarvis Street built in 1958.

¹⁶⁷ The City of Toronto prohibited further construction of walk-up apartments in the 1930s claiming “they promoted a non-family-oriented lifestyle.” See, Paul Gallant, “Ready For A Renaissance,” *IN Toronto Magazine* (30 May 2013).

¹⁶⁸ Michael Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile* (Jan 2006), 11. http://www.isr.yorku.ca/download/Ornstein--Ethno-Racial_Groups_in_Toronto_1971-2001.pdf (accessed 21 Jan 2024).

¹⁶⁹ City of Toronto Planning Board, *Core Area Task Force: Technical Appendix* (1974), 156. See also Jon Caulfield, *City Form and Everyday Life: Toronto's Gentrification and Critical Social Practice* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁰ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto, Between The Lines Publishing, 2016), 17.

¹⁷¹ Brad Teeter, “My road to the village,” *Xtra*, Pink Triangle Press (28 Jul 2010) <https://www.dailyxtra.com/my-road-to-the-village-9669> (accessed 6 Feb 2024).



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 17, Item 1

Image 26: City Park apartment complex (three buildings) completed in 1957 on Church Street between Maitland and Alexander streets. Considered the first modern post-war apartment complex built in Toronto and home to gays in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 17, 1972.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 61, Item 69

Image 27: Maitland Street, east of Yonge Street, towards Church Street showing "KY Towers" also known as "Vaseline Towers" among other high-rise buildings and older homes. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1526, File 61, Item 69, 1971.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 17, Item 8

Image 28: Corner of Church and Maitland streets looking north-east with 100 Wellesley Street East high-rise in middle-left among other residential spaces. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, Item 8, 1972.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 219, Series 2311, File 1708, Item 13



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 3, Item 14

Image 29 (left): 100 Wellesley (formerly named Plaza 100) high-rise in middle-left among other residential spaces. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 219, Series 2311, File 1708, Item 13, 2003.

Image 30 (right): Massey House apartments, corner of Jarvis and Isabella streets, looking northwest at 550 Jarvis Street. Isabella was a popular residential street for gay men to live in Toronto with walk-up apartment buildings and older Victorian homes. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 3, Item 14.

In Proximity to Gay Bars

Tim McCaskell was born in Orillia, Ontario and grew up in the small town of Beaverton, just across Lake Simcoe from Barrie, Ontario. He lived in Toronto in 1971 and 1972, then hitchhiked with what he calls an “unrequited love” on an adventure to South America. He spent two years teaching English and “bumming around Latin America” before moving back to Toronto permanently in 1974. Tim is known for his long-time work as a Toronto writer, activist and educator. From 1974 to 1986, he was a collective member of *The Body Politic*, Canada’s first Lesbian and Gay Liberation newspaper. He now lives with his long-term partner in Toronto, video artist, activist and educator, Richard Fung. Richard is the founder of Gay Asians Toronto, established in 1980.

Tim explains the assortment of residential and older retail buildings in TCWV created opportunities for mostly gay white men “to find each other and attain the critical mass to develop identities and demand change.”¹⁷² He explains:

The thing about Church Street was that it had been a street of pawn shops. It was seriously depressed. Yonge Street had sucked up all the oxygen out of the room. And so, if you were a penniless gay entrepreneur who wanted to open a gay bar that was close to the subway, close to the original two or three gay bars, you were getting that external economy of scale. Church Street was only a block away, but had rents much, much cheaper. And it became a place where many gay men actually moved into the neighbourhood as well. The subway created the gay community, really. The subway created all those high-rise apartments, City Park and all the other ones, KY towers. All those kinds of places, which had relatively cheap apartments and small apartments because they were new. And so single people who were looking to get away from their families and to be close to a whole bunch of jobs down in the centre of the city suddenly started migrating there. In the early 1980s, there's this huge influx of single people living in these apartments.¹⁷³

¹⁷² McCaskell, *Queer Progress*.

¹⁷³ Interview with Tim McCaskell, 5 Sep 2023.

When Brian Hardy arrived in Toronto, he found a job as a computer operator in a downtown office building on King Street East. The wages afforded him the opportunity to rent his first Toronto apartment, a one-room bachelor at 477 Sherbourne at Wellesley Street for \$150/month. Not only did this leave room for additional purchases, entertainment, and socializing, but it also provided a comfortable surplus. Hardy exclaimed in his diary of living in his first apartment, “I felt like Mary Richards!”¹⁷⁴ Like Hardy, other oral history narrators and VGT members recall living in or frequenting these residential spaces with relatively inexpensive rents throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was not only cost-effective but also convenient living in this residential neighbourhood around Church and Wellesley in proximity to adjacent gay bars around Yonge Street.

David Hallman remembers the significance of walking home to his apartment building in 1976 with his future partner of over thirty loving years, Bill Conklin. They met at nearby gay bar *The Manatee*. Bill offered to walk David back to his apartment building at 100 Wellesley Street – conveniently within walking distance of the Yonge Street area gay bars:

It was love at first sight, on both our parts. We were totally into each other, but this was really emotional territory for both of us. We were being pretty careful that one or other of us didn't screw it up. He walked me home, and I was living at 100 Wellesley, Plaza 100 as it was called at the time. And we were sitting on a bench on the opposite side of the street. I ventured the invitation, "Would you like to come up?" And he said, "Oh, I didn't think you were that kind of guy." And I just thought, "Oh, I fucked this up." And then we parted amicably. But he told me later it was because he was so nervous about the first time that we were to sleep together that he wasn't willing to take that step yet.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Hardy, 3 Jan 2020, [\(4\) Vintage Gay Toronto : My first apartment, 1979. Wellesley & Sherbourne 4th floor bachelor. \\$150 a month. I felt like Mary Richards | Facebook](#) (accessed 12 Jan 2024). Mary Richards was the main character in the self-titled and award-winning comedy series, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), played by actor Mary Tyler Moore. Mary Richards is a young woman who moves to a new city “to make it on her own.”

¹⁷⁵ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

Jim Elliott has moved to Toronto three times. He was born in Nelson, British Columbia and grew up in Victoria and Vancouver. He first moved to Toronto with his parents in 1969 when he was in grade eleven. His family moved back to the west coast and Jim decided to return to Toronto in 1978. He worked for IBM, and they transferred him to New York City in 1981 before he moved back to Toronto in 1984 continuing to work at IBM. Despite his IBM office in the northern Toronto suburb of Don Mills, Jim has always lived in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village:

I never thought of living anywhere else than in the Church-Wellesley area, because if you're new, especially to a city, which I pretty much was, even though I lived here for a year as a kid, you wanted to be someplace you could feel comfortable [as a gay man]. Even though my office at that point was in Don Mills and Eglinton, the thought of living in Don Mills [expresses a sound of distaste] ...I don't know how that comes across on a tape [audio recording] but [expresses same sound of distaste] but living in The Village attracts a lot of gay people... though I must admit, I have friends who are gay farmers who live out in the country. So, everyone to their own thing. That attracted me to live right in The Village where I could feel safe.¹⁷⁶

Jim is not alone in the longevity of living in The Village, spanning nearly four decades. Bill McMaster has lived in Toronto's gaybourhood also close to forty years. He is now a retired counselling therapist with a long history of living and socializing in the area. Born in Wawa, Ontario, he graduated with a social work degree from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay in 1973 and was breaking up with a "very controlling" boyfriend at the time. "I didn't like to be controlled," he laughs. Bill moved to Toronto in the summer of 1984 and stayed with a gay couple who were friends before making long-term living arrangements in The Village:

I decided to just pull the plug [amused laughter] and move to Toronto. I had a friend, a classmate that had gone to school with me, who had moved here with his partner. I was basically out [as gay], and the friends that I moved in with were a gay couple. So, I literally moved from Thunder Bay down and into their second bedroom when I first arrived. I was literally living-in because I had just arrived as these things happen quite often. You make moves without really thinking a lot of

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

things. [After finding an apartment near Jarvis and Isabella streets] I've been in this apartment for close to forty years. It's under rent control [quick laugh]. It's finally flipped over the \$1,000 mark. So, for me, it's fabulous.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, lower rent did not necessarily translate into well-maintained apartment buildings as Anthony Mohamed relays. Anthony was born in San Fernando, Trinidad and Tobago and was a year old when his family moved to Toronto. He grew up in a deeply religious family and went to high school in the west end of Toronto throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. He was “extremely active in the church” but was asked to leave by a pastor for being out as gay. In 1983, Anthony heard about the “gay-welcoming” Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Toronto and a youth group meeting at The 519 Church Street Community Centre. After becoming familiar with the area, he moved to one of the more rundown apartment buildings around Church-Wellesley in 1988 when he was twenty-one-years old. He recalls: “I was on Jarvis Street in one of those low-rises, and it was a bachelor, and it was perfect for me. But the roaches and the mice [amused laughter]. Oh, my goodness!” Despite run-down apartments Anthony agrees that, as a young gay man, the neighbourhood “felt safer than anywhere else in the city.”¹⁷⁸

Feeling safe in the gaybourhood did not mean gay tenants did not experience homophobia in their own apartment buildings. VGT members¹⁷⁹ Kevin Smith and Brian Hardy recall living at Massey House at 550 Jarvis Street:

Kevin Smith: “They had a Superintendent that was employed by the Property Management company who turned out to be very homophobic. Numerous tenants made complaints, and nothing was done. I got sick of the BS and moved.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Bill McMaster, 8 Aug 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

¹⁷⁹ For the purposes of this project, quotes of written narratives by VGT narrators are listed by name in bold while quotes by oral history narrators will be indented.

¹⁸⁰ Kevin Smith in response to a post by Brian Hardy, “Me out on my balcony at 550 – Jarvis, Apt. 616 in June of 1984,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 1 May 2020.

Brian Hardy: “We had a hard-ass woman who was tough but fair, wish I could remember her name.”¹⁸¹

Kevin Smith: “I remember Claudia...if memory serves me right her husband was the homophobic prick I had the run-in with. Complete and utter asshole. Always carried a huge chip on his shoulder.”¹⁸²

Both homophobia and a lack of support were daily challenges for gays in the 1970s and early 1980s. This often meant educating oneself about being gay by finding publications like *The Body Politic*, going to bookstores or a public library to look for books about ‘homosexuality’ (often more clinical). This also meant travelling to find gay spaces in larger cities outside smaller communities to connect with others who were gay.

Lionel Collier was fourteen when he started regularly taking an almost two-hour walk, bus and GO train trip to Toronto from his family home in Oshawa in 1974. He remembers that “At that time, it really seemed to be a separate world or a separate city from Toronto.” His family would make occasional visits to Toronto, so he was “always aware of the big city next door.” He says at four years old it was part of his consciousness and he decided one day he would move to Toronto and leave Oshawa, explaining that “It was too small for me.” Like others, he discovered *Glad Day Bookstore* and the non-licensed gay bar/dance club, *The Manatee*, known for younger clientele, including gay teens. Lionel says growing up he was looking for an “affirmation” of his sexuality. By fourteen he realized why:

During school there was no affirmation of gayness in public school, not even in high school. They hardly even acknowledged it. The biggest acknowledgement I ever got was when the gym teacher said, “Basically, 10% of the population is gay. And that was a real eye opener for me. I thought, “Okay if I’m part of this larger group, where are they? How do I figure out who these people are? And how do I find them to make friends with them?”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Brian Hardy in response to Kevin Smith.

¹⁸² Kevin Smith in response to a post by Brian Hardy.

¹⁸³ Interview with Lionel Collier, 21 Sep 2023.

Lionel soon made friends during these bus and train trips to Toronto, observing that “I learned that there were a bunch of us that were doing this.” When Lionel started classes at the University of Toronto (U of T) he was already familiar with gay Toronto. His earlier weekend visits had seen to that. He knew the area where he wanted to live in – Toronto’s gay ghetto. He recalls:

I was living on Sherbourne Street on the east side of Allen Gardens. Oh, it was wonderful because I could ride my bicycle to school at U of T. But I was right across the street from the park, which was a huge pickup zone. That was a huge cruising park at that time. And it was all gay ghetto all around me. At that time, Cabbagetown [Toronto neighbourhood], meaning east of Parliament Street and north of Carlton or north of Gerrard [Street] was full of rooming houses and cheap accommodation. And so, it was full of gays and lesbians.¹⁸⁴

Gay-Owned & Grown

This critical mass of gay men living in Toronto’s gay ghetto supplied regular patrons for the *St. Charles* when Samuel Greenspan, President of St. Charles Foods, the company running the *St. Charles*, licensed it as a *tavern* after Hemstead’s death. Greenspan either recognized the value of a ‘gay dollar,’ or turned a blind eye (or both) to the growing gay clientele at the *St. Charles* in the early 1960s. The same could be said for Norman Bolter, who inherited the property from his father Hyman, and ran it with his wife Edythe. As owners of the *Parkside Tavern*, they purchased the longstanding competition of the *St. Charles Tavern* in 1978¹⁸⁵ where both their two adult sons, Gary and Howard, worked as managers.¹⁸⁶ *St. Charles Tavern* and *Parkside Tavern* were known as popular gay bars by the early 1960s and 1970s,¹⁸⁷ frequented by

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Lionel Collier, 21 Sep 2023.

¹⁸⁵ *Toronto Life*, “The Rise of Gay Capitalism” (September 1976), 150.

¹⁸⁶ Might Directories Limited. *Might’s Metropolitan Toronto City Directory 1978*. Gary and Howard Bolter are listed as *Parkside Tavern* and *St. Charles Tavern* managers.

¹⁸⁷ Denise Benson, *Then & Now: Toronto Nightlife History – Stages* (October 29, 2014) [Then & Now: Stages - Then and Now: Toronto Nightlife History Then and Now: Toronto Nightlife History \(thenandnowtoronto.com\)](https://thenandnowtoronto.com) (accessed 29 May 2021).

gay men conveniently living in the area, and mentioned by VGT members identifying themselves as regular patrons.

The *St. Charles* was David Hallman's first gay bar as a university student from Waterloo on one of his weekend trips to Toronto. Hallman describes the experience:

I was sitting there as it was probably the Saturday late afternoon and I was sitting at the bar very nervous. It was structured in such a way that there was a big horseshoe bar, and people sat around the outside and the bar was in the middle of the horseshoe, and the bartenders would serve you. So, I was sitting on the stool at this bar, kind of nervously nursing my beer and glancing furtively around.¹⁸⁸

Hallman also recalls going to *Parkside* in the early 1970s, located down the street from the *St. Charles*:

It was a tavern and didn't have dancing, but it was the place where people, at least when I was going to it, would gather particularly on Saturday afternoons. It was a beer hall. And this was prior to people going out at night. It was how people spent their Saturday afternoons.¹⁸⁹

At the dawn of the 1970s, Hugh Brewster was an out-of-town student from the University of Guelph who travelled to Toronto with a gay friend to go to gay bars. Born in the U.K., his family emigrated when he was six from Hornchurch (a suburb of East London) to Georgetown, Ontario before settling in Guelph. Hugh was the son of a medical doctor and sent to boarding school at Upper Canada College in Toronto at the age of thirteen. He returned to Guelph for university. After graduating in 1971, he moved to Toronto and became a founding writer and member of *The Body Politic* collective, going on to become a book editor and award-winning writer. Hugh recalls the unseemly side of Toronto gay bars and the connection between the *St. Charles* and *Parkside*. He provides a rich description of the bars and a zealous employee enforcing the liquor licence laws that prohibited patrons from standing up with their drinks:

¹⁸⁸ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

I was kind of horrified. The *St. Charles* in particular was quite seedy. There were drag queens and leather queens and working class...and there was that laneway that still exists...this back laneway led to the back door to the back room of *The Parkside*. The former men's beverage room at the *Parkside* had become gay and that was the place I most went to when I came to Toronto and worked with *The Body Politic* and was involved in gay liberation. The backroom of the *Parkside* attracted all kinds of people and was kind of lively. And there was a fat guy named Frank who yelled at everybody and told us to sit down. He was a waiter, but he could have been a bouncer. I think he had to be an enforcer. You had to be sitting down. "Sit down!" He was always saying, "Sit down! I can't serve you unless you're sitting down."¹⁹⁰

Clientele may have had to sit while downstairs at the *St. Charles* and *Parkside* but by the mid-1970s they were free to dance on Friday and Saturday nights upstairs, which became home to gay dance clubs. At the *St. Charles* there was Maygay (1970-1977), Club Triangle (1977-1978), and Charley's Disco (1978-1981) and at *Parkside* there was Stages (1977-1984). Charley's and Stages were thought to give Toronto's gay scene a New York *Studio 54* vibe.¹⁹¹

Terrance "Teach" Saunders remembers walking down Toronto's Yonge Street passing the *St. Charles* tavern and being told, "that's where the gays go." It was 1980. Terrance was a 21-year-old international student from the Bahamas studying at York University when a dorm-floor roommate invited him for a trip downtown: "I'm going to take you to Yonge Street, the most interesting Street in Toronto." Terrance looked at the *St. Charles* and surrounding area. Curious to explore his sexuality, he thought to himself, "I'll remember." He returned to visit it shortly thereafter:

I was brave enough to walk through, and it was midday, so nothing was happening. And I walked straight through and came out the back door. I think I remember someone saying or I later learned that Friday night is the night when you're supposed to go. I eventually made it to a Friday night and was just blown away. It was my first [gay] bar, and it was interesting because it was very much

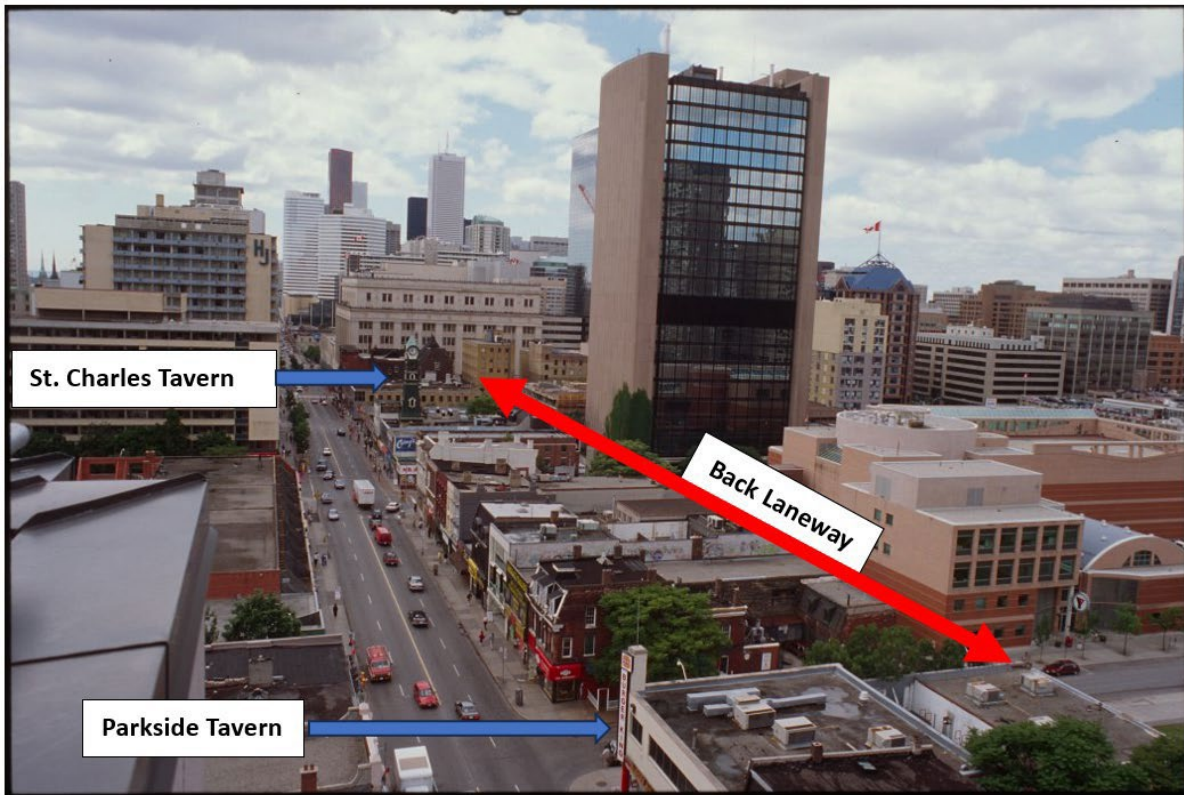
¹⁹⁰ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

¹⁹¹ *Studio 54* was a former disco nightclub located in Midtown Manhattan, New York City from 1977 to 1980, famous for celebrity patrons and glitzy dance parties. This is not an exhaustive list. There were several other dance clubs upstairs at *The Parkside* over the years but not mentioned by narrators. See appendix for full list.

that Studio 54 kind of gay, and it was just men everywhere... [amused laughter]
...beautiful men everywhere.¹⁹²

Terrence thinks back to that day in 1980 with nostalgic memory:

I remember I looked around. I remember the bell tower [original clock tower attached to St. Charles that still exists today]. And then I remember travelling towards College [Street], and it has remained this kind of deja-vu moment in my time spent here because almost every time I pass it, I remember what it was like.¹⁹³



City of Toronto Archives, Series 1465, File 616, Item 9

Image 31: Back-alley location between Parkside Tavern and St. Charles Tavern on Yonge Street, looking south from Breadalbane Street. Arrows and labels overlay included by author, J. Gary Myers. Notice HJ (on building at top left), Howard Johnson Hotel, formerly Westbury and currently Courtyard by Marriott. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 616, Item 9, ca. 1980.

Most oral history narrators for this project remember *The Quest* and *Carriage House* as the first prestigious places that gays could go to dance and socialize in Toronto. However, that didn't mean they felt safe going to them until once inside. Despite these places being less

¹⁹² Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

¹⁹³ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

‘seedy’ and more ‘upscale,’ the entrance to these locations were still highly visible off the busy streets of Yonge (*The Quest*) and Jarvis (*Carriage House*). This made closeted gay men self-conscious about who was seeing them enter from the outside.



Image 32: The Quest (1973-1985) at 665 Yonge Street in 1979. Source: The ArQuives: Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (19), Photograph Collection Box 2.

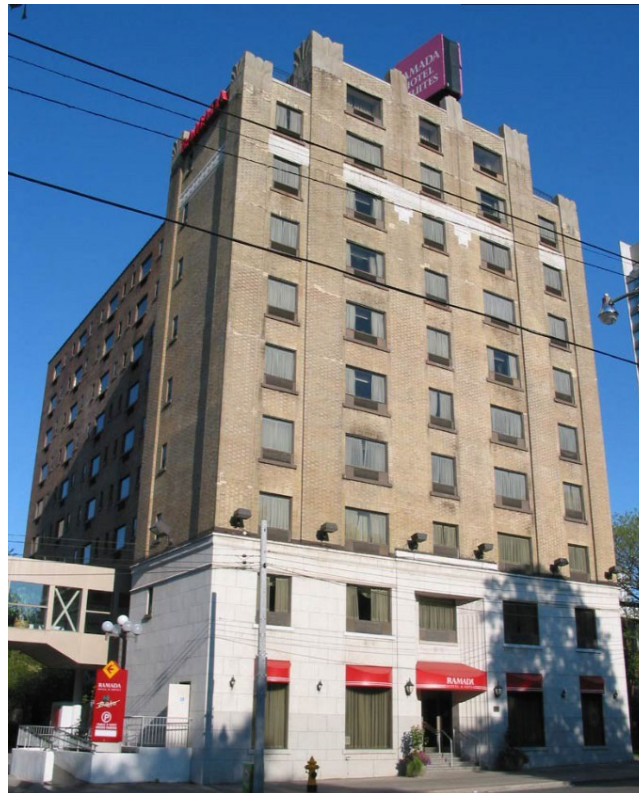


Image 33: Ramada Hotel & Suites Downtown (1998-2002) previously Carriage House Hotel (1965-1978) at 300-306 Jarvis Street, ca. 2000. Source: Permission granted for use by Bob Krawczyk, photographer.

Dan Benson was one of those gay men. He moved from the town of Whitby, an hour-and-a-half east of Toronto and remembers growing up in a family of the typical expected gender binary roles. He explains, “I often reflect that my dad, like everyone else’s dad, worked. Of course, all our moms stayed at home, because that’s what they did back in the ‘60s.”¹⁹⁴ Benson came to Toronto in 1975 at 18 to go to George Brown College and lived in the neighbourhood of the Annex to be close to school. Benson is now a retired United Church minister with a lengthy career as an influential advocate and minister within LGBTQ2+ communities. Long out of the closet and living openly and lovingly in Toronto with his husband, he recalls those self-conscious closeted days of entering a gay bar like *The Quest*:

The Quest was on Yonge Street just below Charles Street on the east side. It had sort of a bar downstairs and a dance bar upstairs. I remember going upstairs and hanging out dancing. I remember being very nervous about it, very apprehensive. I mean, this was the 1970s. People were not out in the same way. I was still exploring but still closeted. Very self-conscious, did not want people to know. I remember walking past *The Quest* and walking past and then quickly do a quick look around. “Is anyone watching?” And then dodge inside. You’d sort of transmit this thing of someone who was walking up the street and then they just evaporated [amused laughter] because you snuck into someplace.¹⁹⁵

A VGT member thinks back to those years in clandestine spaces sheltered from an often-hostile public gaze:

Viktor Kaczowski: “More often than not their entrances were hidden in back alleys (Buddy’s, Dudes) or their street presence was minimal such as no signage or no windows (The Quest, Cornelius). You slipped in and out hoping that no one you knew would see you.”¹⁹⁶

Jeremy Vincent is best known for his ongoing charity appearances as the longstanding “Kiwi” fruit to raise funds for various LGBTQ2+ and other community groups in Toronto. Jeremy has performed in *Fruit Cocktail* since the 1980s and continues performing in costume

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

¹⁹⁶ Viktor Kaczowski in response to a post by JP Larocque, “St. Charles clock tower was an important early example of queer visibility in Toronto,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, January 3, 2020.

today with the iconic five fruits group.¹⁹⁷ Jeremy was 18 when he moved to Toronto in 1976 from the small town of St. Thomas, Ontario. He describes his experience of always being hyper-aware of one's surroundings when walking to and from gay bars in the 1970s and 1980s:

I was not apprehensive of being in the bar. I was more apprehensive of getting to the bar. That was your difficulty. Going into *The Quest* wasn't an issue because you'd walk along Yonge Street and [making a sound indicating a quick movement] in you'd go. Coming back out, you'd come out and you go into traffic. Well, if you've got some homophobic person behind and they knew that was a gay bar, there was a little more of an issue. It only happened once, and one guy said something, and I just kept walking and ignored him and there was never an issue after that. But going into *Katrina's*, trepidation getting there, because it was also off on a side street [St. Joseph Street]. But it was a little better because the side street was a little quieter.¹⁹⁸

As growing numbers of gay men lived and socialized in the neighbourhood, other licensed gay bars opened in the area including three *gay-owned* bars near the end of the 1970s: *Dudes*, *The Barn*, and *Buddy's Backroom Bar*. Opening gay-owned gay bars was not an easy task with the continuing challenges of Ontario liquor license laws and extensive homophobia. Rick Bébout, in his memoir, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in The Bar, 1969-2000*, describes what this was like for the gay owners of *Dudes*. He notes the sparse decor and limited resources that gay owners faced:

At first it wasn't quite a bar, unlicensed and allowed to sell only low alcohol beer, promoting itself as "A near bar nearby." ... The place looked like an upscale rec room; the walls done in diagonal slats of light wood with mirrors in place of some panels. There was a pool table, a bar that in time would serve real booze, and a raised, railed off area with table for eating by day, cleared off for dancing by night.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Jeremy Vincent, 16 Aug 2023. Fruit Cocktail was a fundraising cabaret event of musical and comedy skits started in 1982 to raise money for various lesbian, gay and other community groups with the founding of the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal, now Community One Foundation. Charity events are known for their iconic five 'Fruits' mascots, alternating over the years as Kiwi, Pineapple, Banana, Blueberry, Orange, Plum, Apple and Tomato.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Jeremy Vincent, 16 Aug 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Rick Bébout, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in The Bar, 1969-2000* <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1977.htm>. Accessed 19 May 2021.

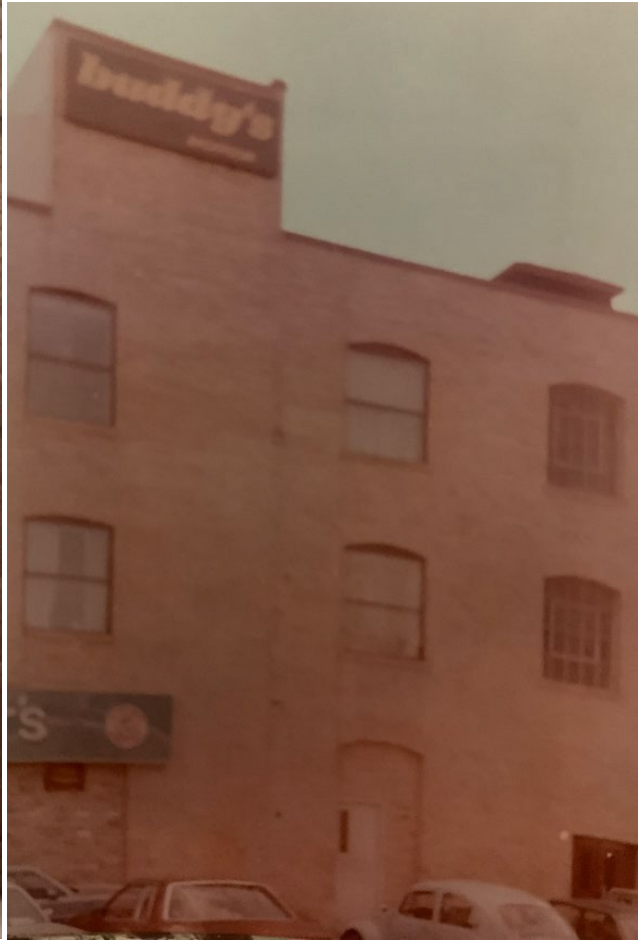


Image 34 (left): Laneway entrance to *Dudes* (1977-1982) at 10 Breadalbane Street behind Parkside Tavern in 1979. Source: The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (14), Photograph Collection Box 2.

Image 35 (right): Entrance to *Buddy's Backroom Bar* (1978-1987) at 370 Church Street in 1979. Source: The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (05), Photograph Collection Box 2.



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 51, Item 29

Image 36: Les Cavalier Restaurant, Granby Street looking southwest from Church Street, 1972. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 2032, Series 841, File 51, Item 29.



Image 37 (left): *The Barn* with Les Cavalier sign still outside before it became *Stables* in 1991 with “The Barn” sign on side of building on Granby Street, looking west from Church Street, 1979. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 531, Item 1.



Image 38 (right): *The Barn* with “The Barn” sign above entrance on Granby Street in 1979. Source: The ArQuives: Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (26), Photograph Collection Box 2.

Other gay bars continued to be straight owned by people who may have shown tolerance or solidarity in providing gay social spaces but likely recognized the economic value from the area's growing gay clientele. Gay-owned gay bars were an important turning-point for Toronto's gay culture. Toronto was rampant with homophobia and the risk of violent gay-bashing, but gay-owned bars provided what was considered a safer environment to socialize and freely express gay identities. They were completely exclusive spaces with the added protection and supposed solidarity of gay owners. Within these spaces gay identities and gay culture were forged as places of community building, fostering friendships, support networks and intimate relationships. Knowing a gay bar was gay-owned seemed to establish a greater sense of trust after examples of distrust and mere tolerance experienced in some gay bars that were straight-owned.

Owning and operating gay bars also sent a message to the gay community of economic empowerment and self-sufficiency at a time when one could be fired from employment or evicted for being gay. Individuals faced employment discrimination and limited economic opportunities for being openly gay or if they were outed. Gay-owned gay bars appeared to offer a path to entrepreneurship and financial independence, even if many of the early establishments in Toronto during the late 1970s and early 1980s required refinement before reaching their full potential. Of course, gay individuals looking to open a gay bar at that time faced challenges with significant homophobic barriers based on gay cultural stigma. This was further limited by gendered and racialized economic disparities in a growing climate of feminist protests, male chauvinism and identity politics, which provided privilege and advantages for white, middle-class gay male owners to open up gay bars over women and racialized individuals.

Journalist, critic and lesbian activist Chris Bearchell, writing for *The Body Politic* in 1981, describes "the development of lesbian separatism" that "sees the interests of lesbians as

distinct enough from those of both gay men and straight women to warrant struggling for a movement free of both.” Bearchell suggests this was picked up by “radical feminists” and “bar dykes” who jeopardized other lesbians with the risks of separatism:

For these gay women, their lesbianism is a product of their sexual responses, not their politics. Separatism makes even less sense to some of them; having experienced the isolation of the closet and the social hostility toward homosexuality, they see straight women, friends, their families – even gay men – as potential sources of support and understanding in a world that presents too few such opportunities.²⁰⁰

Bearchell states this conflict began in the early 1970s and filtered into the gay bar scene when male-oriented businesses began to segregate by the mid-1970s with gay bars like *Club 511* (511 Yonge Street)²⁰¹ charging women more to get in as a deterrent. Some places attempted to create mixed spaces to include lesbians. In 1975, openly-gay business owner Janko Naglic purchased *Les Cavaliers* restaurant (established 1969) at 418 Church Street, a few blocks south of what would become today’s Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV), the main street of the current LGBTQ2+ Village. He kept the *Les Cavaliers* sign out front and converted the main floor to *The Barn* in 1976 (renamed *Stables* gay bar downstairs in 1991 with *The Barn* upstairs) and opened *Jo-Jo’s* on the second-floor as a mixed space geared towards lesbians. Naglic was one of the first to open a gay bar closer to Church and Wellesley streets. *Tanks* opened at 457 Church Street in 1980. Within a year it was converted to the lesbian bar *Sapho*. *Sapho* was damaged by an arsonist’s blaze only two weeks after opening. Naglic reopened it as *Together* – “a restaurant

²⁰⁰ Chris Bearchell, “Bar-Hoping,” *The Body Politic* (Oct 1981), 25.

²⁰¹ *Club 511* was a private drag club (1970-1975). It was previously *Soul City* (late 1960s-1970) that catered to mostly Black clientele. See Faith Nolan, “A Whole Other Story,” *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer* (Toronto, Coach House Books, 2017), 22. According to Tim McCaskell in an interview on 5 Sep 2023 *Soul City* was turned into a gay venue by owner Harry Holst. It then became the short-lived *The Monkey Club Discotheque* (1975). See *Might’s Metropolitan Toronto City Directory 1975* (Toronto, Might Directories Publishers, 1975), 855. *Club 511* is listed in *Might’s Directory* in 1974 and replaced in 1975 and 1976 with *The Monkey Club Discotheque* which is not listed in any directories after that time.

and bar catering to women and men.”²⁰² In 1985, Naglic briefly converted the ground floor of *The Barn* to *Club Ivory*, “Toronto’s newest piano bar for the discerning gay woman.”²⁰³ That same year, Naglic renamed *Together* to *Private Eyes* then *Together Again*, all serving mostly women. Soon it was just *The 457* as a gay bar for men. *Jo-Jo’s*, *The Barn & Stables*, and the nomenclature reincarnations of *Tanks*, *Sapho*, *Private Eyes*, *Together*, *Together Again* and *The 457* were some of the first openly established and licensed lesbian and gay bars located on Church Street. Bearchell points to the irony of Naglic opening other lesbian bars:

A few years ago [late 1970s] *The Barn* was called *Jojo’s* [sic], and was one of the few weeknight bars frequented by gay women – until the management went out of its way to discourage female patrons. *Jojo’s* was picketed for a discriminatory dress code that banned women wearing jeans.²⁰⁴

This dress code was possibly used as a guise to maintain a certain type of ‘less troublesome’ lesbian clientele and restrict rougher ‘dykes’ considered instigators of fights and damage in bars. Or it was an indication of pervasive binary gender stereotypes with expected types of dress for men and women. Bearchell also recognized the economic reason for a lack of lesbian bars in Toronto as the number of gay bars geared towards men continued to increase by 1981:

The floundering network of lesbian bars seems tiny by comparison with the commercial ghetto catering to (and some say exploiting) gay men. And it may be doomed to this status by the relative poverty of women as compared to men.²⁰⁵

Brian Hardy includes in his diary some of those gay bars that Bearchell suggests were potentially exploiting gay men. Brian went to places like *St. Charles Tavern*, *Maygay* (which became *Charly’s Disco*) as well as *Stages at Parkside*. Like *Charly’s*, *Stages* was also considered

²⁰² Bearchell, 27.

²⁰³ Michael Lyons, “I Love the Nightlife: The 80s and 90s – Rising from the fringe to mainstream acceptance” *Summer Play 2017* (Summer 2017), 11, <https://pinkplaymags.com/edition-archives/> (accessed 8 Mar 2024). The article presents an ad for *Club Ivory* with the description.

²⁰⁴ Bearchell.

²⁰⁵ Bearchell.

“the *Studio 54* of Toronto.”²⁰⁶ Brian says he went to *The Quest* for “a change” of scenery, and *Buddy’s Backroom Bar*, a popular gay bar opened by gay owner George Hislop and connected to *Crispins Restaurant* at Gerard and Church streets. *Buddy’s* was just down the street from *The Barn* at Church and Granby streets.

Brian also mentions both *The Barn* and *Dudes* as two other gay bars he frequented most. *Dudes* was located in a back alley on St. Luke’s Lane in a building off Yonge and Breadalbane streets, directly behind *Parkside*. Roger Wilkes, a founder of the York University Homophile Association, with his same-sex partner David Payne opened *Dudes* in 1977. *Dudes* catered to the “gay clone” look, a 1970s style of gay masculinity, adopted as the moustached or bearded, plaid shirts and denim jeans crowd. *Dudes* was a small cruise bar.²⁰⁷

Grant Campbell says he was a very closeted 19-year-old when he moved to Toronto from Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1977 for his undergraduate studies at the University of Toronto. He had only one gay experience before heading off to U of T’s Victoria College men’s student residence. Like other closeted gay men in Toronto in the 1970s, it was an act of bravery in a very homophobic city to get up the courage to go into a gay bar. Once there, it was also an act to look ‘cool and collected’ when making an entrance into a gay bar. Campbell recalls the challenge of making such an entrance at *Dudes* when all eyes were on you:

They had these swinging doors, sort of like a saloon that you go in, only the spring was really, really tight and if you didn’t go in right away, if you tried to sort of make a dramatic entrance and go [making a sound like a door swinging out], the doors would come back and [making a sound like a door swinging back and hitting], knock your glasses off and whatever.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Posted by Vintage Gay Toronto Members, Ken Bisson, and Doug Robertson, “Although so much smaller, this was the Studio 54 of Toronto,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 7 Jun 2020.

²⁰⁷ A bar where gay men would go to pick up other men for sex.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

Grant is now a retired university professor living with his husband in Toronto. He indicates that in the early days most people saw going to a gay bar as a declaration of your gay identity, unlike going to a gay/queer bar today:

I remember very visible subcultures because it was of course, a cruising culture back then. You had basically a choice between going to a bar which was specifically set up as a gay bar. So, if you were there, you were gay...by going in you were making a confession, and that was a huge thing, huge thing for me. The other option was to walk along the streets like everybody else, but keeping the eye out and the look back, the pause and stuff like that, and so people tended to advertise themselves with certain looks [such as the hyper-masculine clone or leather look].²⁰⁹

An editorial letter written by Noel Bari in *The Body Politic* in 1980 suggested gay men were “prisoners of a stereotype” when they dressed in hyper-masculine clone or leather styles. Bari was perhaps sending an early message to the binary generation about either moving beyond the binary in gay culture or reinforcing a hetero/homo binary view in his criticism of gay men adopting “heterosexual looks and actions.” He distinguishes a binary feminine “soft look” from a hard masculine “clone look.” He also adopts an essentialist view of homosexuality as “natural” rather than the future non-binary view adopted by the fluid generation. Bari recounts seeing a friend who he last saw in drag now sporting a hyper-masculine look:

As far as I am concerned, he is still in drag. The soft look that had brought him so much attention had been replaced by what I call the clone look: moustache, plaid shirt, logger’s boots, and ripped blue jeans...Our culture, as I see it, is anything but original. We have opted for heterosexual looks and actions. To be the slightest bit nelly is to be a gay leper. We have become prisoners of a stereotype: macho, which looks absolutely ridiculous on most...I would die for my belief that being homosexual is natural. I would not die for what is happening to our culture. Masculinity is not the answer, femininity is not the answer. To be yourself is the answer.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

²¹⁰ Noel Bari, “Prisoners of a stereotype,” *Body Politic*, Letters section (Oct 1980), 4-5.

In the midst of conforming to these stereotypes and binary expectations, this project's gay cohort remember the growing number of gay bars around Yonge and Wellesley streets by the late 1970s and 1980s that began to cater to different gay subcultures like the clone or leather look. More choices were becoming available beyond the limited, older straight-owned gay bars like the *St. Charles* and *Parkside*. But some describe how many of the early gay bars, like the dingy *St. Charles* and *Parkside*, were also in poor condition in rundown buildings. Some did not mind:

Brent Storey: “In 1981, most gay bars were dives. They couldn't make it with straight crowds, so they went gay before going bankrupt. Or a gay person would rent a bankrupt space. Very few were nice, clean, impressive.”²¹¹

Ken Bisson: “We all wondered when the dance floor [of *The Barn*] would collapse.”²¹²

Roderick Conte: “[*Solteros*] was my first gay bar, coming out, my introduction to the gay community...I was 19 and it was 1987. A back-alley entrance, dark, dumpy, and completely exhilarating!! I have had many firsts in my life, but this one was significantly special. I remember the experience like it was yesterday.”²¹³

Old beer taverns and a few new bars continued to offer Toronto's gay crowd spaces for drinking and dancing, with more upscale places like *The Quest* or *Carriage House* or gay-owned options like *Dudes* or *The Barn*. The spaces created further opportunities for gays to find one another and socialize beyond the closeted world of the 1970s and 1980s. Gay dance clubs like *Stages* or *Komrads* began to provide state-of-the-art sound systems and dance-floors “with the most immersive sound and best light shows,”²¹⁴ but remained among the limited and less shabby spaces until more gay-owned bars were opened after the mid-1980s.

²¹¹ Brent Storey in response to a post by Ken Bisson, “Although so much smaller, this was the Studio 54 of Toronto,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, June 7, 2020.

²¹² Ken Bisson in response to a post by Greg Pledge, “The Barn & The Stables,”

²¹³ Roderick Conte in response to a post by Greg Pledge, “Does anyone remember the bar “Saltaros” [sic]?” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, May 31, 2020.

²¹⁴ Brian Greenwood in response to a post by Eugenio Salas, “What is your best gay song?” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, September 1, 2018.

However, social options remained limited for gay teens like Lionel Collier and others. They sought to find gay social spaces that could educate them about gay culture and identity beyond the books and magazines of *Glad Day*, *The Body Politic* or youth groups at *The 519 Church Street Community Centre*. Alcohol-licensed bars and dance clubs restricted access to legal drinking-aged patrons at places like *Carriage House*, *The Quest*, *Charly's Disco*, *Stages*, *Katrina's* or gay-owned establishments like *Dudes*, *The Barn* or *Buddy's Backroom Bar*. Perhaps if one looked older, like Jim Elliott, they “bought a fake ID on Yonge Street”²¹⁵ like Anthony Mohammed or was let in surreptitiously, like me. Being ‘under-aged’ prohibited gay teens from licensed gay bar/dance clubs where they could learn about gay culture and identity. The only exception was the all-ages and *gay-owned* but *unlicensed* gay bar/dance club called *The Manatee*.

²¹⁵ Interview with Anthony Mohammed, 6 Sep 2023.

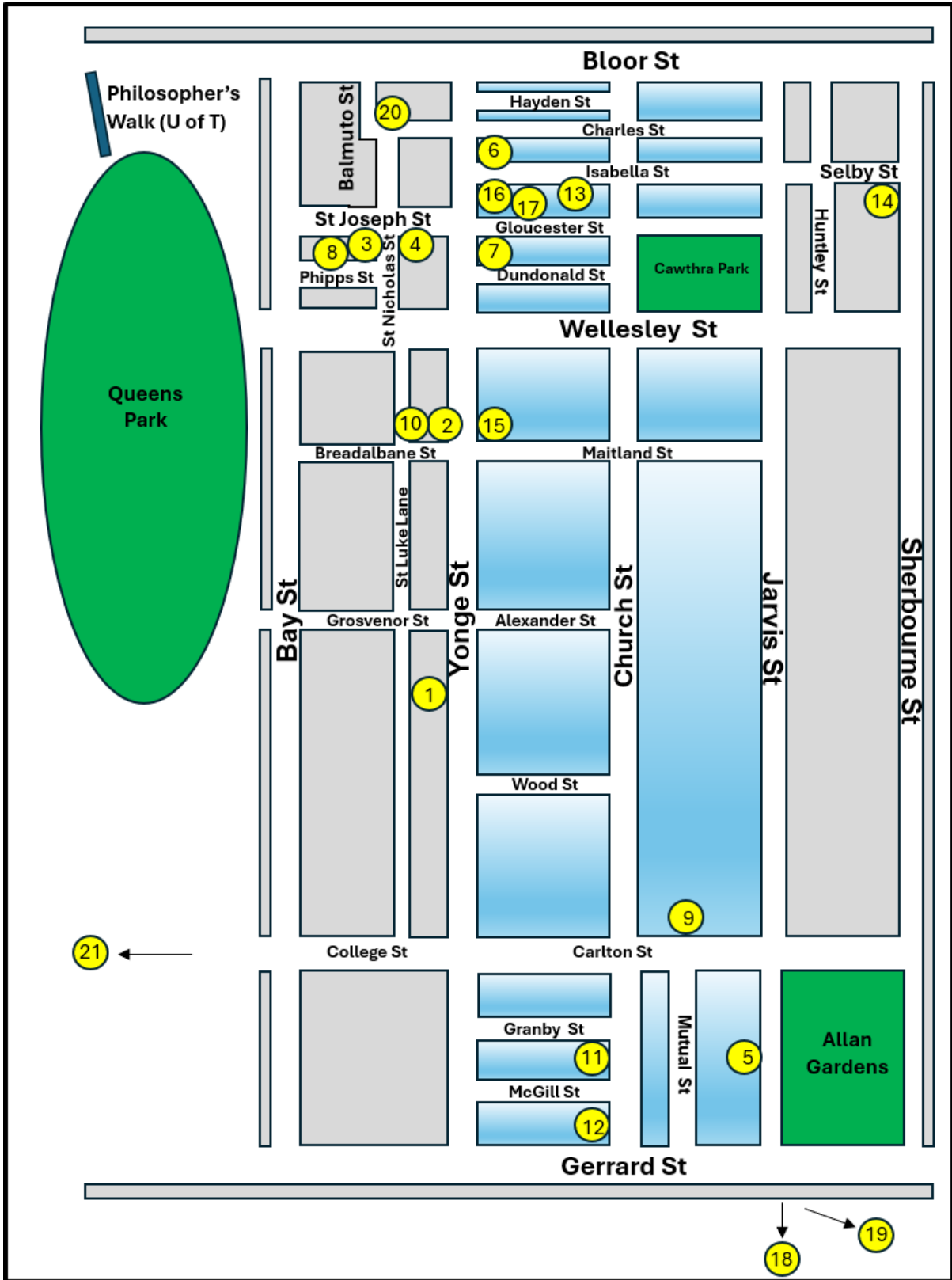


Image 39: Map of downtown Toronto indicating gay bar/dance clubs between 1973 to 1988 most frequently mentioned by VGT members and oral history project narrators. NOTE: This map is not exhaustive. The blue shaded area represents the current boundaries of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village between the same dates. Source: By author J. Gary Myers.

The following is a list of twenty most frequently mentioned Toronto gay bars/dance clubs by narrators.²¹⁶

1. *St. Charles Tavern* (previously, *St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge* opened in 1950 and known for gay clientele by 1963, closed in 1984) at 488 Yonge Street, and upstairs, *Maygay* dance club (1971-1977); *Club Triangle* (1977-1978); *Charly's Disco* (1978-84) and *Y-Not Bar* (1985-1987).
2. *Parkside Tavern* (originally the *Hotel Breadalbane*, opened in 1945 and known for gay clientele by the mid 1960s, closed in 1986) at 530 Yonge Street, and upstairs *Stages* (1978-1984) dance club.
3. *The Manatee* also known as *Club Manatee* (1970-1984) at 11 St. Joseph Street, all-ages unlicensed gay bar/dance club.
4. *Katrina's* (1978-1982) gay dance club (downstairs). Upstairs was the alternative *Voodoo Club* (1981-1985). Later became *Colby's* also known as *Club Colby's* (1986-2000) dance club at 5 St. Joseph Street.
5. *Carriage House* (1971-1978) bar/disco at 300-306 Jarvis Street switched to gay clientele in 1973.
6. *The Quest* (1973-1984) dance club at 655 Yonge Street; previously *Famous Door* (c.1964-1973).
7. *Cornelius* (c.1975-1986) bar/dance club located above the biker bar and hard rock club *Gasworks* (c.1971-1993) at 585 Yonge Street.
8. *David's* (1975-1977) disco at 16 Phipps Street.
9. *Studio II* (1977-1979) lesbian and gay dance club at 72 Carlton Street; became straight/gay-friendly nightclub P.M. Toronto (1992-1998); then Buttons (1998); then *Zipperz Cellblock* (1998-2016) gay piano and dance bar.
10. *Dudes* (1977-1982) cruising bar at 10 Breadalbane, later *Crowbar*, (1982-1984) in the back alley behind the *Parkside*.
11. *The Barn* (1976-2012) bar/dance club at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street).
12. *Buddy's Backroom Bar* (1978-1987) at 370 Church Street.
13. *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street with *Badlands* (1990-1992) denim/cowboy-themed bar/dance club.
14. *Boots & Bud's* (1981-2000) gay bar/dance club at Selby Hotel, 592 Sherbourne Street.
15. *Trax* (1985-2009) gay piano, show-tunes and dance bar at 529 Yonge Street.
16. *Komrads* gay dance club (1985-1991) at 1 Isabella Street.
17. *Solteros* gay bar/dance club (1987-1998) located in the back-alley behind 619 Yonge Street, between Isabella and Gloucester Streets.

²¹⁶ Most frequently mentioned by VGT members and oral history narrators in this project. I gratefully acknowledge the work of Donald McLeod from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (now The ArQuives) and author Denise Benson as a valuable sources for the years of many of these earlier gay establishments, along with other source materials from The ArQuives, *Xtra* magazine and Rick, Bébout's *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in the Bar, 1969-2000*. See also Donald W. McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1976-1981* (Toronto, Homewood Books, 2016); Denise Benson, *Then and Now: Toronto Nightlife History* (Toronto, Three O'Clock Press, 2015).

18. *Rock & Roll Fag Bar* (1988-1990) weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night held at Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1990); formerly Club 101 gay and lesbian bar (1984-1987) at 99-101 Jarvis Street.
19. *The Toolbox* (1987-2004) gay leather bar at 508 Eastern Avenue, originated from an earlier gay leather bar *18 East* at 18 Eastern Avenue (1979-1984).
20. *Club Manhattan* (1990s to early 2000s) weekly Saturday nights dance club for mostly Black gay, bisexual, and men who have sex with men at 19 Balmuto Street.
21. *El Convento Rico* (1992-Present) Latino gay-friendly dance club and drag show bar at 750 College Street.

Magic at The Manatee

The bar that most frequently conjured nostalgic memories of gay youth in Toronto was *The Manatee*. It was opened in 1970 by Derek Stenhouse with his same-sex partner Réne Fortier as the first gay-owned *non-licensed*, all-age gay bar and “hot gay disco.”²¹⁷ (Stenhouse and Fortier also opened *Solteros* in 1987). *The Manatee* was an important space for gay teens and adults to have fun dancing while exploring their sexuality. David Hallman provides the layout of the bar:

The Manatee was structured in such a way that when you entered you went downstairs and there was a dance floor. And then there was another set of stairs that went up to a kind of balcony area. And halfway up that second set of stairs was a landing. I used to love to stand on the landing because I could look right down at the dance floor, see all my friends and cruise other guys.²¹⁸

Hallman’s nostalgic memories of *The Manatee* are specific to that landing. It was where he and his lifelong partner Bill Conklin met each other at the start of their relationship:

So, I was standing there. I used to stand there. It was my perch. And he came up one night and stood behind me. He told me this after the fact, “to smell my aura.” This is his story. He was so overwhelmed by it that he had to leave [amused laughter] and he left that night, but the next Sunday night, I used to go there every Sunday, he asked me to dance, and I didn't even know that he knew that I existed, let alone that he was so enamoured. And so, we danced. I was thrilled. And I kept looking around to see if my friends were seeing that I was dancing with Bill because he was so hot. And we agreed to meet the next Sunday night, which we did. And it was magic.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

²¹⁸ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

²¹⁹ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

David and Bill met each other at *The Manatee* in August 1976. Sadly, after thirty-three years together, Bill died of pancreatic cancer in August 2009.²²⁰

The magic of *The Manatee* from the 1970s to mid-1980s was its gay environment for creating lifelong and sometimes lost relationships, educational experiences and social entertainment. There are a mix of poignant and exuberant memories of gay Toronto and *The Manatee* during that time.

VGT members reflect on *The Manatee* as their first gay bar as teenagers, providing them a safe gay community dance space as part of their learning and coming out process:

David Arnold: “My gay life started at the Manatee! I was 16 in July 1978. I had just moved out and a friend took me to the Manatee...I met my first boyfriend that night. There was no looking back, no moving home, and it probably saved my life.”²²¹

John Agro: “My first gay bar. It was 1971 and I was 16...My legs shook as I descended the stairs off the entryway...Only soft drinks served...but many would step around back of the alley to smoke up [smoke cannabis/drugs]. The drag show didn’t get started til 2:00 am and the place would usually still be packed until 6am. My first dance with a guy.”²²²

Kevin Humphrey: “[T]he only safe place for gay kids/chicken²²³ to go be gay...word got out secretly that there was a clubs [sic] where boys could go to hang out with older gay kids. I showed up in 77 at 13 and had to sneak in at first. But once they got used to me as did with any gay kid showing up in those days they allowed us in and looked over us while we had fun. One of a kind legal club anywhere in there [sic] world. It was Ours...first boyfriends, first dance with another boy, omg watching those first kiss moments, or being that kisser. So it went as did many Manatee boys...the great memories of the Boys and the fun of the Club, will live on.”²²⁴

²²⁰ David Hallman a heart-wrenching and heart-warming book about his long-term relationship with Bill. See David Hallman, *August Farewell: The Last Sixteen Days of a Thirty-Three Year Romance* (Toronto, iUniverse, 2011).

²²¹ David Arnold in response to a post by Steve Sterritt, “1972. The Manatee,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, February 21, 2017.

²²² John Agro in response to David Arnold’s post in response to a post by Steve Sterritt, “1972. The Manatee.”

²²³ Chicken and Chicken Hawk are slang terms, popular in the 1970s and 1980s to describe younger gay men who would be pursued for sex by an older gay man known as a Chicken Hawk; now often referred to as a Daddy in relation to pursuing or interest from a Twink, a popular slang word to describe a younger gay man, often in late teens to twenties, with a slimmer physique and youthful appearance.

²²⁴ Kevin Humphrey in response to David Arnold’s post in response to a post by Steve Sterritt, “1972. The Manatee.”

David Hallman also remembers the importance of gay men slow-dancing at places like *The Manatee* when faced with a severely homophobic outer world beyond the gay bars where one could be arrested for ‘public displays of gay affection’ such as kissing or dancing. These were public privileges of straight couples. David conveys how slow-dancing with another gay man in a bar like *The Manatee* went beyond the mere act of physical dancing to elevate these moments to the right of gay men to slow-dance:

DJs would vary the music. It would be mainly disco music, but then there was also some very romantic slow-dance disco music. We wouldn’t talk about it but everybody kind of looked forward to those segments because then you could crunch up against each other. Slow dancing was more than physical.

Anthony Mohamed with his fake I.D. also recalls fun as a teen at the unlicensed *Club Manatee* and the convenience of the licensed *Katrina’s* next door:

We went to Katrina’s, and it was a lot of fun. Manatee and Katrina’s were almost simultaneous for me. And it was ...they were both amazing experiences. The Manatee would go all night. I’d dance, dance, dance. They had great drag shows. Katrina’s had multiple shows, both drag and game shows, and all that and here I am under-age.

Jan Grygier heard about *The Manatee* after first going to a Gay Youth Toronto meeting (later Lesbian & Gay Youth Toronto) at The 519 Church Street Community Centre. As a twin of a straight brother, he used to hang out with his brother’s friends because he was very introverted and shy. This made it difficult for him to make friends on his own. He recalls in high school when his mother had a mastectomy:

I was falling apart at school because I didn’t have friends and there was too much stress. The guidance counsellors pulled me in, and they say, “You’re gay, aren’t you?” I was like, “Huh?” Gay people back then were Liberace²²⁵ because I didn’t see who gay people were.

²²⁵ Liberace was a flamboyant pianist, singer actor from the U.S. who never publicly acknowledged he was gay during his career from the 1950s to his death of suspected complications related to HIV infection in 1985.

Jan also remembers *The Manatee* as an important haven of discovery for gay youth in Toronto and dancing to music of the 1970s. But he also remembers a more shadowy side:

We lived to go out to dance. The Manatee was sanctuary. It was safe. It was non-alcoholic. We took care of each other. It was an amazing place. I remember dancing to Donna Summer's, *Love to Love You Baby* [released in 1975]. And that was when Barry Manilow "her name was Lola at the Copa" [Copacabana, At the Copa, released in 1978] ... Then you get all the people who wanted young guys. It was this whole dark side to the gay world too. All these men came and congregated, but it was still safe. All that was going on.²²⁶



Image 40A (left) & 40B (right): Entrance to *Club Manatee* (1970-1984) in 1979. Source: The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (18), Photograph Collection Box 2. The green arrow indicates entrance to *Katrina's* (1978-1982) at 5 St. Joseph Street, and the red arrow indicates entrance to *Club Manatee* at 11 St. Joseph Street. Overlay of arrows by author, J. Gary Myers. Source: The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1982-038/01P (18), Photograph Collection Box 2.

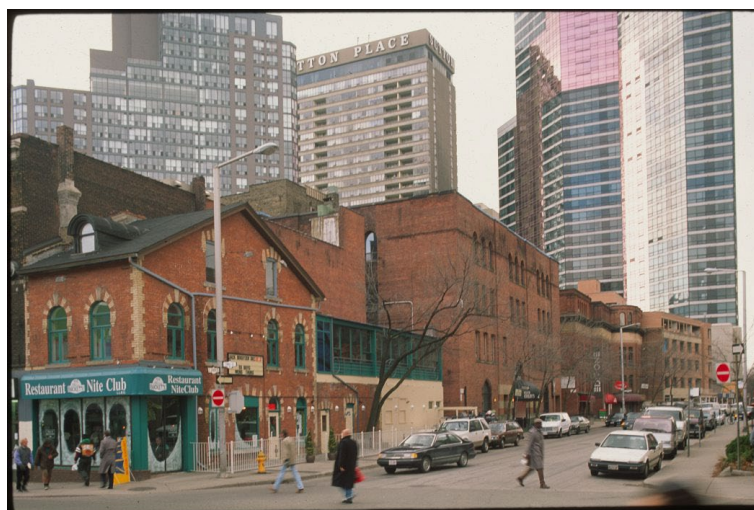


Image 41: St. Joseph Street looking west from Yonge Street. in mid-1980s. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 604, Item 1.

²²⁶ Interview with Jan Grygier, 4 Aug 2023.

Andre Goh found out about *The Manatee* through *The Body Politic* while at *Glad Day Bookshop* in 1981. *The Body Politic* had small advertisements for clubs. One of them was *The Manatee*. Andre was a seventeen-year-old in his final year before graduation at Humber Collegiate in Etobicoke (now a western suburb of Toronto) before heading off to York University. Goh had discovered *Glad Day* and *The Body Politic* unexpectedly on a previous trip to downtown Toronto and was drawn to enter the bookstore with trepidation:

I was walking up Yonge Street and I saw this pink sign on the second floor just north of Wellesley [Street] and I went, “That’s gay.” I didn't have the words. I just knew. It was like a calling card. Walked up the steps. Trembling. I still remember it. Terrified. And there was this older guy [amused laughter]. He was probably in his thirties behind the counter. The minute he saw me, he was very nice. He said, “Hi. Come on in. It's okay.” So, I came in. I looked around. It was a little overwhelming all the books were things like taboo. And the magazines were just like, “Oh my god.” That was my exposure here to the gay world. And then as I was leaving, he said, “By the way, if you look down on the floor, there's some older copies of *The Body Politic*. You can take those for free.”



Image 42: Glad Day Bookshop sign at 598A Yonge Street (1978-2016) for much of its history. The sign remains on Yonge Street after Glad Day moved to its current location at 499 Church Street (2016-Present). Source: Photo taken by author J. Gary Myers (15 Mar 2024).

Andre recalls not being able to find a map of Toronto at the time to find the street on which *The Manatee* was located. He remembers asking his high school guidance counsellor, “Have you heard of this street, St. Joseph’s?” And she said, “Oh it’s downtown. It’s around here.” Andre recounts that:

And I remember one night, I got off at Wellesley subway. I walked the wrong way. I walked south. I couldn't find it. I came home [quick laugh]. And then, I think, a week or two later, did the same thing, found the street, found *The Manatee*. No name [to identify it outside]. Just a bunch of kids who looked gay to me. And I thought, “I’m here except the doors not open.” And then the kid said, “It opens at eleven.” And I remember just walking around waiting until eleven to get in.²²⁷

Andre’s memories of *The Manatee* (in the introduction) illustrate the “exclusive” and “cliquish” racialized groups that formed there because of racism. He is grateful for the group of Filipino friends who welcomed him “when Asians stuck with the Asians.”

Oh yeah, it was quite obvious. even though I didn't have the words or understanding, I knew it wasn't right, and I just didn't understand why. Yeah, that was one of the few outlets where we felt like a community, but if you scratch the surface, it was still very exclusive.²²⁸

As a young gay teen forming community at *The Manatee*, Andre also recalls the shadowy side of the club but feeling protected:

First of all, it was such a relief to be in a place where I could kind of let my guard down. And yet, I didn't know how to behave. And, as you know, it was an after-hours club. There was no alcohol that I knew of, but there was a lot of drugs. I was a kid, and it was a space for kids. Unfortunately, there were some older men who were...what do we call them? Chicken Hawks [amused laughter]. And because I was the youngest of the group, they would always be on the lookout if a hawk was coming by. It was very nice.²²⁹

²²⁷ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

²²⁸ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

²²⁹ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

The experiences at *The Manatee* were opportunities for gay teenagers and adults to form gay identities, learn about gay culture and build friendships in a place where they could freely be themselves beyond the homophobic world outside. By the 1980s, Toronto gays began to move beyond a strictly bar-based subculture exploring other ways to connect.

Beyond the Bars

In the 1970s, there were a few options for connecting with other gays. These included participation in organizations like CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto), or for students, involvement with the University of Toronto Homophile Association or York University Homophile Association. Additionally, individuals could engage with Gay Youth Toronto at The 519 Church Street Community Centre. Other options included attending house parties, visiting bars, bathhouses or cruising public spaces. When Brian Hardy arrived in Toronto in 1978, one of the few other social venues where one could meet other gay men was the gay Cabbagetown Group Softball League (C.G.S.L.). Hardy joined C.G.S.L., playing on the league during the third organized season in 1979. He played on the *Super Dupers* against teams that included the *Maple Loafs*, *Baker's Dozen*, *Grey Hounds*, *Hustlers*, *Front Runners*, *Ikons*, *Toronto Equipment*, *Wrecking Crew*, *Hot Shots*, and *Jocks*.²³⁰ Softball games were played in Riverdale Park. Hardy's diary states that *Dudes* hosted a midweek 'Baseball Night' when different teams from the C.G.S.L. would entertain with skits, singing, and presentations at local gay bars. Hardy mentions being part of a group that presented a slide show at *Dudes* about the gay softball league.

Narrators and VGT members have memories about going to a variety of restaurants, for coffee, breakfast/brunches, or late-night meals after dancing at nearby gay bars, before any Church-Wellesley Village gay-owned restaurants were established. In particular, *Brothers*

²³⁰ Cabbagetown Group Softball League, *1979 C.G.S.L. Welcome Book* [Including Rules and Team Schedules]. Posted by Brian Hardy on the Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook website, January 4, 2020.

Restaurant (1979- 2000), a “great greasy spoon” “to get ‘comfort food’” or the “best breakfast in Toronto for years,” was located on the street front of the building occupied by The Church of Scientology at 696 Yonge Street.²³¹ *Brothers* was remembered as a space where gay men could feel safe, comfortable, and welcomed. Several VGT members have fond memories of a charismatic waitress named Vula (also spelled Voula), who “was like Alice from TV,” called “everyone baby,” and “got to know us by name!”²³² VGT members mention the waitress teasingly chastising them for not eating everything on their plate or staying out late for sexual adventures:

Brad Clary: “What do you mean you can’t finish it?? – Voula as she slaps me in the back of the head.”²³³

Dan Menard: “Vula would softly smack me on the side of the head every Sunday morning after whoring around all night at the Playground [a gay dance club].”²³⁴

Another popular restaurant mentioned by oral history narrators and VGT members is *Fran’s* at 20 College Street. The long-standing restaurant was opened in 1945 and is still in existence at this location today. *Fran’s* is remembered as a convenient location to hang out after last call at nearby gay bars in the late 1970s and early 80s “waiting for the subway to open after a night at The Manatee” or “that horrible ‘Blue Nite’²³⁵ Yonge St. bus to Bloor or Eglinton at 4 a.m.” while you “watch all of your fellow drunken friends walk in at 3 am.”²³⁶

²³¹ Jamie Bradburn, “696 Yonge Street (Diamond Building, Brothers Restaurant, Some Organization I’d Prefer Not to Mention in the Title),” *Jamie Bradburn’s Tales of Toronto* (July 29, 2020), <https://jamiebradburnwriting.wordpress.com/2020/07/29/696-yonge-street-diamond-building-brothers-restaurant-some-organization-id-prefer-not-to-mention-in-the-title/> (accessed 13 Feb 2024).

²³² Andrew Braithwaite, Art Tomlin, David Heymes, Bruce Roy Slater, and Leo DeSorcy in response to a post by Darcy Drinkwalter, “Anybody remember the restaurant called Brother’s [sic] on Yonge Underneath the Scientology building?” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, May 21, 2020. Alice was a popular comedy TV series from 1976-1985) about a waitress named Alice and her co-workers at a greasy-spoon diner.

²³³ Brad Clary in response.

²³⁴ Dan Menard in response. The *Playground* was an after hours dance club in the late 1990s, located at 11A St. Joseph Street.

²³⁵ Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) all-night bus.

²³⁶ Michael Sweenie-Lane, Robert Lashambe in response to a post by David Bennett, “Frans Restaurant ad – Jan. 13, 1959 [Toronto Daily Star],” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, March 25, 2015.

As a university student at the time, Terrance “Teach” Saunders concurs that *Fran’s* was an important stop after late night gay bars and clubs downtown, drinking and dancing into the wee morning hours before going home or back to his student residence in the outskirts of the city:

Because we had a friend who worked at Fran’s, we would just sit there and have breakfast. Stay long enough to catch the ‘Blue Nite’ that was going to take me back to York University. That one traveled straight up Yonge Street to Finch.

However, VGT members also convey that *Fran’s* was not always a safe and welcoming place like *Brothers*:

Ron Brown: “In the early 1970’s they actively kicked out gay folks. Happened to me and my first boyfriend.”²³⁷

Ross Harrison: “I got carded there one night. It read...please leave the restaurant immediately. We don’t wish to serve your kind here. Do not come back. You’re not welcome. So, to this day I haven’t.”²³⁸

Despite the restaurant’s earlier known homophobic reputation, Lionel Collier remembers *Fran’s* as a lively and fun place by the 1980s:

Fran’s was much more interesting. You could go to *Fran’s* because it was open 24 hours, and they’d have people in there singing songs and playing guitar and it was not a quiet place. It was often a little bit rowdy because people were going there often drunk after leaving a bar at two in the morning then they’d go there to sober up, have something to eat and just visit, but it was very sociable. I loved going to *Fran’s*. It was a wonderful place.

Another VGT member also acknowledges a shift in the restaurant’s approach in the 1980s:

Mike Milley: “Times have changed and so has *Fran’s*. They’ve been great friends of the gay community for decades now.”²³⁹

²³⁷ Ron Brown in response to a post by Jeffrey McCade, “Many night/morning,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, March 7, 2020.

²³⁸ Brown, Ross Harrison in response.

²³⁹ Brown, Mike Milley in response.

Another long-gone restaurant frequently mentioned is *Bemelmans* (1977-1994) a sophisticated Manhattan-style eatery at 83 Bloor Street. It is said to be “the first place you could stand and drink in Toronto” after liquor-licence laws were relaxed.²⁴⁰ It is remembered by narrators and VGT members for Sunday brunches, after-work happy-hour cocktails, and drinks on the summer back patio by those who could afford the higher prices. As Brian Hardy recalls it was not a gay establishment, but popular for gay clientele: “I remember, there sure was a lot of cruising going on!”²⁴¹ VGT member R. Thomas Hynes states, “We used to call it ‘Toronto’s straight gay bar.’”²⁴²

Leo Mitterni moved to Toronto with his family from Italy in the late 1950s when he was two-and-a-half years old and has lived in Toronto ever since. In his twenties, Leo moved to the central Toronto neighbourhood of Cabbagetown, just east of the residential gaybourhood that would become TCWV. He recalls, “There was a lot of gay people who lived in this area, but there was no community really, except for the bars [around Yonge Street].”²⁴³ In the early 1970s, Leo had a student placement at the Hassle Free Clinic²⁴⁴ in the basement of the building that housed CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto) at 201 and 223 Church Street:

On Friday nights, CHAT had a social, and it sort of was one of the first places where there was a bit of a gathering, besides the bars. George Hislop [founder of CHAT] started to have a lot of young men going up to him and asking for advice or “I think I might have gonorrhoea” or other sexual health concerns. So, he started to send gay men downstairs to us [Hassle Free Clinic offering education and STI prevention counselling].²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Rick McGinnis, “The Ghost of Bemelmans at 83 Bloor West,” *blogTO* (22 Jun 2009), https://www.blogto.com/city/2009/06/the_ghost_of_bemelmans_at_83_bloor_west/ (accessed 28 Feb 2024).

²⁴¹ Brian Hardy, “Bemelmans at 83 Bloor St. W.,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, April 30, 2020.

²⁴² Hardy, R. Thomas Hynes in response.

²⁴³ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

²⁴⁴ Originally a free first aid clinic started in Rochdale College in Toronto, counsellors offered mostly drug crisis and STI counselling. See Kelli Korducki, “Remembering Rochdale College, Toronto’s hippie heart,” *Globe and Mail* (8 Nov 2013) <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/remembering-rochdale-college-torontos-hippie-heart/article15357582/> (accessed 28 Feb 2024).

²⁴⁵ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

In 1980, Leo went on to help establish the Hassle Free Clinic at 556 Church Street, offering HIV/AIDS education and prevention counselling and anonymous HIV testing when it became available in 1985. Having connections to gay men through work had given Leo some background in gay life. In his early twenties, he was taken to his first gay bar, *The Barn*, by a work colleague. Going on to other places like *Parkside* or *St. Charles*, he soon realized he had more upscale tastes than what they had to offer:

I was never a beer drinker and the *Parkside* was where most hung out on a Saturday afternoon. I'd been there maybe a couple of times, but when I first saw the tray with one-hundred [beer] glasses being just popped, I was like [making a stop gesture with his hand and face gesture indicating dislike and contempt, then quick laugh]. It wasn't my sort of scene...at *The Barn* I had heard they used to have a restaurant [piano] bar downstairs [*Les Cavaliers*] and everybody use to tell me it was called 'the open grave.' And I had no idea like, "What does that mean?" I wasn't part of that culture. And then there was upstairs. It was called *Jo-Jo's* [gay and lesbian bar and disco]. But there were always fights and it was more lesbian. And so, I thought, "Why would I go there?" It had no appeal to me. And then *Dudes* was a cruise bar. "What do I know from that?" And it was very tiny. And it was filled with very handsome men but just standing around, which I thought, "Well this is kind of boring" [amused laughter].²⁴⁶

A similar experience awaited Leo going to the *St. Charles* when his friend said, "We're going to walk down this alley and we're going to the *St. Charles*":

I knew about the St. Charles from seeing people on TV. People got egged and all kinds of stuff happening. So, I was kind of worried about that because I thought, "This is like the scary place." And we went in and it was not very exciting. It was very depressing because it was just dark, dingy and beer. I thought to myself, "If this is the gay scene, I don't know that this is for me."²⁴⁷

Leo then met a straight female at a gay house party who invited him to Hanlan's Point²⁴⁸ the next day. He recounted, "We all go to Hanlan's Point, not how I used to go to Hanlan's Point,

²⁴⁶ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

²⁴⁸ Hanlan's Point is a Toronto Island beach (now a clothing optional beach) that has attracted many gays and lesbians due to its secluded area. Gay and Lesbian picnics were held there during the 1970s and it remains a popular gay/queer clothing optional beach officially recognized by the City of Toronto in 2023. See *City News*, "Toronto's Hanlan's Point recognized as historically queer space" (23 Jun 2023),

but with mega ice-cold coolers filled with champagne, and pâté.”²⁴⁹ Leo credits this woman for solidifying his more refined tastes and introducing him to Yorkville and the fashionable *Bemelmans*. He recalls a particular gay Halloween party at *Bemelmans* in the early 1980s where refined tastes may have been mixed with a little more revealing gay Halloween fun:

I started to hang out in Yorkville. Yorkville was just becoming what it is kind of today [upscale shopping/dining district of Toronto] after the whole hippie thing.²⁵⁰ It was all gay, pretty much, and a bit more upscale at *Bemelmans*, you saw it was kind of an upscale crowd. I became friends with all the waiters and the hostesses and everybody. I think I was the first person who danced on the bar with a jockstrap, just saying. But it was Halloween. And it was a very gay Halloween on Bloor Street [amused laughter].²⁵¹

According to Mitterni, there was also a less upscale burger restaurant nearby *Bemelmans* where gay men would also meet:

Down the street from there, if you went there later at night, there was Toby’s which was a hamburger place.²⁵² The lineup was all gay men. So, if you didn’t get picked up at the bar, you might get picked up there. It was a whole different thing.

This “whole different thing” was the lost art of cruising for sex.

The Lost Art of Cruising

Toronto has a history of men seeking out sex with other men in public spaces well before the post-war period. Historian Steven Maynard presents a history of such Toronto encounters during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the ways they were surveilled by police. Maynard sheds light on a downtown laneway, public parks and washrooms at places

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/06/23/torontos-hanlans-point-recognized-as-historically-queer-space/> (accessed 28 Feb 2024).

²⁴⁹ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

²⁵⁰ In the 1960s, Yorkville was transformed into a hub of hippy culture due to the cheap rents of run-down Victorian and Edwardian homes converted into coffee houses for countercultural music and poetry readings. Upscale gentrification in the 1980s began to move the hippies out of the neighborhood. For a comprehensive look at the history of Yorkville as Toronto’s countercultural hub see Stuart Henderson, *Making The Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2011).

²⁵¹ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

²⁵² Toby’s Good Eats chain of hamburger restaurants was one of the first gay-friendly restaurants to open in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village (1988-2007) becoming a popular casual dining space in The Village.

such as Albert Street Lane (back of 230 Yonge Street), Queens Park and Allen Gardens (two of Toronto's oldest central parks) using archival court records that documented arrests for gross indecency.²⁵³ Maynard explains, "In the Albert Street Lane, in the shadows cast by the factory, warehouse, and department store buildings of the T. Eaton Company, men sought out other men for sex."²⁵⁴ Albert Street Lane has since disappeared with the development of The Eaton Centre in the 1970s. However, Queens Park and Allen Gardens continued to be popular cruising areas for gay men into the 1980s and 1990s, along with a few additional locations. The fear of getting caught by police in the pursuit of public sex between men remained constant since those earlier days in Toronto, yet so too had the desires to do pursue such desires.

Bob Dirstein was born in Hanover, Ontario and lived the first few years of his life in the small town of Elmwood just north of Hanover. When he was five, his family moved to Listowel, near Guelph, west of Toronto. Bob was 18 years old in 1976 when he moved to Toronto to complete an English degree and a Bachelor of Music and Performance, both at the University of Toronto, before spending a year at opera school. Bob states, "I stuck at it for about twenty years and got tired of starving, and The Met wasn't calling, so it was time to move on." He jokes that when he arrived at U of T, "I was so far in the closet I was in Narnia."²⁵⁵ Bob's first foray into Toronto's gay scene was cruising to meet random people on the street before he discovered cruising at a bookstore on the east side of Yonge Street near *Parkside*. He describes his success at a bookstore named:

Queen of Hearts. It was a bookstore, but it was essentially a porn bookstore...this was sort of like when I decided okay [amused laughter] let's just deal with reality. So, I picked up two guys in the Queen of Hearts bookstore.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Oct 1994), 213.

²⁵⁴ Maynard, 207-242.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

Bob recalls cruising at other places in Toronto at the end of the 1970s through the 1990s. One was a gym located on the northwest corner of Alexander and Church streets, which he calls a hopping gay spot for cruising. He also remembers the reputation for cruising at the downtown YMCA:

They had a gym upstairs. And it was a great place to have sex [amused laughter]. There are many fond memories of late afternoons at the gym. [At the YMCA] nothing ever happened there for me. I'm so disappointed [amused laughter].²⁵⁷

One of the more popular cruising places was David Balfour Park in the Deer Park neighbourhood of Toronto. Bob suggests this park was so busy at times that you had to “take a number.” There was another cruising spot that Bob frequented further up Yonge Street:

There was David Balfour Park proper, but where the LCBO is now at Summerhill, behind there is a whole new development. That was for years just sort of a wild field and some old, abandoned buildings. Had some wonderful experiences there [amused laughter].²⁵⁸

Several narrators and VGT members also recall cruising parks, parking lots, washrooms, movie theatres and residential streets known to find others interested in connecting.

Kevin MacKay: “There weren’t only great bars. Remember Allan Gardens, Philosopher’s Walk and David Balfour Park.”²⁵⁹

Viktor Kaczowski: “Don’t even get me started on what is now known as The Path...Eaton’s Centre to Union Station, they should have just called it a bath house!”²⁶⁰

Pierre Lake: “I am old enough and secure enough to admit to cruising many of the spots you listed and others. Queens Park, Riverdale Park, High Park, Cawthra Park [now Barbara Hall Park], the parking garage that used to sit on the site of the condo now at Alexander St. and Church St. The old CBC building, the parking lots along Maitland, over the years.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

²⁵⁹ Kevin MacKay, “There weren’t only great bars,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 13 Feb 2019.

²⁶⁰ MacKay, Viktor Kaczowski response.

²⁶¹ MacKay, Pierre Lake response.

The concentration of gay men living at 100 Wellesley and surrounding apartment buildings conveniently next door to Cawthra Park made it an ideal location. Grant Campbell recalls the significance of Cawthra Park beside The 519 Church Street Community Centre and the duo-element of cruising in that particular spot:

The 519 Community Centre was important because there was a park. The park behind The 519, and there were the services that were offered by The 519. The park was a notable cruising area but also socializing area. And as I recall, the line between socializing and going further was kind of vague [amused laughter].²⁶²



Image 43 (left): Cawthra Park (later Barbara Hall Park), facing east from Church Street with 519 Church Street Community Centre on right and 100 Wellesley Apartments behind, c.1982. Source: City of Toronto, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 473, Item 2.

Image 44 (right): 519 Church Street Community Centre with 100 Wellesley Apartments behind, c.1982. Source: City of Toronto, Fonds 200, series 525, File 123, Item 1.

Yonge Street was also known as an area for gay cruising. Anonymous Interviewee #3 born in the Caribbean recalls living in Toronto and his first experience of meeting another man sexually on Yonge Street. He suggests there are different ways to understand what it means to be “out” cruising:

Well, it’s interesting, because out for me, there are two kinds of definitions. I was out, meaning I recognized that I was gay, and I wanted to experience it. And then there’s that out where you tell everyone, or you’re not concerned [about anyone knowing you’re gay]. It was in ’76. I was nineteen. You must realize that I had just come to Canada, and I really hadn’t any gay experience. I wanted the experience to meet someone and to become involved. But I was still pretty

²⁶² Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

young. Caribbean young also, so not very worldly. And so, this was the introduction. I was walking along Yonge Street, and I saw this man looking at me. It was really my first experience, and I was quite thrilled. And so, eventually he followed me all the way up Yonge Street to Bloor and then he worked up the nerve. I turned around actually, and he worked up the nerve to say hello. He followed me from King and Yonge to Bloor. And we started chatting.²⁶³

Dan Benson also remembers his first experience unexpectedly on the street meeting a man for sex:

I remember the first guy really that I met was at the bus stop near my house and that would have been at Spadina and Dupont and it was one of those things where it's like a bit of a glance, a bit of a look and all of a sudden, it's like, "Hi, how are you?" And things go from there. I think I first met some gay men just incidentally on the street. And I had some encounters that way. I was still in the process of coming out. I wasn't sure about my identity in terms of being gay or straight, but I got to know a few people.²⁶⁴

Lionel Collier points out there was a difference between cruising along other streets like Yonge Street as opposed to an advantage on Church Street:

The whole world walked on the sidewalk on Yonge Street, whereas you could pretty well assume that if you saw a guy walking on Church Street, he was gay. So, from that point it was safe to cruise everybody. Whereas on Yonge Street, you had to be a little bit more careful because not everyone was gay.²⁶⁵

A VGT member mentions the intergenerational differences around the lost art of cruising since modern dating/hook-up apps like *Grindr* or *Scruff*:

Ron Brown: "I came out over 50 years ago ('69). Times have changed, and it's true that the new generation just doesn't seem to need or want the same spaces that were so vital for our needs back then. It's important to remember that the internet & today's [sic] phone apps have changed the way people meet to socialize and cruise and hookup for sex."²⁶⁶

Anonymous Interviewee #3 suggests the older art of cruising is not necessarily lost despite the use of today's dating/hook-up apps:

²⁶³ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Lionel Collier, 21 Sep 2023.

²⁶⁶ Ron Brown in response to a post by Colin Johnson, "Drag bar Crews & Tangos might be turned into a condo," Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 3 Mar 2020.

What exactly is ‘the lost art of cruising’? Because it’s still there [amused laughter]. I was just telling a friend of mine, a couple of days ago, I was somewhere, and this guy was cruising the hell out of me and I was cruising him also. Nothing happened because I’m at the age now where I’m nervous as to why people are looking at me [amused laughter]. What do they want really? You know? So, I tend not to follow through on these...[but] it’s still there.²⁶⁷

Whether the art of cruising has been lost or not, Bob Dirstein suggests cruising and in-person meetings at gay bars before the existence of dating/hook-up apps had its advantages over modern technology:

I find it was much more exciting pre-technology, and ironically, it felt safer. For one thing when you're on *Grindr*, or any of the other apps, it's like shopping, right? [Quick laugh] and you have some preconceived notions of, “I want this. I want that.” He has to be 5’11” and weigh 185 pounds and he has to have broad shoulders and blah, blah, blah. And where's the six pack? And of course you scroll forever, right? In some ways, it's more like commodifying the person than just seeing them across the room and getting that they'd be a good sex partner. Part of it is, there was a certain amount of unknown as well in the pre-technology, but then, like I said, the other thing is the reason it felt safer is, if you go to somebody's house that you met on *Grindr*, you don't know if you've hooked up with this psychotic or not. At least you get some kind of reading with the person when you see them in the flesh.²⁶⁸

As these examples have shown, gay cruising was important for different reasons. For those not “out of the closet,” particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were limited social spaces for men to meet men for sex. Some had their first gay sexual encounters with cruising on the streets. For others, cruising provided an alternative way to connect without being “out” and risking exposure in gay bars or bathhouses. Cruising allowed the exploration of their sexuality discreetly and anonymously on their own terms, providing a sense of freedom, adventure and agency in gay identity formation.

Although cruising may have felt safer than hook-up apps, it was not without its risks and challenges. Gay men cruising for sex were criminalized and pathologized with the risk of

²⁶⁷ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

violence if a cruising ‘signal’ was misinterpreted. Despite these risks and challenges, cruising allowed gay men to assert their right to express their sexuality in public spaces and reclaim these spaces as *places* instilled with gay cultural meaning. Overall, while gay cruising could be fraught with risky consequences, it also fostered a sense of community among gay men with the common experiences of cruising. It provided an opportunity for gay men to form connections sexually and socially, share these experiences and shape what was considered a gay subculture. Cruising provided opportunities to find not only sex but support from others who understood their gay identity struggles. Cruising became a building block for developing common gay cultural experiences.

Going Undercover

Life in late 1970s and early 1980s Toronto was relatively more open for gay men than in other Canadian urban centres. Yet gay men still avoided public notice and created concealed social spaces to meet one another. Gay men were at risk of capture by undercover police officers in Toronto’s morality squad as police became more vigorous in surveillance and entrapment in public washrooms and parks by going undercover. These risks also made their way to gay bars. *St. Charles* and *Parkside* became places for police spying and entrapment of gay men in washrooms with active undercover surveillance and police raids. It was at this time that the Bolter family, owners of *Parkside*, also purchased their competitor, the *St. Charles*.²⁶⁹ Toronto police officers, with the support of Bolter management, set up bathroom spyholes at the *Parkside*²⁷⁰ to catch and arrest gay men for having sex in the washrooms. Within a year of Brian

²⁶⁹ Hannon, “Epitaph for the Parkside.”

²⁷⁰ *The Body Politic*, “The View from Morality’s window” (Apr 1980), 27.

Hardy's arrival in 1978, on average, a gay man was arrested and charged with a sexual offence every 46 hours and eight minutes, with a total of 190 arrests of gay men in Toronto that year.²⁷¹

As historian Daniel Ross explains, changes in attitudes towards sex during the 1970s “created the right conditions for sex shops and body rub parlours that appeared by the dozens on downtown Yonge Street, transforming it into a night-time marketplace for sexual services and a playground for heterosexual [and gay] men.”²⁷² Yonge Street, from south of College/Carlton to Queen streets colloquially became known as ‘The Strip.’²⁷³ Ross states that this area in the 1970s was a lively mix of social interaction:

Day and night, the strip running from just below Queen Street north to College was a magnet for crowds, a hub where a cross-section of the urban population converged for Friday night thrills, Saturday shopping, or spontaneous celebrations. It was the section of the city that was the busiest, that contained the most prized real estate, that evoked the most vivid memories.²⁷⁴

By 1980, most of the gay bars mentioned were well-established just north of The Strip on Yonge Street, on St. Joseph Street, and in proximity. When Hardy arrived, calls for “cleaning up” The Strip had been growing louder, particularly targeting gay bars. Although gay bars were not in The Strip they were seen as its annex. The catalyst for cleaning things up occurred in August 1977 with the murder of 12-year-old Portuguese shoeshine boy Emanuel Jacque above a Yonge Street body-rub by a group of gay men. Intertwined narratives and conflation of the murder with gay liberation led to strong demands, particularly by Toronto's Portuguese community,²⁷⁵ to clean up both The Strip and gay sexuality in Toronto. Toronto media

²⁷¹ *The Body Politic*, “Every 46 Hours and Eight Minutes” and “Arresting figures: 190 in 1979” (March 1980), 10.

²⁷² Daniel Ross, “Remaking Downtown Toronto: Politics, Development, and Public Space on Yonge Street, 1950-1980,” PhD diss., York University (Mar 2017), 28.

²⁷³ *Globe and Mail*, “Yonge Street Strip: Bare bosoms, big bucks, and bound-up boys in blue” (25 Jul 1977), 5.

²⁷⁴ Daniel Ross, *The Heart of Toronto* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2022), 14.

²⁷⁵ Gilberto Fernandes, “Beyond the “Politics of Toil”: Collective Mobilization and Individual Activism in Toronto's Portuguese Community, 1950s-1990s,” *Urban History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2010) 65-66, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/045108ar> (accessed 19 May 2021).

persistently described the tragedy as a “homosexual orgy,” a “homosexual assault” and a “homosexual murder.”²⁷⁶ The Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario pushed back arguing that “the gay community cannot be held responsible for some of its members just as all heterosexuals cannot be held responsible for the actions of some.”²⁷⁷

Add to the mix the controversy and aftermath of Gerald Hannon’s article “Men Loving Boys Loving Men” published in *The Body Politic (TBP)* in the December 1977/January 1978 issue.²⁷⁸ As Historian Steven Maynard points out: “Many in the gay/lesbian community condemned *TBP*’s decision to publish an article about cross-generational sex in such a volatile political climate” as the article is “often considered an apology for pedophilia.”²⁷⁹ Hannon wrote the article to address inequity in Canadian law at the time that stipulated the age of consent for most sexual acts was fourteen while anal sex was twenty-one.²⁸⁰

With the increasing moral panic around homosexuality, gay visibility in Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s had its consequences. Criminology researchers, Emily van der Muelen and Robert Heynen found that “gay men and their public visibility were branded as a social problem

²⁷⁶ *Toronto Star*, “Homosexual Backlash Feared” (3 Aug 1977), A3.

²⁷⁷ Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario Press Release (9 Aug 1977), City of Toronto Archives, F200-1512-795.

²⁷⁸ Gerald Hannon, “Men Loving Boys,” *The Body Politic*, No. 39 (Dec 1977-Jan 1978), 29-33.

²⁷⁹ Steven Maynard, “1969 and All That: Age, Consent, and the Myth of Queer Decriminalization in Canada, *The Abusable Past* (6 Sep 2019), <https://abusablepast.org/1969-and-all-that-age-consent-and-the-myth-of-queer-decriminalization-in-canada/> (accessed 9 Feb 2024).

²⁸⁰ Federal legislation repealed it to eighteen in 1988. In 2008, the Canadian government increased the age of consent for most sexual acts to sixteen while anal intercourse remained at eighteen. It was not until 2019 that the Canadian Parliament passed Bill C-75 repealing section 159 of the *Criminal Code of Canada* to change “anal intercourse” as inclusive to apply the age of consent at sixteen “to all forms of sexual activity, ranging from kissing and fondling to sexual intercourse” with a “close in age exception” where a “14 or 15 year old can consent to sexual activity as long as the partner is less than five years older and there is no relationship of trust, authority or dependency or any other exploitation of the young person. See Government of Canada, “Unconstitutional provisions (Bill C-39),” *Legislative Background: An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as enacted (Bill C-75 in the 42nd Parliament)* (21 Jun 2019) <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/jsp-sjp/c75/p3.html#sec4> (accessed 9 Feb 2024). See also Government of Canada, *Age of Consent to Sexual Activity* (21 Nov 2023) <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/clp/faq.html> (accessed 9 Feb 2024).

[and criminal suspects] that required continued scrutiny.”²⁸¹ Ross points out the moral panic about ‘homosexuals’ that ensued with police actions focusing on teenagers:

Officers also increased the attention they paid to minors congregating on the strip. Sidewalk patrols were increased, and hundreds of teenagers were questioned and warned by police not to frequent the area. Police reported paying particular attention to boys seen near or in the company of “suspected homosexuals.”²⁸²

St. Charles Tavern became a place of outright hostility towards gay men by the public – especially during Halloween – when many spectators would surround the entrance to insult patrons and pelt “so-called drag queens with eggs, paint and ripe tomatoes.”²⁸³ During Hardy’s first year in Toronto, it was still common to hear homophobic shouts like, “Kill the queers.”²⁸⁴ Hugh Brewster, working for *The Body Politic* remembers when the tensions against gays and particularly drag queens in the late 1970s were heightened:

We used to leaflet [about gay liberation from *The Body Politic*] on Halloween outside, across from the *St. Charles* because that’s where the drag queens went. And it was around the corner from Maple Leaf Gardens, so you got the hockey crowds and on other Saturday nights gay bashing and some violence and egg throwing was the big thing. You know, it usually wasn’t ugly and violent at first. I remember going there [and] it was a little bit festive. The drag queens kind of liked the attention and the cheer, the yelling and the whatever when they got out of cars all dressed up to go into the *St. Charles*, but there would be eggs thrown and then later in the evening it would get ugly and there’d be arrests and stuff made. It wasn’t nice. It wasn’t in any way I sell it.²⁸⁵

A major concern in the 1970s and early 1980s, culminating with the outrage and call for cleaning up The Strip, was being publicly identified as gay because it could threaten your job and your life. It was not until 1986 that the Ontario legislature included sexual orientation under

²⁸¹ Emily van der Muelen and Robert Heynen (eds.), *Expanding the Gaze: Gender and the Politics of Surveillance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 226. See also, *Toronto Star*, “Homosexual backlash feared,” (3 Aug 1977), A3.

²⁸² Ross, 193.

²⁸³ *Globe and Mail*, “Swim bill, bitter pill” (28 Oct 1977), 8. See also, *Toronto Star*, “Hallowe’en a Treat for Police” (1 Nov 1976), C1.

²⁸⁴ *The Body Politic*, “Just like last year: cops fail to stop violent Hallowe’en mob” (Dec 1979/Jan 1980), 14.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

human rights protections. It took a decade later for the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation in 1996. Until then, most lesbians and gays knew it was safer to stay undercover in the closet in public. Jeremy Vincent talks about that concern:

Outside [gay bars] you really had to be much more guarded because there was still no protection of the human rights code at that time. That was a big issue. We didn't get that until December of '86. So, people could lose their job, get kicked out of your apartment, and I was aware of it.

David Hallman and his life partner Bill Conklin found out the hard way:

He [Bill] was a teacher in the Catholic School Board. And one morning early in September he came outside, and his principal was standing outside our apartment and [Bill] said, "What are you doing here?" They had gotten a tip that Bill might be gay and that began a whole process where they essentially were trying to fire him. Bill had started teaching piano because he lost the job with the school board.²⁸⁶

Fears about one's own reputation, livelihood and safety sometimes inhibited some gay men from publicly defending other gay men. Anonymous Interviewee #1 lived in Toronto during the late 1970s and 1980s and later in the United States before returning to the city by the 1990s. A former Catholic priest and now a retired social worker, he thinks about the time he wanted to help but was afraid someone would question why he was helping someone who was gay. He was worried that people would discover he was a gay priest:

I had to be actually doubly careful. I was at Hanlan's Point. They were attacking a gay kid on the beach, and I did what a straight person would do. I jumped up and said, "This isn't right." But then I had to think about, "Wow, what if I get injured? How am I going to explain how I got a broken arm or slashed or something," you know?²⁸⁷

Tony Souza moved to Toronto from India in 1971. He had gay experiences in a boarding school in India and recalls not having many opportunities to explore his sexuality further until he moved to Toronto at 26-years-old. Tony was hired by the Toronto Board of Education to

²⁸⁶ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #1, 15 Aug 2023.

work with immigrant communities before becoming the head of race relations in the equal opportunity office at the Board. Because of his work in community development, in 1975 he was asked by Toronto City Councillor Dan Heap to organize the first Board of Directors of *The 519 Church Street Community Centre*. *The 519* opened on Church Street in 1976. Tony remembers the Emanuel Jaques murder that sparked outrage and hostile reactions towards gay men with the conviction of three gay men for murder. Tony recalls how it affected his work:

The Emanuel Jaques thing completely changed the nature of being out as a homosexual. All of a sudden, the word was that gays were attacking small children. So, *The 519* Board of Directors had to be careful. At the same time as that was happening, *The Body Politic* publishes “Men loving boys,” and so people make that connection of gay men being pedophiles. Which was an issue especially in education. Working at the Board of Education I realized I had to be a little careful. I couldn’t be out in terms of work I was doing because I’m working in immigrant communities and if they find out, especially the ethnic/multicultural communities I was working with. So, I kind of thought, “Okay, just keep it quiet.” I couldn’t show that I supported the cause. I wasn’t a teacher so they could easily dispense with me. I had no protection from unions or anything like that.²⁸⁸

Tony conveys the hopeful yet still homophobic climate before the 1977 murder:

The gay community was growing. And *The 519* was becoming a much more vibrant centre. Gay people were beginning to be seen. Things were working really well. George Hislop was running for city councillor so, we felt, “Oh good, we’re making some headway” and John Sewell was running for mayor. All of a sudden John Sewell was painted with this brush of supporting pedophiles. George Hislop lost, and John Sewell lost and we realized, “Oh shit.” And we thought okay, maybe we have to cool these fledgling gay organizations.

Larry Laforet was 22 when he moved to Toronto in 1984 from his birthplace of Windsor, Ontario. He found an administrative job at the National Ballet School on Maitland Street just off Church Street. Larry recalls all too well being discriminated against for being gay at that time:

I applied for a job at the Ontario Paraplegic Association, out at Sunnybrook [Hospital in Toronto] and was told, “I can't hire you because you're gay.” My partner and I went looking for an apartment and were told, basically, “We don't rent to two men” even though it was a two bedroom. So, when you get hit with

²⁸⁸ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

that, you inevitably go where you're more comfortable, which would have been [living in] The Village.²⁸⁹

By the 1980s, gay socio-cultural geography began to shift. Newer bars concentrated around Isabella Street with the opening of *Chaps*, dance clubs *Komrads* and *Solteros* extending along Isabella to Sherbourne with *Boots & Bud's* up the corner, and Club 101 over on Jarvis Street. Larry recalls how fears about one's safety continued into the 1980s with this spreading out of bars. He states if gay-bashing occurred there was little help from the police and even gay establishments:

It was still scary because the bars were so spread out and I mean, you really did have to come together as a community physically, to feel safe. Because I remember walking from the subway to *101* [gay bar] on Jarvis [Street]. I mean, it was scary. There were rumours around, all kinds, supposedly there was this white van that would come into Toronto on the weekends from Scarborough with guys with baseball bats, and they would beat gays up. There was a guy and he bragged about the fact that in Toronto, he would lure guys, pretend to be gay, and go to their place and beat them. And I remember at *Chaps* there was a young guy who was beat up on New Year's Eve and he stumbled over to *Chaps* and asked for help, and they wouldn't let him in. So, I wrote a letter to the guy who ran that and just refused to go back to that bar. It was New Year's Eve, so they figured he was just trying to get in but here he was bleeding. And the cops did not take that kind of thing very seriously back then.²⁹⁰

One thing that was taken seriously by many gays was that Toronto police continued to have an overly-paranoid concern about gay sex. Homophobia and hostility continued despite the growing number of spaces and ways for gays to meet other gays in Toronto. One of those ways was gay bathhouses, and Toronto police had their moralizing eyes firmly focused upon them.

Soap 'Dish' in the Bathhouses

Several VGT posts and oral history narrators reflect on the number of Toronto gay bathhouses that existed throughout the 1970s and 1980s as important sexual spaces that helped

²⁸⁹ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

form gay identities, relationships and a gay subculture. Gay nostalgic memories indicate that the many former Toronto gay bathhouses prior to the year 2000 were meaningful in shaping the experiences and social connections among gay men. These bathhouses include the *International Steam Baths* (485 Spadina Avenue); *Oak Leaf Steam Baths* (216-222 Bathurst Street); *Romans II* (742 Bay Street); *Terminus* (600 Bay Street); *Back Door Gym & Sauna* (12 ½ Elm Street); *The Library* (5 Wellesley Street West); *Richmond Street Health Emporium* (260 Richmond Street East); *Hot Tub Club* (9 Isabella Street); *The Barracks* (56 Widmer Street); *Club Baths Toronto* (231 Mutual Street); *St. Marcs Spa* (543 Yonge Street); and *The Cellar* (78 Wellesley Street East).

One day in the early 1970s, Tony Souza was being driven home by a colleague after a children's services youth group meeting. It was a car ride that would open his eyes to the world of bathhouses. His colleague:

pointed out a place on Beverley Street and he said, "Oh, don't go there because that's where the homos go." I said, "What is it?" "Oh, it's a steam bath," he said. As far as I know that guy, even to this day, I think is straight. So, I don't know how he knew about it. But I didn't do anything about it then. One evening, I had nothing to do, and I thought, "Well, I should go and explore this place." It was called the Beverley Baths. It was just above Dundas [Street] on Beverley [Street] just up from the Art Gallery of Ontario.²⁹¹

The *Beverley Steam Baths*, located at 137 Beverley Street was one of the last remaining post-war bathhouses in Toronto running from 1949 to 1974. The property also has an interesting bit of history. It is located a few houses south of the historic family home of Canada's 12th and long-serving Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950). King lived with his parents and siblings at 147 Beverley Street while studying at the University of Toronto (1893-1896). The houses were built in the late 19th century and still exist today.

²⁹³ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

Tony describes his first bathhouse experience at the Beverley Baths:

Well, I was terrified, I had no idea what would happen, and what it was like. I go to this bath, and I pay my money, and the guy says, “Do you know what this is?” I said “Okay, it's a sauna.” And the guy said, “Do you know what a sauna is?” And I said, “It’s a bath, right?” “Yeah, it’s a sauna,” he said. So off I go to the locker and I'm terrified. And there are a few men around and they're all in towels and it's very kind of [quick laughter] ... quiet. And people are stealth. I take off my clothes, I think, “Okay, I'll go down and to the sauna, and maybe something will happen.” And suddenly this guy comes up to me and asks. “You've never been here before?” He was good looking, a very nice guy. And I said, “No, no. I’ve never been.” And he's a white guy. And there was nobody of colour. I was the only person of colour [amused laughter] ... And I said, “yes I’m new.” He said, “Let me show you around.” I said, “That’s nice.” So, we go downstairs, and he said, “Well, this is the steam room, and this is the wet room. Why don’t we go in?” I said, “Sure.” So, we go in and it's the steam room and there are people lurking in the steam, but you can’t see them, and we're barely inside, and I'm so excited. I respond to his touch, and he says, “Let's go up to my room.” We go up two floors to his room, and I think within five minutes, I came.²⁹²

Tony calls his first time at a bathhouse a valuable and positive experience. He says it became a regular place to visit and influenced how he would connect with other gay men as a man of colour. He elaborates:

I was terrified of being in parks or being seen outside [cruising]. It never occurred to me that you would have sex in public spaces as it’s so public. Also, you could get caught by the police...I experienced a lot of baths, but no bars. At that point, I didn’t. I didn’t drink. I didn’t smoke. I think the only two places I did go into was the *St. Charles* once and just thought, “This isn’t a very nice place,” and *The Quest* which was full of older men. And I thought, “Oh no.” But also, nobody paid any attention to me, so I just didn’t do anything [at gay bars] ... and so my experiences were basically at the baths. I would chat, talk to people in the baths, but very few people would engage. I think very few people found me attractive probably because of the colour of my skin. That was a big factor in all of this. I mean they had not experienced somebody of colour, a person of colour. So, I was going to the baths and meeting people.²⁹³

Like many other gay men in the 1970s, after homosexuality was supposedly decriminalized in Canada in 1969, Tony thought having sex in private behind closed doors in

²⁹² Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

²⁹³ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

places like bathhouses would not get one “caught by the police.” He was wrong. Toronto’s first bathhouse raid took place at *The Barracks* on 9 December 1978. People were arrested as “found-ins.” They fought police charges with the help of the Right to Privacy Committee (RTPC), a volunteer group founded in 1978 providing resources for the legal defense of those charged.

Historian Tom Hooper in his work “Queering ’69: The Recriminalization of Homosexuality in Canada” argues decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969 is a myth as it enabled the expanded role of the Canadian criminal justice system. According to Hooper, the supposed ‘decriminalization’ did not go far enough because of the stipulation that only two people could be present during sex. This also gave police morality squads greater license to make arrests in gay bathhouses under the “bawdy house law” in the 1892 *Criminal Code of Canada* that police continued to use in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹⁴

In response to police behaviour against the gay community, Tony was part of an anti-policing group meeting at The 519 Church Street Community Centre in 1979 when they heard about another bathhouse raid by Toronto police. He recounts:

Our anti-policing group would meet at *The 519* [Church Street Community Centre]. There was this one incident where we were meeting about a bath raid that happened [the previous year at *The Barracks* in 1978] and somebody comes running in and says, “Oh, they’re raiding the baths on Isabella [Street]. *Hot Tub Club*. So, we leave our meeting, and we rush, and the police are there and what we knew was that if we got a lot of people screaming/protesting, the police would back off. We decided we would just go to the local neighborhood bars and try to recruit people. I ran to *The Quest* because it was just around the corner. I open the door and these guys are there having their drinks, and I said, “We need your help. You know, the police are raiding the baths on Isabella. Please come. We need people.” Nobody moves. And I said, “Please, please, please. We need people. Just come.”²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Hooper, *Queering ’69*, 257-273.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

Tony believes the lack of response by those at *The Quest* reflected the way many in the gay community reacted to these earlier bathhouse raids before finally waking up and protesting after the major bathhouse raids in 1981. He elaborates:

And nobody says anything. Finally, a guy puts up his hand and says, “Can I ask you a question?” I said, “Sure” thinking this is good, maybe he's interested. He said, “What were the guys wearing when the police raided the baths?” And I just thought, “Oh, honestly, give it up. Give it up.”²⁹⁶

Tony suggests it was not apathy that these gay men were showing: “They were scared. They were scared.”²⁹⁷

On February 5, 1981, almost 300 men were arrested and charged with being found-ins at a common bawdy house when four Toronto bathhouses were raided by Toronto Police as part of *Operation Soap*.²⁹⁸ This event was the spark that made thousands of gay men in Toronto say, “Enough Is Enough”²⁹⁹ to the history of harassment and brutality by the Toronto Police. Gays in Toronto may have been scared but they and their allies channeled those fears into anger against all the previous gay bar inspections, bathroom and parks surveillance, entrapment, police beatings – and now bathhouse raids – targeting gay men that had escalated throughout the 1970s. The day after *Operation Soap*, flyers were quickly printed and distributed throughout Toronto gay bars, bathhouses, and along Yonge and Church streets. That night, protestors staged a demonstration against the raids, taking to the streets and blocking traffic around Yonge and Wellesley streets. Other protests were organized over February including one to march on to the

²⁹⁶ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

²⁹⁸ Peter Zorzi, “The 1981 Toronto Bathhouse Raids” (1992 to 2011) <https://www.onthebookshelves.com/raids.htm> (accessed 9 Jan 2024).

²⁹⁹ The title of a 1982 documentary about the Toronto bathhouse raids. See, Gord Keith, Jack Lemmon, and Harry Sutherland, *Track Two – Enough is Enough* (Toronto: 1982) [Track Two - Enough is Enough - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (accessed 9 Jan 2024).

provincial government building at *Queen's Park* later that month. Brian Hardy wrote in his diary about participating with friends at one of the protests:

“[T]here was a big rally against police harassment of gays after the big steam bath raid of last week. I met Allen and Norm at Norm’s work at 6:30, then we all walked down to Queen’s Park and listened to a few speakers. There were a couple of thousand people there. Then we all walked arm in arm down College to Yonge, down Yonge to Dundas, then west to 52 division police station all the way chanting “no more shit” “stop police harassment” “fuck you 52” “out of the closet & into the streets.”³⁰⁰

Other VGT members also remember participating:

Martin Ciantor: “[W]e started getting angry and we found out there were a lot of us. So many protests. Never missed one. We changed Toronto. We found a voice and made it big by our numbers.”³⁰¹

Todd Kaufman: “Indeed what a night. Face to face with riot officers who looked pretty damned worried about our pack of pissed off queens!”³⁰²

Tony Souza recounts being part of organizing the protest that first night against Toronto Police:

I'm on my way to Toronto Island to give a workshop with the school that's on the island. Just before I left to go to give the workshop, I hear on the CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation] that hundreds of gay men have been arrested in baths. And I think, “Oh shit.” But at this time, I have a few connections in the community. So, we meet, and we plan. We think, “Okay, we should have a rally.” We drew up a flyer calling people to come to the rally at Church and Wellesley [streets] at 11 [p.m.]. And we were allocated different bars to go to, and I got the bar that was way out in the east end [*18 East*] as I had a car, a leather bar out in the east end. But of course, I went there at nine o'clock. Nobody was there. So, I was sort of standing there trying to give a flyer to anybody who came in. I wait till about 10:30 [p.m.]. Hardly anybody comes. I leave a bunch of flyers there. I get into my car and go back and as I'm walking to Church and Wellesley, I hear this roar. And I think, “What is this?” And as I get closer, it's louder and I think, “Oh my God.” And all of a sudden, I realized when I get to Church and Wellesley, there's thousands of people. Thousands of people. And I think, “Oh shit. Finally, the community has woken up.”³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Brian Hardy, “Dear Diary: Friday, February 27th, 1981,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, May 24, 2020.

³⁰¹ Hardy, Martin Ciantar in response.

³⁰² Hardy, Todd Kaufman in response.

³⁰³ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

Leo Mitterni also recalls the second protest march with a backlash from homophobes and lack of police support:

The second march was even bigger. We went and sat in front of the police station on Jarvis Street [former Toronto Police Headquarters at 590 Jarvis Street (1967-1988) torn down for residential development]. It brought out a lot of closeted people because you saw guys with hats and newspapers [to hide from being recognized] but wanted to show that we were very proud of that because at least you're here. Whether you're incognito, you don't want to be recognized or whatever, that's great. What happened is that some of them [homophobic gay-bashers] just lost their minds. And I lived on Isabella [Street] just west of Church Street. And coming from Jarvis [Street] wasn't that far, but all of a sudden, these guys took apart a white picket fence and started chasing everybody with sticks. It was just a horrible experience because everybody panicked and was running, and it just was a horrible ending to that night. And I remember just bringing a bunch of people to my apartment just to get them off the street because the police weren't doing much.³⁰⁴

The aftermath of the Toronto bathhouse raids raised deeper concerns about a homophobic city as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggle for lesbian and gay rights and acceptance in 1981. The protest marches galvanized a broad sense of gay community despite the risk of violence. Bathhouses became recognized as an important part of gay culture despite the risk of closures.

Richard Chambers had moved to Toronto in the fall of 1981, six months after the bathhouse raids. He states he was not immersed in Toronto media (newspapers, radio, tv) and was a closeted gay man at the time disconnected from the gay community. Chambers says he was unaware until years later that the bathhouse raids had taken place. Richard was a graduate student at the University of Toronto after completing an undergraduate degree in history at Wilfrid Laurier in his hometown of Waterloo, Ontario. He wanted to explore if he was gay and met with a university counselor who listened to his story and said, “You haven’t done enough and what he meant by that was anything sexual with anybody to know anything [amused

³⁰⁴ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

laughter].” A university student group exploring sexuality was suggested. “It was a hard “no” since I wasn’t out to myself, let alone jumping into a group situation.”³⁰⁵ After graduating from Teachers College and taking a position on an Indigenous reserve in northern Manitoba, Richard returned to Toronto in 1983 and decided to educate himself in a non-typical manner at a bathhouse with no preconceived notions or knowledge of the bathhouse raids. He remembers:

As a complete neophyte, okay, I might be gay. So, what am I going to do? Or how do I check this out? It was a whole different world in the sense that there was no such thing as a world online. Nor were there depictions in the mass media. It was very much a closeted experience. It’s still in 1983. I went to a bathhouse. I didn’t do anything in the bathhouse. I just walked around because where are you gonna find gay guys. I thought, well I guess you go to a bathhouse. So, I walked around the bathhouse...*Club Baths*. So that was it. I went in there, walked around, didn’t engage with anybody. And I didn’t stay long. I’m sure I wasn’t there half-an-hour. I certainly didn’t go into any rooms. But I just walked around and observed. It was an educational experience...I do remember when I left, and I was in the locker room, two very masculine well-built guys, I mean big, looked like football players came into the change room together. They’d obviously just been together sexually, and they were lovingly saying goodbye. Not in any raunchy way, but in a very loving, as two people who might have been going out together that I’d seen modeled my whole life in heterosexual couples. These two guys kissed goodbye and said goodbye to each other. And I thought to myself, “That strikes me as perfectly natural, normal and healthy.” And I could relate to that.³⁰⁶

Richard’s experience indicates the value of bathhouses as educational sites for gay identity and subcultures. Despite the risk of closures after the police raids, they survived as important places of gay cultural meaning. However, a far more insidious threat loomed on the horizon. The HIV/AIDS crisis would soon cast a long shadow over the lives of many, reshaping the landscape of activism and healthcare along with gay identity in ways they could not have imagined.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

³⁰⁶ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

Beyond the Stigma of HIV/AIDS

Narrators and VGT members are old enough to have experienced and benefitted from the rights and freedoms fought for and gained for lesbians and gays during the 1980s. Changes came with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* that banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in 1986, and in the *Canadian Human Rights Code* a decade later.³⁰⁷ Members also remember, firsthand, this time period for the devastation and loss of partners, friends, and colleagues with the growing HIV/AIDS crisis. Many narrators and VGT members also reflect on their survival of the AIDS epidemic.

One VGT member's post prompted a nostalgic reflection of a sunrise event attended by several VGT members and the many friends who later died from AIDS. On Victoria Day weekend in 1980, a gay dance event called "Sunrise High" took place at Sparkles discothèque located on the observation deck of the *CN Tower*, with dancing through the night until the dawn of the new day. The post includes a *Mixcloud* recording of a set from the dance event by DJ Greg Howlett, who died from AIDS in 1992, and evoked memories of others who died from AIDS. The sunrise event seemed to symbolize the dawning of the HIV/AIDS crisis signaling the profound uncertainty and the tragic toll of the countless deaths that would unfold in the decade to come. The VGT posts reflect the sorrow:

Tony Lea: "Greg was such a nice guy...so pissed at the universe for taking away so many cool friends from us...these were supposed to be our golden years spent with lifelong friends who are now gone."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Part 1 – The context: sexual orientation, human rights protections, case law and legislation," *Policy on discrimination and harassment because of sexual orientation*, (2024) <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-discrimination-and-harassment-because-sexual-orientation/part-i-%E2%80%93-context-sexual-orientation-human-rights-protections-case-law-and-legislation> (accessed 10 Feb 2024). See section 3.1 "Sexual orientation in provincial and federal human rights protections."

³⁰⁸ Tony Lea in response to a post by Joseph Van Veen, "[DJ Greg Howlett at 'Sunrise High' party May 1980 at the CN Tower](#)," Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, September 25, 2016.

Pierre Lake: “We have to share these stories, because our loved ones are gone and that era can’t be forgotten.”³⁰⁹

David Bennett: “We have a right to grieve. In those days, if I allowed it, I would have been crying constantly. We became numb. I find myself overcome now about certain people who died than I ever could at the time. I guess the long shock is wearing off.”³¹⁰

One member posted a copy of an article from the December 1981 issue of *Mandate* (a monthly gay pornographic magazine) and recalls the first time he had heard about gay men dying from a mysterious disease originally named GRID, or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency:

David Arnold: “On the cover “Gay Cancer.” I’ve posted the article which talks about the number of cases of Kaposi’s Sarcoma identified in the gay community. It’s probably one of the earliest reports of the oncoming AIDS pandemic. I know for a fact this was the first I ever heard about it. I can so clearly recall a conversation I had just before I turned 20.”³¹¹

Leo Mitterni remembers very well the devastation of the HIV/AIDS crisis with his important work as counsellor at the *Hassle Free Clinic*. When *Hassle Free* moved to the upper floor of 556 Church Street in Toronto not much could be done about this new ‘gay’ disease:

That was the first I had ever heard about it, and we became alarmed, because we’re thinking it’s a matter of time. But there was nothing, no information. Nothing. We didn’t even have a name for it. And then we started to see a lot of men coming in and worried, but we couldn’t offer much, except some support, physical checkups, making sure. Everybody was looking for lesions for Kaposi Sarcoma as this was one of the first opportunistic infections that was being seen and reported. Unfortunately, then slowly people started to get sick. That’s what we started to see. And also, because some incubation period for infections would have occurred years before. People could have been positive for a while, but symptoms took time to show. A test wasn’t available until ’85.³¹²

Once Leo and colleagues at *Hassle Free Clinic* realized that a test was coming, they brainstormed about how best to deal with the crisis and this new gay identity of being “positive”:

[We] started talking about how are we going to deal with this given the stigma and the fear and everything? How do we attract men to come in and get tested. And also, when you gave a positive test result, what were you gonna say? So, it took a

³⁰⁹ Lea, Pierre Lake in response.

³¹⁰ Lea, David Bennett in response.

³¹¹ David Arnold, “This was a recent post where someone was talking about GRID,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, August 26, 2017.

³¹² Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

lot of thought. That's when we decided that we should offer HIV testing anonymously. Also offer a support group *Body Positive*. We offered anonymous testing for many years before it was formally recognized by the Ministry of Health.³¹³

For many who survived and for those who died, being HIV-positive became a secret gay identity like being in the closet, only revealed when necessary, being outed through visual signs or on one's own terms. A binary generation of gay men also remember the door beside *Devon Restaurant* leading upstairs to the *Hassle Free Clinic* on the second floor. Like the earlier fears of being seen entering gay bars, gay men were now self-conscious of walking into the clinic with fears in waiting for HIV test results. The *Devon Restaurant* closed in 2006, replaced by other restaurants since then, and the *Hassle Free Clinic* moved to 66 Gerrard Street in 2004, but the memories of this important 'life or death' location remains for a great number of gay men who pass by this location today.

According to Larry Laforet, the AIDS crisis (like the bathhouse raids) also created a greater sense of gay community:

Some public figures came forward to support the gay community, people like June Callwood, and Margaret Atwood and whatnot, but because AIDS had started, there was almost like a backward motion about supporting gays because originally, I guess I think the straight community always thought of gay people as disgusting because of how they made love. AIDS just made that even more so because people got it through, basically, anal sex. And I think that just made some people even more anti-gay. But at the same time, that forced the gay community to take care of its own, to come together and to form a more serious community. Whereas before they were just seen as pretty silly, and it was always the drag queens and the leather men that made the news. And I think AIDS forced other gays who don't fit those particular roles to come out, come forward. And I think that strengthened the community.³¹⁴

Larry met his former love-partner Elias at Vagara Restaurant, one of the newer fine dining restaurants that had opened at 475 Church Street in the 1980s. Elias was a waiter at

³¹³ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

³¹⁴ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

Vagara and a stained-glass artist who had a piece hanging in the restaurant on display for sale. Larry states he pretended to show interest in purchasing one his artworks for his parents' anniversary to get to know this "gorgeous and adorable" waiter. He was invited back to Elias's home with "Oh, you should come and see my works":

I went and saw it all and it was very expensive for me at the time. I worked in the arts. I didn't make much money. And he was living with this man, and I thought, "Oh well, he's got a partner and now I'm supposed to buy one of these three or four-thousand dollar things." So, I said, "I'll think about it" [amused laughter] and next time I saw him at the restaurant, I said, "Well, I think it's a bit too pricey for me." He said, "Oh, no problem. We should have a drink sometime or go to a movie or something." I thought, "What's going on. Either he's straight or he's with this guy." We went to the movies and halfway through the movie he put his hand on my leg, so I got it [amused laughter] and he drove me home. I thought should I ask him up. He said, "Thank you, but the world doesn't end tonight" and he kissed me goodnight and left and that was the beginning [amused laughter].³¹⁵

That was in the spring of 1988. By that fall, Elias got pneumonia and was diagnosed in February 1989 with an AIDS-related illness. Larry and Elias were together for seven years until Elias died from AIDS complications. Larry poignantly shares that Elias is remembered for his stain-glass windows installed at Casey House, a Toronto hospice and hospital to care for those living with HIV.

As part of the growing strength of the gay community, gay men like Richard Chambers volunteered to help with the AIDS crisis. Because some of his graduate work was in psychotherapy, he remembers the physical and psychological toll, and the devastating loss of lives by 1989:

I volunteered with the AIDS Committee of Toronto. I co-facilitated a group of men with AIDS. And of course, in 1987, '88, '89, sadly, tragically, all those guys were still dying. There was one group that I co-facilitated. And there were twelve guys in the group. We met weekly, and they all had quote unquote 'full blown AIDS.' Every week somebody was missing because they had fallen ill with something. We started in September of '88. By July '89, everybody was dead. The entire group. They'd kind of lasted through the fall, and then starting in January,

³¹⁵ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

they just died one by one. And coincidentally really, I did the funeral for the last guy who died in July 1989. That was a heavy year.³¹⁶

Andre Goh also reflects on the devastating loss of his friends at *The Manatee*:

I always have fond memories of *The Manatee* because of two things, because I met new friends who were gay, which was so exciting for me. The other thing, sad thing, is four of the five died of AIDS.³¹⁷

Space, Place and Subjective Meanings

These are examples of *nostalgic afterglow* and *afterburn* from space and place in the formation of this binary generation's notion of gay identity, gay community and gay culture in Toronto's past. Gay nostalgic space is comprised of meaningful places of social and gay cultural constructs that have shaped (and continue to shape) gay people's sense of self and belonging to the past and the present in gay Toronto. They are sites of memory, symbolism, meaning and mixed emotions where community members formed attachments, participated in cruising adventures, significant socializing and devastating dramas, creating gay identity in historical contexts through social interactions and experiences.

Space (as physical location) and place (imbued with gay identity and gay cultural meaning) are dynamic and contested as they are constantly changing or reinterpreted as each generation – including the *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations – reflects and shapes our past and present. Physical space can remain visible and intact, either altering with decay or repair over time. Physical space can also be destroyed or replaced leaving a nostalgic afterglow and sometimes a nostalgic afterburn.

Meaningful places can be sustained by an older generation in memory, social media or historical documents but can be destroyed when forgotten or ignored and not conveyed to a

³¹⁶ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

³¹⁷ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

younger generation. Different generations may have varying perspectives on what aspects of history are significant or worth preserving. Differences in values, interests and priorities among different generations can create barriers to effective communication and collaboration in preserving historical knowledge about what constitutes a meaningful place. Generational differences in lived experiences and social contexts can influence perspectives on historical events and spaces and their perceived relevance to contemporary issues.

In terms of contemporary spaces that still exist and hold nostalgic meaning for an older generation, not feeling safe, comfortable or welcomed in these spaces may trigger memories of past exclusion in other spaces. This can create a nostalgic afterburn replacing a nostalgic afterglow in the very locations that hold important meanings for this older generation. Nostalgic afterglows can occur when meaningful place is remembered. However, nostalgic afterburn can also occur if the meaningful place is replaced or appropriated for a different or personally challenging meaning (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). Finally, gay nostalgia about meaningful place can also be altered with memory decay and variations, including an idealized or devalued retrospection.

How do we deal with these memory deteriorations, contradictions or reinterpretations to preserve an understanding of *historical* gay identity and gay culture? We can do so by focusing on the *meanings* conveyed through oral testimonies and online narratives. Focusing on the historical meanings of gay identity and gay culture in Toronto help us preserve and understand the legacy of these stories before they are forgotten and replaced with different meanings during an intergenerational transition period.

Oral historian Alessandro Portelli points out that historical events or places (I include identities or cultures) are not less accurate when told through oral histories. Rather, it requires a

shift in focus on the narrator's subjective *meanings* expressed about such historical events or places (identities or cultures) to distinguish between the specific interpretive approaches that oral history or other histories provide. Portelli suggests narrators' subjective meanings are important in the process of expressing memory in oral histories since "memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings... [that] reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context."³¹⁸

The historical context of the binary generation in gay Toronto is relevant to understand this older cohort's concerned views about changes in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village and the sensed loss of a gay community. This generation of gay men remember and revisit places and spaces that are significant to them (as we have seen in this chapter) either physically (if they still exist) or mentally through gay nostalgia. Gay nostalgia produces *personal* and *collective* narratives through gay identity formation and gay cultural experiences – both positive and negative through *nostalgic afterglow* and *afterburn*. On one hand, gay nostalgia can foster a sense of continuity, belonging and identity as these gay men reminisce about former gay bars, residential spaces in the "gay ghetto" or relationships formed in gay bars/dance clubs, house parties, music, restaurants, bathhouses, cruising parks, gay sports teams and organizations. On the other hand, gay nostalgia can also create a sense of alienation, exclusion and resistance as we recall a disconnection as gay men challenged dominant narratives and norms after traumatic events of police surveillance, arrests, and deaths during the AIDS crisis. In addition, the nostalgia of gay men of this generation reflect the social values of their time, such as racism and sexism, in addition to binary ideas about sexuality.

³¹⁸ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," In Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, Third Edition (New York and Abingdon, Oxfordshire, Routledge, 2015), 54.

Space and place are essential to the development of identity and culture. Gay nostalgia helps us recognize how they are remembered with subjective meanings in forming an understanding of the earlier development of an historical gay identity. Several gay men from the binary generation have shared memory narratives for this project of earlier gay bars, bathhouses, organizations and other gay social spaces, events and activities in Toronto that mostly no longer exist. These have provided nostalgic glimpses of gay identity and culture in Toronto's gay past before the Church-Wellesley Village emerged as a vibrant and important socio-cultural hub by the 1990s.

In the 1980s, Toronto's gay socio-cultural geography began to shift. Gay bars began to spread out even further from Yonge Street over to Sherbourne Street with a new gay-owned concentration around Isabella Street. The historical significance of residential buildings housing mostly gay men in the "gay ghetto" made way for a new more-concentrated mix of gay and gay-friendly service, retail and residential spaces moving into the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood throughout the 1980s. Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village became a more vibrant gathering place on a daily basis beyond the annual Pride Day or weekly lesbian and gay meetings at The 519 Church Street Community Centre. New lesbian and gay bars, restaurants, grocers, organizations, social gathering spots and an influx of new gay residents created a thriving gay "village" or gaybourhood by the 1990s. Entwined with this is the HIV/AIDS crisis that brought on significant community and political challenges and ongoing discrimination. TCWV began to provide a more centralized and safer area to gentrify, socialize, and find support with this shifting gay socio-cultural geography.

Chapter 3: A New Village Rainbow (1989-2009): Shifting Gay Geography & Identities with a Neo-Queer Generation

Organizing Identities

Samuel Lopez knew from childhood in El Salvador that his sexuality was different from the heterosexual expectations of his parents, church and society. The son of a Baptist minister, his father moved the family to Mexico City before going to Montreal in 1984 as refugee claimants during the civil war in El Salvador raging between 1980 to 1992. When the family moved to Toronto in 1987, Samuel lived with his parents in the Jane and Finch area known for being one of Toronto's most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Samuel says he started to meet other men for sex in places like the mall or out at night for hookups but did not go to Toronto gay bars as he was still in grade thirteen and living at home with his family.

After finishing high school, Samuel studied theology at the Baptist Leadership Education Centre in Whitby, a town just east of Toronto. By 1988, he discovered through friends a life beyond theology at the *Rock & Roll Fag Bar*, which hosted every Friday a gay/queer/alternative dance party at the *Tazmanian Ballroom* at 101 Jarvis Street in downtown Toronto:

When I was in Whitby, I would go to the *Rock & Roll Fag Bar* with my friends because it was also the alternative bar. And I only had weekends off. I wasn't in the city. I would come to town on the weekends and instead of going to church, which was part of my education, I would go to the *Rock & Roll Fag Bar*. The music was amazing. And what I did, I would go with my friends, here in downtown Toronto. I'd stay there instead of going home to my parents and go out at night.³¹⁹

Not seemingly destined to follow his father into the church, Samuel studied International Development at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus. From 1988, Samuel says he was regularly making weekly one-hour trips from Jane and Finch and Whitby to downtown Toronto for political events:

³¹⁹ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

I would come downtown on a Thursday night. There was some kind of network or something political. Something is happening in Africa. Something's happening with the nukes, and I would go to those events. It was all just political stuff, but I was out [as gay]. People at the university knew about my gayness and I just was into my education. That following year, I moved to Kensington Market, and I tried to take all my courses downtown [at University of Toronto downtown campus], so that I didn't have to go to Scarborough too often. And so that's when I was meeting with people.³²⁰

Samuel's early participation in political events would later become an important influence in his life and the LGBTQ2+ lives of others in Toronto. Samuel identifies as Indigenous and now "two-spirits"³²¹ and also mentions the importance of an academic paper he wrote in the late 1980s exploring his identity:

I was young, like, you know, 'fresh meat' kind of thing. And when I was studying at U of T, I started to intellectualize everything that was happening in my life. I think it was a sociology course when I started. I actually wrote a paper on me being the 'guy from Jane and Finch coming to Church and Wellesley' and my duality, because it was not the same. You put your high heels as soon as you get off the bus or something [amused laughter]. It was kind of that feeling of becoming, of arriving at Wellesley subway station and then removing the 'monkeys' [stigma] that are on top of me and just be myself. But then, in the paper, what I discussed is that Jane and Finch is also myself. Why can I not be myself all the time? That was the discussion on the paper.

Samuel says he first learned about Toronto's gay community and scene through *Xtra* magazine, a popular Canadian LGBTQ2S+ publication.³²² *Xtra* was started by *Pink Triangle Press*, the longest-publishing LGBTQ2S+ media group in the world founded by members of *The Body Politic*.³²³ Samuel's older brother, Mario Raul worked at *Xtra* as an advertising coordinator and was able to get promotional material and free tickets to go to places like *Buddies in Bad*

³²⁰ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

³²¹ Samuel states, "I never identified myself as an Indigenous person, only until I came to Canada." Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023. Samuel states, "I identify as two-spirits" in an email received 24 Jan 2023 after the oral history interview on 26 Sep 2023.

³²² *Xtra* magazine uses the LGBTQ2S+ acronym. See *Xtra*, "Our Principles" (2024), <https://xtramagazine.com/principles> (accessed 20 Mar 2024).

³²³ *The Body Politic* was published between 1971 to 1987. *Xtra Magazine* was published as a print newspaper between 1984 and 2015 before exclusively becoming a digital online publication in 2015 to present day. Both published by Pink Triangle Press.

Times Theatre (the longest-running *gay and lesbian*³²⁴ – now *queer*³²⁵ theatre in the world since 1978)³²⁶ or tickets for gay dance events at Phoenix night club. Only three years older than Samuel, Mario “had his own entourage” and according to Samuel always knew the good places to go where they all enjoyed the same kind of music and environment. However, he points out it was not a Latino entourage. “They were all white. It was my brother and I, and everyone else was white.” Samuel later hung out with more Latino and racialized friends, which continued after moving into the downtown Toronto neighbourhood of Kensington Market.

Living in Kensington Market, Samuel was closer to Toronto’s gay scene and going out to gay bars more frequently. He recalls gay bars still on the periphery of Church and Wellesley like *The Barn* further down Church Street, *Chaps* at 7-9 Isabella Street and the next-door dance club *Komrads* at 1 Isabella Street at Yonge Street. Samuel states he was particularly interested in a gay bar at 5 St. Joseph Street named *Club Colby’s*, which opened in 1986. More popularly known as *Colby’s*, it was located in the space previously occupied by the gay bar *Katrina’s* (1978-1982):

I was going out on a Monday or Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. But I would go to the place that has the special something. At *Colby’s* it was Tuesdays because there was the drag show and basically there was a competition. It was by popularity that you win. So, you had to bring people to applaud for you. I eventually entered a competition. I did one song that is by an artist, La Lupe. La Lupe was a Cuban woman with a very strong accent, and that's the way she sings,

³²⁴ In 2001, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre stated it was “Canada’s premiere *gay and lesbian* theatre” (emphasis added by author) to launch its 2000-2001 season. See Wayback Machine Internet Archive, *Buddies in Bad Times Theatre*, “About Buddies” (5 Apr 2001), <https://web.archive.org/web/20010405071836/http://www.buddies.web.ca/about.html> (accessed 20 Mar 2024). By 2006, their website stated, “dedicated to the promotion of *gay, lesbian and queer* theatrical expression” (emphasis added by author).

³²⁵ In 2024, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre states “the company has grown to be the largest and longest-running *queer* theatre company in the world...Buddies enters its 44th season as the premier cultural centre for Toronto’s *queer* community” (italic emphasis added by author). See *Buddies in Bad Times Theatre*, “Our History” (2024), <https://buddiesinbadtimes.com/about/history/> (accessed 20 Mar 2024).

³²⁶ This shift in LGQ identity language is an example of an intergenerational shift from binary to fluid adopted by formerly named gay and lesbian establishments now using the term queer.

and she sings English and Spanish. I did songs like “Fever”³²⁷ and I would win. But the thing is, I’d win because all these people were clapping.³²⁸

Samuel went on to win other drag show competitions when his drag persona *Samantha* emerged. He states *Colby’s* also became a popular space for him and gay Latino friends to gather at one of those three racialized high tables with the stools (mentioned in Chapter One) to watch drag shows, drink alcohol, dance and share friendship. He also recalls it was the devastating time of the HIV/AIDS crisis and many of his Latino friends were afraid and naïve about HIV-AIDS. One particular drag show at *Colby’s* was a turning point for him. He began to educate and offer HIV-prevention support to the gay Latino community:

Two things happened at *Colby’s*. One is that HIV was just kicking in terms of death, people were already positive, like my brother [Mario], and other friends. And then there was a need to respond to that...It started at *Colby’s*. Basically, there was a drag queen doing a show. And she said, “This song, I want to do it in memory of Marcus.” And people knew why drag queens were doing something ‘in memory of.’ So, everyone starts looking for HIV on their skin.³²⁹ “Do I have it. Do I have it?” And then I said to myself, “Okay, so what’s the difference between these people that think that they have it or that they’re gonna find it by looking at their skin versus me? Why do I know differently? I’m also Latin just like them. I’m also gay just like them. How come I’m more educated?” I speak French. I speak English. And they didn’t. That’s when I said, “Let’s start a group” ... We have to organize ourselves. We have to do prevention work before it [HIV/AIDS] comes to us. And the way to do it is to do everything else that way, with our music, with our culture, with our language, because otherwise, “we’re going to keep looking for AIDS on our skin.” And then I came back one day to *Colby’s* with little pieces of paper, by hand [handwritten] saying, “Let’s meet Thursday” at such a time.³³⁰

³²⁷ R&B song originally released by William Edward (known as Little Willie John) in 1956 and covered by several other artists over the years, including La Lupe in 1963.

³²⁸ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

³²⁹ One of the earlier signs of AIDS-related illness is Kaposi’s sarcoma, a type of cancer with characteristic purple lesions on the skin caused by immune suppression.

³³⁰ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

It was the start of *Hola*,³³¹ a Latino community-based volunteer-run social support group for Latin-America Spanish-speaking LGBTQ2+ people, co-founded with his brother Mario Raul.³³²

Samuel recounted:

People kept the piece of paper. While we were walking from *Colby's* to *Komrads* I would also do the same, "Look. Look. Look" [simulating handing out pieces of paper]. That's all I did...And then I approached the 519 [*Church Street Community Centre*] and I said, "I would like to book a room." ...So, when I went passing these invitations at *Colby's*, people were interested because they were already gathering as Latin in this white space. So why not do without the white guys, right? So that first meeting in 1991 that we had on a Thursday evening at 7pm or at 8, I think it was, there were more than forty people that show up for the first meeting...Yeah, and my brother was key because he was inside publicity. We were able to get a voicemail box...The support from *Xtra*, thanks to my brother being there was incredible...and to this day it's every two weeks on a Thursday [*Hola* continues to this day for over 30 years].³³³

Other gay racialized groups had organized in Toronto in the 1980s and into the 1990s to focus on racism and sexuality. Anthony Mohammed, born in Trinidad and Tobago, remembers two groups he joined, among others, to seek out racialized gays like himself:

One was *Zami*³³⁴ the group for Blacks and West Indians. And that was great because it was like I was around people who looked like me and knew the culture of where I came from. And even though I came to Canada at such a young age, I went back to Trinidad a lot. I knew the culture. Every school holiday, we'd go back to Trinidad. So, I was very familiar with the culture and landscape, and everything. But *Zami* was mostly Afro-Caribbean and being Indo-Caribbean, I thought, I wonder if there's anything else. There was a group called *Khush*³³⁵ that was focused on South Asian 2SLGBT people...Some of the groups were so small they met in people's homes around the city, but the majority of these groups met at the 519 [*Church Street Community Centre*].³³⁶

³³¹ The early focus of *Hola* was educating Toronto's Latin-American community about HIV/AIDs and now includes immigration and human rights.

³³² Heritage Toronto, "Latino Group *Hola*" (2024) <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore-learn/riding-the-waves/latino-group-hola/> (accessed 3 Apr 2024).

³³³ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

³³⁴ *Zami* (1984-1989) was the first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto. *Zami* is the West Indian Creole word for lesbian. In 1989, many *Zami* members formed Black CAP – Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (1989-Present). AYA, founded in 1994, is the successor of *Zami* and provided social support for Black gay and bisexual men throughout the 1990s.

³³⁵ *Khush* (1987-1998) was first named South Asian Gay Association (SAGA) and was changed to *Khush* to include South Asian gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people.

³³⁶ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

Terrance “Teach” Saunders was part of *Zami* and recalls how the 519 became a space for Black gay identity in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) after *Zami* became a larger group in different people’s homes:

It grew and it was becoming the space for Black gay men who wanted to affirm who they are in a space where there were like-minded people. And then when it got too large, we took it to the 519. And so, the 519 enters our lives as a space because it was just too big for us to have it in people's homes. So, when we arrived at the 519, I think you can say that we kind of became institutionalized. It was a new space for me. I never had a reason to go into the 519.³³⁷

Andre Goh recalls his skeptical first impression of going to the 519 for *Gay Asians Toronto (GAT)*³³⁸ in 1984:

I saw an ad in *The Body Politic* for *Gay Asians Toronto*. I remember going to the 519 one Saturday afternoon and there were two or three people there. I looked at them and I thought, “No.” I went away [amused laughter]. It didn’t feel welcoming for some reason. All I remember is that I saw two or three people in this big room and I went, “Nope. Nope. There’s no way” [amused laughter].³³⁹

Andre did return in 1986 and became very active in *GAT* and other community groups during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, like the *AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)*,³⁴⁰ the *Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC)*³⁴¹ and *Khush*. Andre also volunteered for programs at the 519 becoming very active in community work and joining the Toronto Mayor’s Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues in the early 1990s, eventually as committee chair for former mayor

³³⁷ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

³³⁸ Gay Asians Toronto (1980-2002) was a social organization founded by Richard Fung for political advocacy and support of gay Asians in Toronto.

³³⁹ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

³⁴⁰ AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) was founded in 1982 by community activists and volunteers in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

³⁴¹ Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC), a volunteer-run fundraising organization for various lesbian and gay community groups that divided the profits among participating groups. GCDC hosted dances in Toronto at the Masonic Temple Hall, 888 Yonge Street between 1981 to 1992.

Barbara Hall.³⁴² Goh states the HIV/AIDS crisis brought out the need for different groups to care for themselves at a time of identity politics:

There were a lot of groups that were ad hoc, less formal, but because of AIDS, the epidemic, people galvanized, people articulated, people became more grouped together, funding became more urgent. And therefore, now you needed to articulate who you were, what you were, what you did, who you provided services to. All those kinds of things now became more urgent.

Many of the VGT members also remember the *GCDC* dances and posted about groups to which they belonged, and about being survivors of the AIDS epidemic. One member who posted several photos of *GCDC* dances reflects on many in the photos who died from AIDS illnesses:

Flip Frank: “So many of the faces in these photos were lost to a disease that took people who just wanted to be loved – I often get weepy looking at these photos and seeing so many that we lost – I think those guys did so much in helping to shape our community, their memories live on with so many of us!”³⁴³

Toronto’s *Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC)* started in 1981 as a volunteer fundraising group, raising donations to originally support gay legal causes and appeals, later HIV/AIDS concerns. *GCDC* dances needed a bigger space and became popular when they moved to the larger Concert Hall at Toronto’s former Masonic Temple at 888 Yonge Street. *GCDC* ended with its final dance in 1989. According to gay activist, Rick Bébout, *GCDC* dances “eventually attracted up to 2,000 revellers...and raking in up to \$10,000 each time, split among groups who sent volunteers.” According to Bébout: “By the early 1980s gay people in Toronto had built one of the most organized, politically sophisticated communities anywhere.”³⁴⁴

³⁴² Barbara Hall, Canadian lawyer who provided legal aid for gay men during the Toronto bathhouse raids, was the last mayor of Toronto (1994-1997) before amalgamation, and Chief Commissioner of Ontario Human Rights Commission (2005-2015).

³⁴³ Flip Frank, “This deserves its own mention – the #GCDC dances,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 14 Apr 2020.

³⁴⁴ Bébout, <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1981.htm> (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

VGT members and narrators also recall participating in gay rights protest marches and Pride parades that were quite different from today. They remember the smaller, less socially accepted Pride marches/parades with few floats and many hand-written signs that headed north on Yonge Street, restricted to only one lane, and opened to anyone who wanted to participate. Today, the much larger Pride parades have elaborate floats and displays heading south on Yonge Street, filling the streets and barricaded sidewalks to hold back the massive, supportive crowds. Members remember when it was first restricted to the sidewalk and more open for anyone to join the parades:

Roger Spencer: “The first ‘gay pride’ march I attended, had to be 1973 or 74, we had to stay on the sidewalk of Yonge Street, and we walked in twos to spread the line out as much as possible. I swear there were no more than 100 of us. We paraded through bars, on the Yonge Street strip and even got called names and given the finger by patrons in the bar, usually older men who told us ‘You are bringing too much attention to us.’ We terrified the closet cases.”³⁴⁵

David Bennett: “[B]efore they fenced the parade off from onlookers and you had to be ‘authorized’ to be in the parade in the 90s. This was also still in the days when there were often more people in the parade than watching it from the sidelines. Only one side of the street was blocked off then, so opposite traffic would go right by us. I remember open mouthed streetcar passengers with puzzled looks as we processed up Carlton St. to Yonge St...and it was less crowded and commercial but definitely more intimate.”³⁴⁶

Andre Goh also points to earlier Pride events in TCWV in the 1980s that felt more like a gay community for him that he considers different from more recent Pride parades:

My fondest and favourite memories are the early Prides on Church Street that maybe ran for a couple or three blocks. It started north of the 519 and ran down Church Street. Didn’t even come down to Carlton [Street]. It ended maybe at Wood [Street]. That was it [amused laughter]. But we loved it. There would be a few floats, and we’d rave all our friends are on the floats. And everybody came. Those Prides I miss immensely because it really felt like a community celebration. Today, it feels like a fair. It feels like the CNE [Canadian National Exhibition]. It’s very impersonal. Nothing about it says we’re celebrating queerness, partly because the nice thing is today you get queerness everywhere.

³⁴⁵ Roger Spencer in response to a post by David Bennett, “The temporary Toronto AIDS Memorial in Cawthra Park (1988),” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, September 19, 2015.

³⁴⁶ David Bennett, “‘Chaps’ Pride Float in 1989,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, February 9, 2016; Also, David Bennett, “Pride 1991 Official Program,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, March 16, 2014.

Some of the most poignant memories of Pride are of the ‘die-ins’ on Yonge Street during parades in the 1990s to publicly protest against the lack of government support in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. The radical approach of Queer Nation and ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)³⁴⁷ helped spur such demonstrations. VGT members recall the significance of the ‘die-ins’ on Yonge Street when parade participants were invited to lay down on the street and have a chalk outline of their body to leave a visible sign all along the parade route as a reminder of those who died of HIV/AIDS damage to the immune system:

David Love: “It was a sad time of great personal losses in Toronto and everywhere. Shocking to recall what dramatic displays were necessary to have the crisis of AIDS recognized!”³⁴⁸

Kevin Andrew McNish: “It was Toronto Pride 1993, fighting for our lives and grieving our losses. A stunning display of protest and loss.”³⁴⁹

Efforts to amplify these visible protests to policymakers were supported by the formation of a number of local and national organizations such as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), AIDS Action Now!, Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE), and the Canadian AIDS Society.³⁵⁰ It was not until 1996 that antiretroviral treatments were announced at

³⁴⁷ ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was an international activist and political group formed in New York City in 1987, establishing groups across North America advocating change in government and public policies around HIV/AIDS. AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) was a Toronto activist group founded in 1987 and continued into the 1990s in response to the Canadian government’s medical inaction in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The name AAN! Was adopted to avoid confusion with ACT UP and ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto), formed in 1983.

³⁴⁸ David Love in response to a post by David Bennett, “Die-in” During Pride 1993,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 29 Jun 2020.

³⁴⁹ Kevin Andrew McNish in response to a post by David Bennett, “Die-in” During Pride 1993,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 29 Jun 2020.

³⁵⁰ ACT, “Our History” (2024), <https://www.actoronto.org/about-act/our-history/#:~:text=Formed%20by%20a%20small%20group,being%20done%20to%20help%20them> (accessed 3 Apr 2024); Darien Taylor, “AIDS Action Now! Is disbanding,” *CATIE BLOG* (12 Dec 2023) <https://blog.catie.ca/2023/12/12/aids-action-now-is-disbanding/#:~:text=AIDS%20Action%20Now!%20was%20formed,people%20living%20with%20HIV%2FAIDS>. (accessed 3 Apr 2024); See also CATIE, “Our History: Delivering life-giving information for over 30 years” (2020) <https://www.catie.ca/about-catie-what-we-do/our-history/#:~:text=Delivering%20life%2Dgiving%20information%20for,informed%20choices%20about%20their%20health> (accessed 3 Apr 2024); See also Canadian AIDS Society, “About the Canadian AIDS Society,” (2024) <https://www.cdn aids.ca/#:~:text=Created%20in%201986%2C%20the%20Canadian,are%20proud%20of%20those%20roots> (accessed 3 Apr 2024).

the Vancouver World AIDS Conference, giving hope that HIV was no longer a death sentence but now a chronic disease.³⁵¹



Image 44: 'Die-in' demonstration on Yonge Street during 1993 Toronto Pride parade in protest against government response to HIV/AIDS crisis. Source: Photo by Jake Peters/Xtra magazine, June 1993.

A Queer Story

Samuel points to the importance and influence of Queer Nation and ACT UP in his personal journey of human rights activism with the Toronto organization Hola during the HIV/AIDS crisis. He refers to a shift in the late 1990s in starting to support, include and reference trans and queer individuals in the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. Groups began to use the “LGB” acronym to move beyond the earlier exclusive Gay Liberation movement from the 1970s. As lesbian and gay identity was reconceptualized in a social minority framework by human rights activists in the 1980s, Queer Nation and queer theory in the 1990s was reclaiming the derogatory use of “queer” to forge a better understanding of the broad range

³⁵¹ Lawrence K. Altman, “AIDS Meeting: Signs of Hope, And Obstacles,” *The New York Times* (7 Jul 1996); See also Christy L. Beaudin and Susan M. Chambré, “HIV/AIDS as a Chronic Disease: Emergence From the Plague Model,” *American Behavioural Scientist*, Vol. 39, No. 6 (May 1996), 643-776.

of “non-straight” identities. This included a more radical approach to sexuality and gender in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

In the 1990s, thousands of men and women living with HIV/AIDS from a wide range of socio-economic and racialized groups did not always align themselves within the often obscuring gay and bisexual identity labels used to convey a limiting view of those with HIV and dying from AIDS complications. In mainstream media throughout the 1980s, AIDS was often described through a ‘white, middle-class, gay male’ lens as AIDS was mostly ignored by straight people. Samuel understood the importance of Queer Nation and ACT UP during the HIV/AIDS crisis but did not always see it as representative of his own intersectionality and decision to focus on the Latino community:

So, yeah. Queer Nation and ACT UP, that was very white too. The key point is my brother [Mario Raul]. He was among the white guys, and he wasn't converting to white. He had already lived in the U.S. and suffered like a Mexican would. But he knew how to deal with the white guys. I didn't and it's difficult. It's difficult. Mostly when they are so exclusive, right. On that paper that I wrote when I was a student at U of T, my point was acknowledging that I had to change hats, not only to out myself as gay, but also, I needed to bring my Jane and Finch ‘me’ to Church-Wellesley because I was Christian, because I was Latin and Spanish speaking.

In the fight for human rights and government HIV/AIDS medical support, *The Queer Nation Manifesto*³⁵² called for revolutionary change by using radical fear tactics to gain the same freedoms as “straight people.” Queer Nation saw straight people having a privilege that allowed them to live “and fuck” without fear while not acknowledging those made invisible with straight mainstream images on TV, in magazines, in public spaces along with the privilege of “public displays of affection among the opposite sex and media images that promote heterosexuality.”

³⁵² “The Queer Nation Manifesto” was distributed as a leaflet during the ACT UP march in the New York City Gay Pride parade in 1990. See *QZAP – Zine Archive*, “The Queer Nation Manifesto” (2014), https://archive.qzap.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/184 (accessed 8 Mar 2024).

Straight people were viewed as “the enemy” who ignored “AIDS death due to homophobic government inaction” or perpetrating violence with physical and verbal assault as “queer bashing.”³⁵³ *The Queer Nation Manifesto* asserted that:

Our sexuality and sexual expression are what makes us most susceptible to physical violence. Our difference, our otherness, our uniqueness can either paralyze us or politicize us. Hopefully, the majority of us will not let it kill us.³⁵⁴

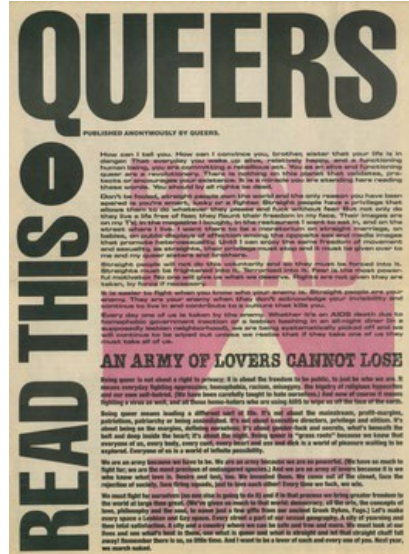


Image 45: Cover page of “Queers Read This” pamphlet distributed at 1990 NYC pride parade by Queer Nation. Source: http://againstequality.org/files/QRS_1990.pdf (accessed 5 Apr 2024).

Queer Nation redefined *queerness* by embracing the older connotation of *queer*, recognizing it was not just a marker of difference, but as a celebration of individual uniqueness that transcends binary categorizations. Straight was no longer seen through a binary focus of straight/gay, straight/lesbian or straight/queer. Rather, straightness was the “enemy” against the myriads of queer individuals who were rightfully and radically different, who were marginalized and erased by straight people. Within Queer Nation, these unique queer individuals became “an

³⁵³ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 1.
³⁵⁴ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 12.

army of lovers” against the enemy of straight oppression.³⁵⁵ *The Queer Nation Manifesto* explained:

It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night. Being queer is "grass roots" because we know that everyone of us, everybody, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility.³⁵⁶

Queer could be seen with what I refer to as a *neo-queer* identity – not as a derogatory victim. Queer identity became a diverse collective fighting straight oppression, homophobia, racism, misogyny, and self-hatred. The previous liberation call in Carl Wittman’s *A Gay Manifesto* urged freedom for gays and lesbians to ‘come out of the closet’ and be visible in a world dominated by straight exploitation.³⁵⁷ Queer Nation’s manifesto – and the new queer identity – went beyond with an aggressively ‘in your face’ visibility to live an antagonistically different sort of life that confronts the mainstream and straight. Queer Nation’s focus was on profit-margins prohibiting life-saving medicine or life-giving resources during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Queer Nation confronted patriotism and patriarchy and being assimilated into straight society. Queer Nation was also known for the controversial practice of ‘outing’ public figures without their consent to discredit those suspected of homophobic hypocrisy.³⁵⁸

According to *Xtra* magazine, the last meeting of Queer Nation Toronto was on June 15, 1992, with only six final members attending even though “hundreds of Toronto queers flocked to the first meeting” less than two years before. In the article, Toronto Queer Nation activist Bruce

³⁵⁵ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 2.

³⁵⁶ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 2.

³⁵⁷ Carl Wittman, *A Gay Manifesto* (New York: A Red Butterly Publication, 1970).

³⁵⁸ New York Times, “How Outing Lost Its Power to Shock” (30 Oct 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/2013/10/31/fashion/how-being-outed-as-gay-lost-its-power-to-shock.html> (accessed 26 Mar 2024).

Eakin describes members of the “direct action group” that participated in Toronto well beyond the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood:

Queer Nation was open to everyone and everyone came: men in suits and men in dresses; lipstick lesbians and dykes in combat boots; professional bureaucrats with expensive accounts beside people on welfare; surgeons, teachers, prostitutes, labourers, PWAs [People With AIDS], media stars and the homeless. There were queers who belonged to the Salvation Army and queers who said, “Stop the Church.” There were queers who were pro-choice and queers who were fanatically anti-abortion. There were even queers who didn’t like the word “queer.” There were impulsive kids who thought they were the first to ever hold hands in public, who knew nothing of our history and who dismissed our queer elders as outdated relics. There were men who didn’t believe that lesbians get bashed and men who hated drag queens.³⁵⁹

Xtra states Queer Nation Toronto “had no strategy for accommodating the diverse community it sought to mobilize” with the demise of the group attributed to infighting at meetings, leading to dwindling numbers.³⁶⁰ Another member, Lori Lyons states, “we became obsessed with unity. Instead of working for a process that would allow diversity and dissent, we became fixated on finding that mission statement which perfectly espoused our collective beliefs.”³⁶¹ This infighting was not just at local levels but across Queer Nation chapters as a whole. Trans historian and gender and sexuality theorist, Susan Stryker points out that the fleeting years of Queer Nation in the 1990s and their internal dissension came down to definitional contradictions – “‘queer,’ after all, means ‘diversity,’ whereas ‘nation’ implies ‘sameness.’”³⁶²

Queer theory attempted to address such diversity and dissent. Formerly gay and lesbian studies, queer theory emerged throughout the 1990s. It focused on issues of sexuality, gender, race, religion, age, and abilities in an attempt to consolidate disparate queer groups and broaden

³⁵⁹ *Xtra*, “On Queer Nation,” Issue 200 (26 Jun 1992), 14.

³⁶⁰ *Xtra*, “On Queer Nation,” 14.

³⁶¹ *Xtra*, “On Queer Nation,” 14.

³⁶² Susan Stryker, “Queer Nation,” *glbtq* (2015), http://www.glbtqarchive.com/ssh/queer_nation_S.pdf (accessed 5 Apr 2024).

our understanding of gender and sexuality from wider and different perspectives. Until queer theory, *queer* primarily referred to lesbian and gay sexualities. Queer was now about defining oneself differently in exploring a world of rights, pleasure and infinite possibility. Queer meant defiantly taking on and owning the derogatory ‘queer’ to broaden as well as reinforce solidarity between gay and lesbian framed identities:

Queer Nation asked the question *Why Queer* in the context of gay sexuality and gender:

Well, yes, “gay” is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay [synonymous with happy]. So we’ve chosen to call ourselves queer. Using “queer” is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It’s a way of telling ourselves we don’t have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world. We use queer as gay men loving lesbians and lesbians loving being queer. Queer, unlike gay, doesn’t mean male. And when spoken to other gays and lesbians it’s a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy. Yeah, queer can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe’s hands and use against him.³⁶³

Queer Nations’ call was to be *visible*, be *different*, “bash back” and “let yourself be angry.”³⁶⁴ Samuel Lopez applied this to his own activism with Hola:

The first meeting had men, women, trans, drag queens, mothers, parents, children, and I didn’t know what to do...People wanted to be gay first. They wanted to be out to themselves. There were refugee claimants. They have never been openly-gay. Some wanted to put feathers on, the makeup and tits and all that thing. So eventually I said, “How am I going to relate to these people that they just want to be in drag?” What I did is, like Queer Nation, or any other White-led organizations that were creating these movements, and the climax [of support and recognition of such organizations] was happening around that time [in early 1990s], I would get ideas. There was one time we were protesting against the police...And we marched from Church and Wellesley because of the atrocities against trans or against drag queens or things like human rights that are still not in place. I remember during one of those marches I put high heels on, and I dressed up in drag and walked to 52 Division [Toronto Police]. And then I said, “Now I can say that I know a certain amount of things” because everything was different.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 12.

³⁶⁴ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 15.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

Samuel was showing strength being *different* and *visible*, protesting for human rights while walking in high heels. He says the drag aspect of organizing helped with connecting people and creating HIV-prevention awareness through performance and fundraising: “It really made a big impact in Hola dressing up.”³⁶⁶ Samuel and queers were guided by Queer Nation’s radical approach to being *queer in straight places*. Queer Nation urged people to see beyond straight notions of private and public space. *The Queer Nation Manifesto* asserted that “Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are.”³⁶⁷ Samuel and others made their ‘queerness’ visible in ‘straight’ public Toronto:

A lot of the ideas were coming from Queer Nation at that moment, like when you do a sit-in. We would go to the Eaton Centre [downtown Toronto shopping mall] and do a gay kiss-in and things like that. One of the ideas was to go to straight bars in groups. That’s what we did.³⁶⁸

Samuel, performing as Samantha, and other gay Latino drag queens embraced the radical queer concept of attending straight bars in drag as a means of increasing visibility to heterosexual individuals, albeit in an approachable rather than angry fashion. They were already performing in drag outside Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village at a Spanish bar called *La Pantera Rosa* at College and Euclid streets in Toronto’s Little Italy district before deciding to go to another Spanish bar just down the street on College Street called *Rico’s*:

We’re already dressed up and we stayed like that. And one of the drag queens has a car and we would go a couple of blocks there and keep drinking there. When we decided to come to a Convento [jokingly referring to the bar as a convent] then we stopped calling it *Rico’s*. We say, “We’re going to the convent.” Because *Rico’s* is just *Rico’s*, but The Convent is a good name for a gay bar too. And so first, we just show up one day in drag, and we started ordering drinks. I’m talking about ’91. So, we go to El Convento and have drinks, behave, because that was part of the deal that we were going to behave and spend money and tip well, and then do it a second time. And on the second time, we talked to the owner and said,

³⁶⁶ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

³⁶⁷ “The Queer Nation Manifesto,” 2.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

“How are we doing as clients here? Do you mind us? What do you think?” And so that broke the conversation and eventually it became *El Convento Rico*.³⁶⁹

El Convento Rico at 750 College Street is located over ten blocks west of Yonge Street and the Church-Wellesley Village. The bar remains a popular nightspot featuring drag performances and DJs for club dancing. In the 1990s, *El Convento Rico* began to attract gay men outside Toronto’s mostly-white gaybourhood as a space to dance and watch lively drag shows. This was thanks to Samuel and Samantha³⁷⁰ and other Latino drag queens who were becoming known performing and supporting drag shows in TCWV. Given the smaller and limited dance venues in The Village, the larger dance floor and welcoming attitude at *El Convento Rico* provided many LGBTQ2+ revelers with what felt like a safe space to be themselves. However, Samuel points out the difference in safety along College Street versus Church Street, where some wanted the type of *El Convento Rico* venue confined to Toronto’s gaybourhood:

We got all our people, we were at Church and Wellesley, we had presence. So, we will pull the white guys to come, “Let’s go west. Let’s go west. Come to our things.” And people liked it. They liked the fact that it was different. But everyone was saying, “Oh, when is El Convento going to move to Church and Wellesley?” [amused laughter] ... We wanted to be ghettoized, I guess, and the way things were in society at the time, it kind of makes sense. Because, in drag or a woman coming out of El Convento Rico is not the same as walking home from Church and Wellesley.³⁷¹

Shifting Rights & Gay Spaces Amidst the HIV/AIDS Crisis

By 1990, Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village emerged as a focal point of Toronto’s gay cultural, social and health services scene. Overall, the 1980s into the 1990s marked a period of significant growth of gay-owned and gay-friendly establishments such as restaurants, coffee-

³⁶⁹ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

³⁷⁰ Samuel Lopez is also a documentary filmmaker. *Samuel and Samantha* (released in 1994) was created by Samuel Lopez and directed by filmmaker Jorge Lozano. The film is about Samuel as a university student and his drag persona Samantha performing at La Pantera Rosa to convey the experiences of gay Latinos in Toronto in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Lopez also collaborated with Christian Hui in the documentary film *Walking in these shoes* (released in 2022) about the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized artists living with HIV.

³⁷¹ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

shops, bars/dance clubs, grocers, clothiers and other retail stores. The gaybourhood had evolved from a relatively gay residential enclave to a vibrant and visible commercial and community hub of gay life.

In 1990, when gay rights activist and gay bathhouse co-owner Peter Bochove (1948-2013) opened *Spa on Maitland*³⁷² right in the heart of TCWV, it added a gay symbolic imprint to the neighbourhood. The *Club Baths* had already been operating further south on Mutual Street since 1973 but the *Spa on Maitland* was now in a central spot at Church and Wellesley. Bochove was co-owner of the Richmond Street Health Emporium (1976-1981), one of the gay bathhouses that never recovered after it was completely destroyed by Toronto Police during the 1981 raids. Like the other gay-owned establishments in The Village, anchoring a bathhouse at Church and Wellesley reinforced gay space as well as gay place. It also sent out a powerful message to Toronto Police and those continuing to seek moral regulation of gay sexuality after the anger over *Operation Soap*³⁷³ that continued during the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Societal attitudes began to slowly shift after the Ontario government included sexual orientation under human rights protection in 1986. It would take until 1996 for full protection for all LGB Canadians under the Canadian Human Rights Act.³⁷⁴ Many felt comfortable being more open about their gay identity leading to a proliferation of community organizations and a sense

³⁷² *Spa on Maitland* at 66 Maitland Street became *Steamworks* (1997-Present) at the same location but with a new entrance and address at 540 Church Street.

³⁷³ In 2000, Toronto Police again raided the Pussy Palace at Club Baths being held for women and transgender people of all sexual identities garnering more anger and criticism when five plainclothes male police officers ignored a gender-sensitive approach by entering and searching the club when nude or semi-clad women were present.

³⁷⁴ The Government of Canada added gender identity and gender expression for trans people with Bill C-16 in 2017 and amended the Criminal Code of Canada to make trans people a protected “identifiable group.” See *Amnesty International*, “Canada: Human rights protections extended to trans people (15 Jun 2017), https://www.amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/canada-human-rights-protections-extended-to-trans-people/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwncWvBhD_ARIsAEb2HW-DHJtsoFtisAGnsyUv4Jr1IF4aDmLs3-kpyVUSo6kT5BQU4pU6Fp4aAh6gEALw_wcB (accessed 13 Mar 2023).

of community with a type of ‘gay energy’ from strength in numbers in The Village. Tim McCaskell recalls how this visibility helped solidify the gaybourhood’s reputation as a safe space:

It was a place of safety, for one thing. I mean, you might get away with walking up and down Church Street holding hands with your boyfriend. You certainly wouldn’t get away with that on Yonge Street. That was a really different kind of atmosphere. So, it was a place where people could go and hang out, and be with other gay men, and not worry about getting the shit beaten out of you, so much. I mean, certainly there were always incursions of queer-bashers, and whatever. But it was not like Yonge Street only a block away. So, a place of safety.³⁷⁵

Additionally, the emergence of HIV/AIDS as a devastating epidemic saw TCWV as a focal point for HIV/AIDS activism and support services. Hassle Free Clinic and AIDS Committee of Toronto were conveniently located for HIV-testing, prevention education and counselling services providing crucial resources and advocacy. They were even present in the new *Spa on Maitland* bathhouse and other bathhouses in the city. TCWV became a safe haven for many when prejudice and a new surge of homophobia became rampant around HIV/AIDS. Gay medical doctors, professional counsellors and lawyers began to move into the area and open up practices. Anthony Mohamed remembers how the epidemic hit at the same time strides were being made with gay rights, bringing some people together and keeping others apart:

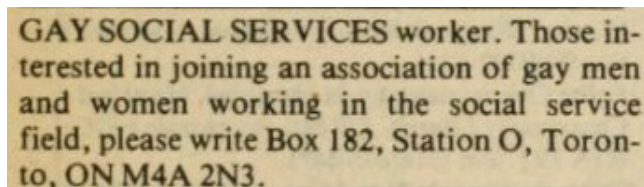
AIDS was hitting. I would say that was a huge leap because everybody that was doing gay rights work at the time, started doing AIDS work. It kind of went hand in hand. You started with the social justice side of AIDS, but also the compassionate side, where we formed care teams, etc. And I have to say, the lesbian community really stepped up. They would form the care teams. They were there. They were supporting gay men who were dying. And this was when not many hospitals were open to HIV-positive people and not many funeral homes. And I was going to one funeral a month. I was losing my entire generation. And it was really terrifying. But what was more terrifying was that no governments were saying anything or doing anything, and I don't know where the researchers were either. There were a few international researchers and Canadians who would take up the torch, but they weren't funded, all of that kind of stuff.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Interview with Tim McCaskell, 5 Sep 2023.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

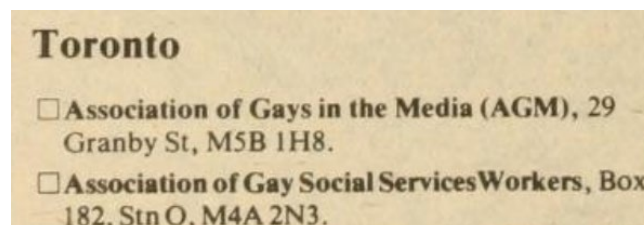
As a social worker, John Montague recalls the sense of urgency and isolation from HIV/AIDS that led to a greater sense of community in The Village. John recalls his own journey towards being part of a gay community, beginning as a closeted social work student at Carleton University in 1972. From being a closeted student he became a closeted social worker and then a closeted social work manager by the 1980s. John's fears, like so many other gays and lesbians in the 1970s and 1980s, was being 'outed' and losing his job. Despite being secretive, John and two other social work managers placed an ad in *The Body Politic* and called themselves the Association of Gay Social Services Workers. This was during the push for lesbian and gay rights and during the HIV/AIDS crisis:

But there was no way that we were going to identify who was behind this, and so we got a post-box. And I looked after the post-box, and people would write letters. Mothers would write letters saying, "Oh, this is a great thing. My son is studying social work [and he is gay]. And so, there was a young social work student, Peter who was gay. He was like, "I'm not putting up with all of this brown bag over your face stuff" [to hide your identity]. "You should be talking to us." Because we were management. We were up here [as management]. He was a student. "You should be going to the Association of Social Workers and advocating for the inclusion of this thing [sexual orientation]. There was no way in hell we were gonna do that at that time...So, there was so much hiding. That's the whole point here that there was so much hiding."³⁷⁷



GAY SOCIAL SERVICES worker. Those interested in joining an association of gay men and women working in the social service field, please write Box 182, Station O, Toronto, ON M4A 2N3.

Image 46: Display Ad for the Association of Gay Social Services Workers. Source: *The Body Politic*, June 1979, 39.



Toronto

- Association of Gays in the Media (AGM), 29 Granby St, M5B 1H8.
- Association of Gay Social Services Workers, Box 182, Stn O, M4A 2N3.

Image 47: Display Ad under Toronto listings for Association of Gay Social Services Workers. Source: *The Body Politic*, December 1979/January 1980, 40.

³⁷⁷ Interview with John Montague, 19 Sep 2023.

Once sexual orientation was included in Ontario human rights protections, John had the courage to inform his straight Executive Director that he was one of the managers behind the Association of Gay Social Workers:

You try and fire me, I'll sue you, because you can't. I want to have these conversations with you now because in fairness to you, as a straight Executive Director, you didn't do anything wrong, but here's where we were at.³⁷⁸

With gay rights protections, John confidently became an openly-gay advocate inside and outside The Village at a time when there were still uninformed fears within the general public about HIV/AIDS transmission. John recalls one incident when he worked at Sunnybrook Hospital:

You know when we had the AIDS crisis, this is around the height of it, what I call the height of it around 1990. And I can remember the dietitian in the hospital cafeteria. There was a lot more in the newspapers about AIDS and about, "You can't get this [HIV/AIDS] from eating in a restaurant" from [casual contact]. It came up in conversation, "Oh, they said that it's okay in restaurants to..." And she said "Oh, oh, I don't know. I wonder if we should put plastic knives and forks out extra for some people in case they need them." And I said to her, and I knew I was speaking from experience, I said, "There are people with AIDS who have eaten in our cafeteria using our knives and forks" and I knew I wasn't exaggerating. And she looked at me like I had two heads.³⁷⁹

Another retired social worker, Anonymous Interviewee #1 mentions creating a safe space in TCWV to house those with HIV and addictions during the HIV/AIDS crisis:

I had all the usual things of losing friends. I am also proud that the organization that I was part of is called LOFT Community Services [providing mental health, addictions and housing support in Ontario]. We founded a residence on Dundonald [Street]. It's still there, called McKewan Housing, back when it was a hospice. It was everything. That's right close to Church Street. I think it's worth acknowledging that something like that exists in those Church Street communities, not all just bars and restaurants. That was a place, is still a place where people with HIV and in the old days AIDS could go. And in our case, mental health challenges, addiction challenges, serious shit. Our people couldn't

³⁷⁸ Interview with John Montague, 19 Sep 2023.

³⁷⁹ Interview with John Montague, 19 Sep 2023.

even get into Casey House³⁸⁰ because Casey wouldn't take people with addictions at one point. McEwan was serving the really needy people. And it's right in the Church-Wellesley Village, because we proactively wanted it there because it's by the 519 Church Street Community Centre. That's where those people lived. So, I think when you think of the history of the Church-Wellesley Village, you've got to also include some of that. It wasn't that we're all just party goers and had no social conscience. Even though there was a sexual component of people wanting to meet people, it was still to create a safe space for people to come together.³⁸¹

Andre Goh remembers the general fears around HIV/AIDS. This was coupled with racism during the AIDS epidemic as groups also formed communities of support inside and outside TCWV:

The focus was, look, there was racism. You sucked it up. You were a minority within the larger, queer, white community and the focus was, "We're dying" [from AIDS illnesses]. We didn't know which one of us was going to be next. And I remember one time, a few of us, a few lesbians, gay men, all Asian, I forget who died. And we were waiting for, I forget, police, ambulance, somebody to arrive. And I remember the discussion was, "We only have each other. We are going to survive this till the very last one of us." And I remember thinking, "I guess I'm gonna die" because everybody else was dying.³⁸²

Anonymous Interviewee #3 thinks about his experience growing up in Caribbean Antigua and going to school in Toronto in the late 1970s before the HIV/AIDS crisis. By the 1980s, he knew about the double stigma of race and HIV/AIDS faced by many in the Black community inside and outside The Village, even with support offered from groups like Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (known as Black CAP, 1989-Present) and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (known as ACT, 1983-Present): He explains:

With Black CAP, and I suppose also in ACT too, there's that whole stigma around the illness. And Black people know that they are more religious than any other group [amused laughter]. There's that mountain to climb up and over. So that made matters difficult within the Black community. Unfortunately, because of this illness, it just messed up a lot of people's minds, because I had a very, very good

³⁸⁰ Casey House was originally a hospice for people dying of AIDS and now a hospital to care for those living with HIV at 9 Huntley Street. It opened in 1988 and expanded to 119 Isabella Street and a renovated house that fronts Jarvis Street, completed in 2017.

³⁸¹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #1, 15 Aug 2023.

³⁸² Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

friend and Black CAP was around, but he just sort of stopped himself and never availed himself to their services or anything like that. And he was also very religious. Yeah, and also the whole concept, that whole idea about our community being so small. They were afraid of the gossiping within the community, and that it would get back [to others in the community].³⁸³

Patrick Brown arrived in Canada from Jamaica in 1980 to go to college, a year before the first reported cases of HIV/AIDS. He recalls the stigma of coming out gay during the HIV/AIDS epidemic:

I've been pretty much in the gay community in Toronto from '85. It was the highlight of the AIDS epidemic. I mean, you're wrestling with accepting yourself and dealing with the stigma associated with being gay and the gay community and AIDS, knowing people who have had AIDS and who have actually died. So it was, emotionally, mentally dealing with accepting you coming out, telling people. It was a lot if you survived it mentally, emotionally and physically, even because of AIDS.³⁸⁴

Notwithstanding the global and broader impacts of HIV/AIDS, all of the older gay men interviewed remember the devastating loss of friends, family, colleagues and loved ones along with the lost voices and experiences of a generation during the crisis in Toronto. Jim Elliott recalls memories of being with his partner Paul in The Village during the HIV/AIDS crisis before Paul was lost to AIDS ten years after they met:

We used to go out and dance, and we loved that, to go out dancing. We met when I was living in New York, and I was up in Toronto for Labour Day in '83. Then I moved to Toronto Labor Day '84 and we moved in together a year or so later... [Remembering his partner Paul at the end of his life] ... And I mean, he was sick. He was in Casey House...So last three months of his life [sad emotion in voice]. And he was very, very sick at the end and that was hard.³⁸⁵

Larry Laforet also recalls the loss of his former partner Eli to an AIDS-related illness. They had been together for seven years until he died. Larry remembers the shock of Eli's

³⁸³ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Patrick Brown, 19 Oct 2023.

³⁸⁵ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

diagnosis, the loss of so many in his personal and professional circles, the prevention education efforts at the time, and the fears inside and outside The Village:

We met in the spring of '88 and he got pneumonia in the fall. And he was diagnosed in February of '89. Well, he died [sad emotion in voice and drawn breath with recovery]. Because I worked at the ballet school, it was pretty prevalent. At the time, Erik Bruhn³⁸⁶ had died, Constantin Patsalas³⁸⁷ and some of the graduates, dancers, male dancers, so I knew people and the ballet school was very proactive. They gave kids lectures on safe sex and all that sort of stuff right at the forefront of that kind of thing. And because I worked in The Village, the 519 [Community Centre in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood] was very active and the AIDS Committee and all that. But still, outside the gay community it was very prejudicial. People were afraid, rightfully so.³⁸⁸

As a social worker and counsellor, Bill McMaster remembers inviting dying gay men to his apartment to be cared for during a desperate time within a sharing gay community in Toronto:

For me, it's been a very personal thing because I had a number of friends die and because of my background, I took a number of friends in. I had a number of friends here who died here [in my apartment]. So, yeah, the emotion is you know, right on the surface. During that period, there were a number of medical doctors that were working with gay clients, and some of them were gay. Some of them were not gay. But they really pushed for the drugs and of course, politically, we lobbied our members of parliament to get the drugs out there. And for many, many people had didn't have the money to be able to afford the drugs. So, there were groups set up to help people get the drugs in any way they could. And people were sharing drugs, because somebody would have a plan where they could basically put the drugs on the plan, and the plan allowed them to buy them and so they would give them to other people that didn't have medical plans.³⁸⁹

Some of the narrators think about being survivors. Bob Dirstein reflects on how “a lot of friends died. How I'm still alive and negative, I don't know.”³⁹⁰ For David Hallman, survival takes on a more significant meaning:

In 1993, I tested positive and that was very traumatic for Bill [life partner] and me because we had lived with the understanding that I would be his caregiver as he

³⁸⁶ Erik Bruhn (1928-1986) was a Danish ballet dancer, choreographer and artistic director at the National Ballet of Canada.

³⁸⁷ Constantin Patsalas (1943-1989) was a Greek ballet dancer and choreographer at the National Ballet of Canada.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Bill McMaster, 8 Aug 2023.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

would gradually deteriorate and now all of a sudden, the possibility of me suffering and dying was up-ended. But I didn't. I was just on the cusp of the antivirals coming in. I took really good care of myself. I had some good support. And so, I continued to thrive. I had very high viral load when I tested positive. I was deemed in the category of fast progressors, meaning that it could take me fairly quickly. But by a combination of things, that didn't happen.

As the HIV/AIDS crisis intensified in Toronto by 1990, the gay community along with lesbian and straight allies had mobilized and saw the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood as a place of refuge and support, seeking solidarity there in the wake of immense loss. The devastation and intensified homophobia wrought by the HIV/AIDS epidemic coupled with ongoing neighbourhood gentrification catalyzed a shift emotionally and geographically to create more *gay space* as physical location and *gay place* as cultural meaning in the Church-Wellesley area. The older bar culture of predominantly closeted gays and lesbians mostly centred around Yonge and Wellesley began to move east of Yonge Street and more lesbians and gays became open about their sexuality. Gay community building after the bathhouse raids evolved into a newer commercial culture of visibility centred around Church and Wellesley. The area became known as a central and flourishing gay village combining commercial, entertainment, social support and residential opportunities all in one place. This shift is known as “The Great Migration of the 80s.”³⁹¹

Closing ‘Old Gay’ Spaces

By the late 1980s, the longstanding straight-owned gay bars around Yonge-Wellesley began to close when Church-Wellesley began to grow as a hub of safety, gay visibility, community and support. Around Yonge-Wellesley, the *Parkside* and *St. Charles* had been known for gay clientele by the mid-1960s. *Parkside* was the first of the two landmarks to close in 1986.

³⁹¹ *The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives*, “The Great Migration Of The 80s – Mapping The Village” (2024), <https://arquives.ca/latest-news/the-great-migration-of-the-80s-mapping-the-village> (accessed 21 Mar 2024).

From the original *Hotel Breadalbane* converted to a beer hall by the Bolter Family by the 1950s, the *Parkside* of the 1970s was known among patrons for ‘Frank the waiter’ and having to sit down to drink alcohol due to Ontario’s strict liquor licensing laws (see Chapter Two). It was also known for owner Norman Bolter’s allowing police harassment and surveillance of gay men through peep holes in the *Parkside*’s washroom. After gay men were arrested, gay activists threatened to report Bolter to the liquor licencing commission and go public to the greater Toronto community. Several reports and warnings to gay men about the incidents were published in *The Body Politic*.³⁹² With the *Parkside* tavern downstairs, a variety of gay venues were opened upstairs over the years: *The August Club* (1970-1972); *Momma Cooper’s* (1972-1973); *Milkbar* (1973-1974); *Quazimoto’s* (1974-1976); *Bimbo’s* (1976-1977); the popular dance club *Stages* (1977-1984); *Avalon* (1984-1985); and finally the apropos name for the time, *Changes* (1985-1986).³⁹³ In 1978, the Bolter family purchased their long-time competitor, the *St. Charles*. After the *Parkside* closed, the building housed a Burger King restaurant – jokingly referred to as “Bugger King”³⁹⁴ for its former gay connection – and a Sobeys grocery store in 2007 before sitting mostly vacant from around 2012 until Boku Japanese restaurant opened by 2020.

The *St. Charles* closed in 1987, a year after the *Parkside*. From the original St. Charles Restaurant (downstairs) & Dining Lounge (upstairs), which opened in 1951, the space would be ridiculed by homophobic attitudes and moral panic in the 1970s stirred by the murder of

³⁹² Gerald Hannon, “Epitaph for the Parkside,” *The Body Politic*, No. 62 (Apr 1980), 26.

³⁹³ In compiling the historical dates presented within this work, every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and reliability. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent challenges in historical research, including the inevitable discrepancies and uncertainties that arise when piecing together the past. As such, some dates provided should imply a ‘circa’ statement indicating that while efforts may have been made to verify the accuracy of the information, some degree of approximation may exist. For some dates where it was impossible to find accuracy I have included (c.1980s) as an example. It is my hope that by acknowledging this uncertainty, readers will approach these historical sources with a nuanced understanding recognizing the complexities involved in comparing discrepancies in sources to which I have assigned a date as accurately as possible.

³⁹⁴ Rick Bébout, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in the Bar, 1969-2000* (2003), <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1986a.htm> (accessed 14 Mar 2024).

Emanuel Jacque (see Chapter Two). Customers were harassed entering and exiting the establishment, particularly on Halloween when heterosexual mobs would throw eggs at patrons dressed as drag queens.³⁹⁵ The *St. Charles* remained downstairs with owners converting upstairs to a variety of gay and mixed dance clubs over the years: *Maygay* (1970-1977); *Club Triangle* (1977-1978); *Charley's Disco* (1978-1984); and *Y-Not Bar* (1985-1987). After the *St. Charles* closed, the upstairs continued as a dance space as *Empire Dancebar* (1988-1992), *Time* (1994) and *Circus* (1995-2001). The building was renovated in 2002 as retail (downstairs) and residential (upstairs). It was torn down and replaced with the 45-storey Halo Condos, which opened in 2023.

The Quest (with *Rusty's Cabaret* upstairs)³⁹⁶ and *Cornelius* were two other gay bars to close on Yonge Street in the 1980s. When *The Quest* opened in 1973, it was considered one of the first “upscale” gay spaces in Toronto. It closed in 1985. The property became various hair and make up salons into the 2000s and then it became home to the Toronto Hemp Company with a new address today at 665 Yonge Street. *Cornelius* (1975-1986), located at 579 Yonge Street, above the biker and hard rock bar Gasworks (1971-1993), appealed to a gay leather/denim crowd, similar to *The Barn* on Church Street. It closed in 1986, making *The Barn* more popular for the *Cornelius* crowd. After Gasworks closed, the building sat vacant for a few years, also with an address change to 585 Yonge Street. Into the 2000s, it became a Dollar Kwick discount merchandise store and Nick's Sport Shop and Army Surplus store for over 20 years until the property became a Mississaugas of the Credit Medicine Wheel Cannabis retail store in 2023.

³⁹⁵ *The Body Politic*, “Straight hate on Hallowe'en” (Dec 1978), 13.

³⁹⁶ *Rusty's Cabaret* was managed by Rusty Ryan, a drag queen and founding member of the Great Imposters drag entertainment group in Toronto. See Michael Lyons, “I Love the Nightlife: The 80s and 90s – Rising from the fringe to mainstream acceptance,” *Summer Play 2017* (Summer 2017), 11, <https://pinkplaymags.com/edition-archives/> (accessed 8 Mar 2024). The Great Imposters were popular throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

A few gay bars and a bathhouse held out on Yonge Street until the early 2000s. *Trax* (1985-2005) at 529 Yonge Street, across the street from the *Parkside*, morphed from a gay leather/denim bar to a space with a restaurant and pool table and then a gay piano bar offering show-tunes with a two-level outdoor upper-deck. It had earlier been *Gunsel's* in 1980, then *Derringers*, before becoming another cowboy-themed gay bar (similar to *Dudes*) called *The Hitch'n'Post* in 1984. *Trax's* final configuration was *Alibi* nightclub in 2005, known for hosting underwear dance parties (in competition with underwear dance parties at *The Barn* and *Black Eagle*)³⁹⁷ as well as Wednesday College nights to attract a younger gay crowd. *Alibi* closed in 2008. The building was then converted to an art gallery called Gallery Hi Art by 2011 before becoming a Cash 4 You payday loan business in 2014 in front on Yonge Street with The Laundry Lounge coin-operated laundromat in the back off Maitland Street by 2011. In 2023, The Laundry Lounge location was replaced by Toronto-Tees Custom T-Shirts embossing, which expanded their 527 Yonge Street store.

Over on St. Joseph Street, *Katrina's* at number 5 closed in 1982, becoming *The Outpost* until the mid-1980s. Next door was *The Manatee* at 11 St. Joseph Street, which closed in 1984, becoming *Playground* gay dance club around 1992 until about 1996. *Katrina's* became *Club Colby's* in 1986 becoming *Five* dance club in 1998 with “straight night” by 2003, the year it closed. Behind the buildings of *Colby's* and *The Manatee* was the revitalized space previously occupied by *David's* old fire-blazed location 20 years earlier at 16 Phipps Street, now called *Joy*

³⁹⁷ Underwear parties of a gay subculture in Toronto became popular in the mid-1990s and early 2000s as a weekly event at *The Barn* and *Alibi* as part of Sunday afternoon tea dances where gay men would dance in only underwear or jockstraps, socks, and footwear on a crowded dance floor. Underwear parties at *Black Eagle* did not include dancing but rather moving freely around the bar interacting with other patrons all wearing underwear, jockstraps (or nothing except) socks, and strictly enforced leather boots or dark running shoes. In each venue, patrons were given a plastic bag to put clothes in (thereby undressing *out of* most clothing) and kept at the coat check where tickets were given to retrieve later. Many would stick the ticket in their sock, risking a sweaty, soggy ticket, or in a wrist strap specifically designed to hold cash and tickets.

gay afterhours dance club. *Joy* opened in 1995, and like *David's* two-year run, *Joy* closed in 1997. In the same building as *Colby's*, the upstairs was converted to Epic Fitness (2003-2007) with an entrance at 9 St. Joseph Street. It became a popular workout spot for gay men with memories of *Colby's* and *Five*, followed by L3 Fitness (2007-2008). Both buildings that housed *The Manatee* and *Club Colby's* were converted to FIVE Condos in 2015, keeping the original structures and facades.

The only gay bathhouse to be located on Yonge Street, *St. Marc Spa*, opened in the area on the fourth-floor at 543 Yonge Street in 1991 and lasted until 2010. According to *Xtra* magazine, “it unofficially held the dubious title of ‘Toronto’s sketchiest bathhouse’”³⁹⁸ due to a number of patrons known for using meth and their drug dealers who provided to them. The property became the Marina House Dormitory and ESL English House for international students learning English, before becoming CDI College, a private for-profit career college in 2014 followed by other private education schools Capital English Solutions in 2018 and Trebas Institute in 2019.

Perhaps what may be considered the last remnant of gay space and place on Yonge Street that officially closed the book on ‘old gay on Yonge’ is *Remington's Men of Steel* male strip club (1993-2018) at 379 Yonge Street. *Remington's* was popular with a predominantly gay male crowd before management ended audience gender segregation in 2009 allowing both men and women to watch naked men perform and dance as mixed clientele at all shows. The building was torn down to construct “Canada’s tallest condo”³⁹⁹ with a 78-storey mixed-use development

³⁹⁸ Chris Dupuis, “Death of a Bathhouse,” *Xtra* (29 May 2013) <https://xtramagazine.com/culture/death-of-a-bathhouse-49559> (accessed 19 Mar 2024).

³⁹⁹ *blogTO*, “New Toronto Skyscraper would be Canada’s tallest condo” (2017) <https://www.blogto.com/city/2017/02/new-toronto-skyscraper-would-be-canadas-tallest-building/> (accessed 21 Mar 2024).

under construction in 2024 at the southeast corner of Yonge and Gerrard streets. The number of ‘old gay’ spaces around Yonge Street disappeared making way for new retail and condo developments, foreshadowing how non-gay establishments and condo developments would continue to encroach on properties and gay spaces around Church and Wellesley.

Gentrification Goes Gay

Gay bars/dance clubs began to shift east of Yonge Street, with newer ones like *Chaps* (1983-1992), *Badlands* (1990-1992) and *Komrads* (1985-1991) concentrating around Yonge and Isabella streets and over to Sherbourne Street at The Selby Hotel in the 1980s with *Boots & Buds* (1981-2000) [*Bud's* became *Kurbash*].⁴⁰⁰ Gay geography also began to focus on affordable retail space around Church and Wellesley. Janko Naglic’s attempt to open lesbian and gay bars further up from *The Barn* at 457 Church Street began to take hold as other gay entrepreneurs moved into the area. Naglic’s new location was the same as the lesbian and gay precursor space of the 1960s, previously mentioned, the *Melody Room* and tabloid *TWO*. Naglic opened *Tanks* as a military-themed gay bar in 1980. This was the first of his evolving named lesbian and gay establishments at this location. The same year, *Neighbours* restaurant opened at 562 Church Street as one of the area’s first gay restaurants, located just north of Wellesley Street. The new Churwell Building (now The Village Centre), a five-storey office building had been recently constructed in the mid-1970s and housed an updated Toronto Dominion Bank branch at the southwest corner of Church and Wellesley. Leo Mitterni recalls the Church-Wellesley area in the early 1970s:

It was not at all what it looks like today. At Church and Wellesley, there was a big white building which was the TD Bank and huge parking lots around it. It was just an old Edwardian, painted white building that just had a TD Bank underneath. That’s what it was all like. Just old housing, one after the other. Then I guess it

⁴⁰⁰ See Appendix for non-exhaustive list of further gay bars with dates and locations along with other people, places and things relevant to topics mentioned in oral history interviews for this dissertation project.

would have been early '80s that [original TD bank building] got torn down and they opened the original Second Cup that drew all the gay men to *The Steps*.⁴⁰¹



Image 48: People sit on The Steps of the Second Cup café on Church Street, 1992. Source: Photo by Andrew Stawicki/Toronto Star via Getty Images.

The Steps became the iconic social spot where lesbians and gay men in particular would gather, *be visible*, socialize and cruise in front of the Second Cup coffee shop when it opened in 1984 at 548 Church Street. *The Steps* became possible because the old “gay ghetto” was going through a period of gentrification. One of the “huge parking lots” to which Leo referred was replaced with the construction of a new four-storey mixed retail residential building at 524-540 Church Street. This street-level retail and upper residential space taking up most of the west block from Wellesley to Maitland streets is remembered for, among other things, the long-established Reither’s Fine Foods International (1980-2012), selling specialty meats and international foods, as well as Super Freshmart 24-hour independent grocery store (1987-2017) at the corner of Church and Maitland. The Loblaws grocery store at 513 Church Street (1961-1976) and its parking lot beside The 519 Church Street Community Centre made way for

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

Cawthra Park (1977-2014), renamed Barbara Hall Park (2014-Present). The closure of Loblaws brought a thriving ‘village grocer’ competition to the area. The long-standing Pusateri’s fruit and grocery market went through a series of address changes, first at 485 Church Street (1967-1975) then 487 Church Street (1975-1982), taken over at that location by Badali’s independent grocer (1982-1998). Pusateri’s moved to 497 Church Street (1982-2023),⁴⁰² which was the long-remembered location in TCWV.

Other businesses evolved in The Village, highlighting its commercial vitality. De Jong’s Bakery located at 483 Church Street since 1956 was converted into the Amsterdam Coffee and Bake Shop (1974-1984) before the independent bookstore, This Ain’t The Rosedale Library (1986-2008) took over the space. This bookstore in the heart of The Village brought competition to the already popular gay-owned *Glad Day Bookshop* still located outside The Village on Yonge Street.⁴⁰³ Throughout the 1980s the area provided further choices of fine-dining at *Vagara* restaurant (c.1980s-c.1990s) at 475 Church Street along with Bersani & Carlevale Fine Foods Restaurant (1987-1993) at 499 Church Street. More casual food was available at Toby’s Good Eats (c.1985-2007) which had established itself at 542 Church Street as a popular hamburger restaurant in The Village.

On the southeast corner of Church and Wellesley at 77 Wellesley Street East is a four-storey Gothic-revival style apartment building built in 1926 whose internal courtyard off Church Street was infilled for commercial use after renovations in the early 1980s. This converted courtyard and street-front retail space topped off the newly gentrified Church-Wellesley

⁴⁰² The property is now Pusateri SR-Express Food Market with the new business owners keeping the Pusateri name for its longstanding familiar association with the space when the new business opened in 2023.

⁴⁰³ *Glad Day Bookshop* is the oldest LGBTQ bookshop in the world, opened in 1970 by Jearld Moldenhauer out of his 65 Kendall Avenue apartment (1970-1972); home at 4 Kensington Ave (1972-1973); 139 Seaton Street (1974-1975); first retail store at 4 Collier Street (1975-1978), then 598A Yonge Street (1978-2016) for much of its history before moving to its current location at 499 Church Street in 2016; previously Byzantium Restaurant (1993-2016).

gaybourhood with Splendeurs Restaurant & Bakery (1987-1992). The Flowerman florist (1988-1993) was given a new commercial address as 501 and 501A Church Street along with The Body Shop skin care products store (c.1987-c.2007) on the corner at 77 Wellesley, before later moving to 528 Church Street.

Businesses around Church and Wellesley, according to Brent Archer, have traditionally fallen into three categories: “those that are born gay, those that achieve gayness, and those that have gayness thrust upon them.”⁴⁰⁴ Gay-owned restaurants and bars like *Neighbours*, *Vagara* and *Tanks* are of the first kind; Second Cup at *The Steps*, This Ain’t The Rosedale Library, and Toby’s are of the second kind; and long-standing Pusateri’s, Devon Restaurant (1964-2006) and Dudley’s Hardware (1936-Present) are of the latter. By the end of the 1980s, all businesses around Church and Wellesley were considered gay-friendly places to meet, eat and shop.



City of Toronto Archives, Series 1465, File 116, Item 31

Image 49: 524-540 Church Street (green arrow, author’s overlay) and 542-544 Church Street with Toby’s Good Eats Restaurant (yellow arrow, author’s overlay) and Churwell Building, now The Village Centre (red arrow, author’s overlay), c.1995. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 116, Item 31.

⁴⁰⁴ Brent Archer, “The evolution of Toronto’s Church Street Gaybourhood,” *Yonge Street* (23 Jun 2010) [The evolution of Toronto's Church Street Gaybourhood -- a photo slideshow and essay \(yongestreetmedia.ca\)](https://yongestreetmedia.ca) (accessed 28 Mar 2024).



Image 50: Corner of Church and Maitland streets looking north-west with 524-540 Church Street retail residential building. Steamworks bathhouse occupies second-floor and apartments/condo units located on third and fourth floors. Source: Photo taken by author J. Gary Myers (31 Mar 2024).



City of Toronto Archives, Series 1465, File 750, Item 16

Image 51: Four-storey Gothic-revival style apartment building built in 1926 at 77 Wellesley Street East on southeast corner of Church and Wellesley. The courtyard between the two buildings was filled in for commercial use and retail space extended out from buildings fronting Church and Wellesley, c1986. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 1465, File 750, Item 16.

The following is a list of Toronto gay bars/dance clubs, gay spaces and gay-owned establishments between 1986-1988 most frequently mentioned by VGT members and oral history narrators. Also see the accompanying map to illustrate the shifting geography of The Village.



Gay bars/dance clubs closed permanently by 1988:

#1 *St. Charles Tavern* (previously, *St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge* opened in 1950 and known for gay clientele by 1963, closed in 1984) at 488 Yonge Street, and upstairs, *Maygay* dance club (1971-1977); *Club Triangle* (1977-1978); *Charly's Disco* (1978-84) and *Y-Not Bar* (1985-1987).

#2 *Parkside Tavern* (originally the *Hotel Breadalbane*, opened in 1945 and known for gay clientele by the mid 1960s, closed in 1986) at 530 Yonge Street, and upstairs *The August Club* (1970-1972); *Momma Cooper's* (1972-1973); *Milkbar* (1973-1974); *Quazimoto's* (1974-1976); *Bimbo's* (1976-1977); *Stages* dance club (1978-1984); and *Changes* (1985-1986).

#3 *Club Manatee* also known as *The Manatee* (1970-1984) at 11 St. Joseph Street, all-ages unlicensed gay bar/dance club.

#5 *Carriage House* (1971-1978) disco at 300-306 Jarvis Street switched to gay clientele in 1973.

#6 *The Quest* (1973-1985) dance club at 655 Yonge Street; previously *Famous Door* (c1964-1973).

#7 *Cornelius* (c.1975-1986) bar/dance club located above the biker bar and hard rock club *Gasworks* (c.1971-1993) at 585 Yonge Street.

#10 *Dudes* (1977-1982) cruising bar at 10 Breadalbane, later *Crowbar*, (1982-1984) in the back alley behind the *Parkside*.



Newer gay bars/dance clubs at older bars/dance clubs locations by 1988:

#4 *Katrina's* (1978-1982) gay dance club (downstairs) at 5 St. Joseph Street; *The Outpost* (1981-c.1985). Upstairs was the alternative *Voodoo Club* (1981-1985). Later became *Colby's* also known as *Club Colby's* (1986-2000); then *Five* dance club (1998-2003).

#15 *Gunsel's* then *Derringers* cowboy-themed gay bar (early 1980s); *Hitch'n'Post* (1984) cowboy-themed gay bar; *Trax* (1985-2005) gay piano and show-tunes bar at 529 Yonge Street. Later became *Alibi* nightclub (2005-2008).

#16 *August II* (1973-1974) at 1 Isabella Street. Later *Mrs. Nights* lesbian and gay dance club (1976-1977) with *Isis* lesbian and gay dance club upstairs (1977). Later straight/gay mixed dance *Cheetah Club*, *Domino Klub*, and *Oz* (mid-1970s to mid-1980s). Later *Komrads* gay dance club (1985-1991).



Gay bars/dance clubs becoming newer gay bars/dance clubs after 1988 at same location:

#8 *David's* (1975-1977) disco at 16 Phipps Street. Later became *Playground* (c.1992-c.1995) then *Joy* (1995-1997).

#9 *Studio II* (1977-1979) lesbian and gay dance club at 72 Carlton Street; became straight/gay-friendly nightclub *P.M. Toronto* (1992-1998); *Buttons* (1998); then *Zipperz Cellblock* (1998-2016) gay piano and dance bar.

#12 *Buddy's Backroom Bar* (1978-1987) at 370 Church Street. Later became *Bijou* porn bar (1995-2007).

 **Older and newer gay bars/dance clubs still in existence by 1988:**

#11 *The Barn* (1976-2012) bar/dance club at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street); *Jo-Jo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) mixed lesbian and gay bar with *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) gay bar; *The Barn* (c. 1976-1991, upstairs) gay dance club; *Club Ivory* (1985, downstairs) lesbian piano bar; after short attempt with *Club Ivory* returned to *Stables* (1985-1991, downstairs) gay bar. Later became *The Barn Complex* (1991-2012, upstairs & downstairs) gay dance club.

#13 *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street. Later *Badlands* was downstairs (1990-1992) denim/cowboy-themed bar/dance club and *Chaps* upstairs.

#14 *Boots & Bud's* at The Selby Hotel [Later *Bud's* became *Kurbash*] (1981-2000) gay bar/dance club at Selby Hotel, 592 Sherbourne Street.

#17 *Solteros* gay bar/dance club (1987-1998) located in the back-alley behind 619 Yonge Street, between Isabella and Gloucester Streets.


#18 *Rock & Roll Fag Bar* (1988-1990) weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night held at Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1990); formerly Club 101 gay and lesbian bar (1984-1987) at 99-101 Jarvis Street.


#19 *The Toolbox* (1987-2004) gay leather bar at 508 Eastern Avenue, originated from an earlier gay leather bar *18 East* at 18 Eastern Avenue (1979-1984).

 **New gay spaces in Church-Wellesley neighbourhood between 1980-1988:**

- A) *Tanks* (1980-1981) military-themed gay bar/restaurant; *Sapho* (1981) lesbian bar, damaged by arsonist's fire only two weeks after opening; *Together* (1981-1985) lesbian/gay bar/restaurant; *Private Eyes* (1985) lesbian/gay bar; *Together Again* (1985) lesbian/gay bar; *Bulldog* (c.1985-c.1987) lesbian/gay bar at 457 Church Street. Later *The 457* (c.1987-1997) gay bar. NOTE: This location has historical value as a brief and potentially first lesbian and gay precursor space specifically on Church Street before the future LGBTQ2+ Village was established. *TWO* gay male tabloid published there (1964-1966) and *Melody Room* (1964-1966) non-licensed gay and lesbian gathering space.
- B) *Neighbours* (1980-1986) gay-owned restaurant; *Windows* (1988-1994) gay-owned restaurant and gay bar. Later *Josephine Bistro* (1994-1996) gay-owned restaurant; *Slack Alice* (1997-2005) – rebranded *Slack's* (2005-2013) lesbian and women's bar at 562 Church Street.
- C) *Jingles* (c.1980s) piano bar/restaurant. Later *Woody's* (1989-Present) at 467 Church Street and *Sailor* (1994-Present) was opened as an adjacent and connected gay bar next door at 465 Church Street.
- D) *Vagara* (c.1980s-c.1990s) gay-owned restaurant at 475 Church Street.

Established in the area by 1988:

 **519** *519 Church Street Community Centre* (1976-2010) is a charitable, non-profit organization established in 1975 and now run by the City of Toronto as *519 Community Centre* (2010-Present).

 **511** *Dudley's Hardware* (1936-Present) at 511 Church Street.



The Steps (1984-2004) iconic social spot where many gay men would gather and socialize on southwest corner of Church and Wellesley Streets in front of Canadian coffee shop franchise Second Cup at 548 Church Street.

HF


Hassle Free Clinic originally a street clinic started in 1973 by Rochdale Free Clinic counsellors offering drug crisis counselling and medical treatment. Moved to 556 Church Street (upper) in 1980 offering HIV/AIDS education and prevention counselling and anonymous HIV testing when it became available in 1985. In 2004 the clinic moved to 66 Gerrard Street.

ACT

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) founded in 1983 by community activists and volunteers in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Formerly at 66 Wellesley Street (1983-1993), longstanding location at 399 Church Street (1993-2015), and at 543 Yonge Street (2015-Present). Also location of Toronto People with AIDS Foundation (PWA) founded in 1987 and at this location until 2015 before moving to 163 Queen Street East.

Club Baths

Club Toronto Baths (1973-2010) gay bathhouse at 231 Mutual Street.

 Early apartment buildings: A) City Park (1957-Present); B) Massey House (1958-Present); C) 50 Alexander - “KY Tower” (1965-Present); D) 100 Wellesley - “Stack a fag” (1971-Present).

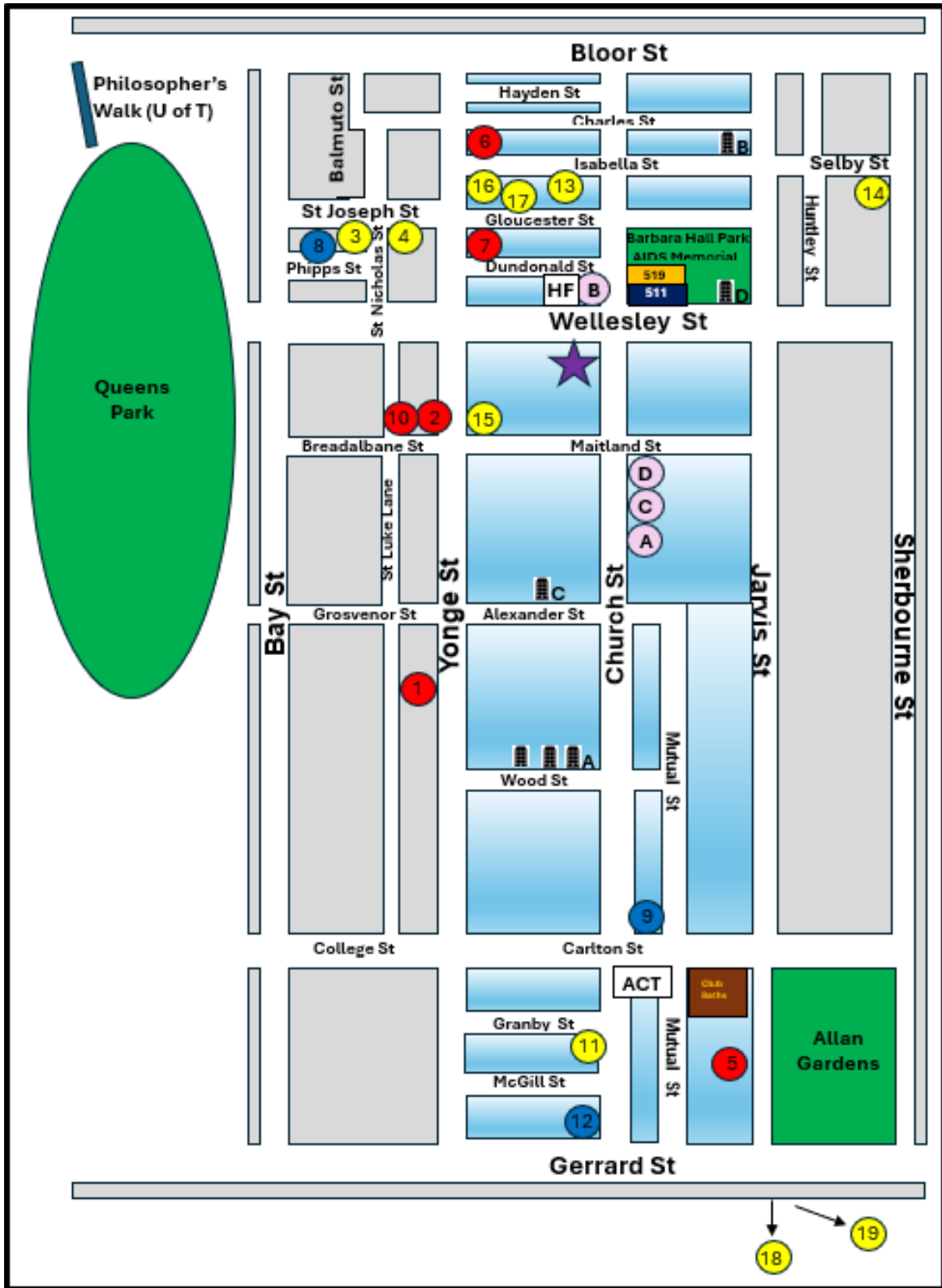


Image 52: Map of downtown Toronto indicating gay bar/dance clubs, gay spaces and gay-owned establishments between 1986-1988 most frequently mentioned by VGT members and oral history narrators and early built residential buildings. NOTE: This map is not exhaustive. The blue shaded area represents the current boundaries of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village between the same dates. Source: J. Gary Myers, 5 Apr 2024.

Among the many new bars, shops and restaurants to move to the Church-Wellesley area during the 1980s gentrification was one bar that was also ‘born gay’ and would become a new gay landmark. Located in the heart of The Village, *Woody’s* would help further transform the neighbourhood into a bustling gay district with a new type of ‘see and be seen on the street’ gay bar. Straight entrepreneur Alex Korn, “the son of the owner of a few suburban strip clubs,”⁴⁰⁵ went on to purchase his own properties, such as the Waldorf Astoria Apartments Hotel at 80 Charles Street East, and become co-owner of gay bar *Chaps* on Isabella Street with gay entrepreneur Ward Hagar. Hagar was originally hired by Korn as front-desk manager of the Waldorf Astoria where the first short-lived *Boots* gay bar opened in 1980 before moving to the *Boots & Bud’s* Selby Hotel location on Sherbourne Street. Korn teamed up with Hagar to open *Chaps* and sadly within a year of opening in 1983, Hagar died from an AIDS-related illness. Korn and his wife Dorry went on to become straight allies during the HIV/AIDS crisis opening a Muskoka retreat for people living with HIV/AIDS and holding benefits for the Toronto People with AIDS foundation at *Chaps*. In 1989, when Korn transformed *Jingles* (c.1980s), a gay piano bar, into *Woody’s*, the only other gay bars on Church Street were *The Barn* and *457* (previously *Tanks* and its various reincarnations). Steven Clegg was a previous general manager of *Woody’s* and is quoted in *Xtra* explaining what made *Woody’s* different from previous gay bars in Toronto. “When we opened [in June 1989], pretty much any gay bar wouldn’t have any window openings or anything like that,” Clegg says. “It would be blacked out or brick walls because of safety concerns. That was one of the things we did early on, open up the windows. People wouldn’t necessarily want to sit in them in the early days. They just didn’t want to be seen in a gay bar.

⁴⁰⁵ Rick Bébout, *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in the Bar, 1969-2000* (2003), <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1990b.htm> (accessed 19 Mar 2024).

And that was part of the evolution of Church Street. People were more willing to be seen.”⁴⁰⁶

Owner Korn made sure that regular patron donation baskets and proceeds from the bar continued to fund the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT). *Woody’s* became a popular gay community bar – and like *The Steps* at Second Cup – an anchor of gay commercial culture and visibility at the heart of TCWV.

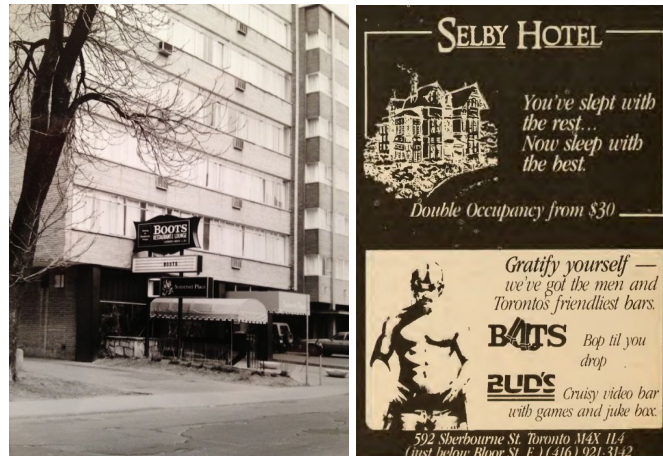


Image 53 (left): Boots Bar at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, 80 Charles St in 1981 before it moved as Boot’s & Bud’s at The Selby Hotel. Source: The ArQuives: Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives, “Gay Businesses: Boots Bar on Charles St.” Gay Businesses / Buildings After Bathhouse Raids, 1981, File No. 1991-177/29P(01) 11P, Photograph Collection Box 27.

Image 54 (right): Display Ad for Selby Hotel and Boots & Bud’s at 592 Sherbourne Street in Toronto, 1986. Source: *The Body Politic*, Feb 1986, page 24.



Image 55: Woody’s and Sailor at 467 Church Street, 2024. Source: Photo taken by author J. Gary Myers, 31 Mar 2024.

⁴⁰⁶ JP Larocque, “25 years of Woody’s: Looking back on the history of Toronto’s greatest gay bar,” *Xtra* (1 Oct 2014), <https://xtramagazine.com/power/25-years-of-woodys-64006> (accessed 21 Mar 2024).

The Gay '90s

If the 1980s was the decade of gentrification in TCWV, the 1990s was the decade of gay intensification and consumerism in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood. The gay '90s was also a paradoxical period of new beginnings, increasing rights and gained advantages mixed with extreme loss, pain and trauma. The Toronto bathhouse raids in 1981, subsequent protest marches, annual lesbian and gay Pride parades throughout the 1980s, and the amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code to include sexual orientation in 1986 brought a defining period of solidarity. TCWV provided space and place for this solidarity and celebration along with mourning and memorials during the HIV/AIDS crisis into the 1990s. It must be emphasized that the dark shadow of HIV/AIDS was ever-present at this time. Like the everyday fears and uncertainty of individuals around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, those feelings were no less felt for those affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In Canada when HIV/AIDS deaths peaked in 1995, HIV was the second leading cause of death for males aged 25-44, the first being suicides. Rates of HIV were 6 times higher in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal than anywhere else in Canada.⁴⁰⁷ Initially realizing there was no immediate cure for AIDS prompted the need for prevention education. The evolution of HIV testing, treatment and education about wearing condoms during sex was a radical change for gay men during same-sex sexual behaviour. Originally referred to as 'safe-sex' workshops, they became more accurately known as 'safer-sex' workshops to mitigate the risks while acknowledging they still existed. Places like the *519 Church Street Community Centre* provided

⁴⁰⁷ Dena L. Schanzer, "Trends in HIV/AIDS Mortality in Canada, 1987-1998," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (Mar 2003), Vol. 94, No. 2, 135-139. It was not until 1995 that HIV-related fatalities decreased by 66% for males and 43% for females. It is also important to note that HIV/AIDS data based on race and ethnicity in Ontario during the same time period may not fully represent the impact of HIV/AIDS based on the problematic collection of race statistics in Canada, the social determinants leading to the spread of HIV within these populations, and reporting category for some as "men who have sex with men" to avoid a sexual orientation category. See Sheryl Nestel, "Colour Coded Health Care: The Impact of Race and Racism on Canadians' Health," *Wellesley Institute* (Jan 2012).

opportunities for such workshops in TCWV. And a large number of gay men continued to conveniently live in the gaybourhood with new services and support in the area. The Hassle Free Clinic and other AIDS service organizations such as ACT were also conveniently located in the gaybourhood. Gays could now get educational, legal and health services along with joining gay social clubs and organizations in The Village, while also going shopping, dining and socializing in newly opened gay bars and dance clubs in one seemingly protected and accepting area.

Jeremy Vincent conveys how everything was ostensibly at your gay doorstep and seen as *gay space* by the 1990s:

Well, in the early '80s it wasn't really an established space. It didn't come until the later '80s. But when it moved in The Village there was that sense of totally, not being 'this is ours you [straights] stay out.' Not that. I don't mean that, but this was our space. If you want to come visit you're more than welcome to but it's our space. It was sort of that proprietorship or ownership of it. And I think people took to that and so all stores reflected that. There was Cumbrae's and Pusateri's.⁴⁰⁸ They got used a lot more. And there was a meat store there as well. Starts with an 'R', German name.⁴⁰⁹ I always bought a few things at the various stores in the neighbourhood because you want to support that. And you felt, it didn't matter what you were wearing or how you acted. It was like they, the stores, it was almost an appreciation that we could be ourselves in the neighbourhood but also we were being patrons of the stores. And so, we were buying things and so it was a reciprocal deal.⁴¹⁰

In the 1990s, TCWV was seen as a more cohesive, identifiable and safer space according to

Anonymous Interviewee #1:

The Village, like all these gay villages around the world, was a protective zone where you knew people were gay, who were there. You didn't have to guess. And you were in a safe environment, relatively, you know. You could still have yahoos out on the street doing things, but that's what I think attracted us all to the thing. I mean, it was only logical.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Cumbrae's was a butcher shop at 481 Church Street (1993-2017) and Pusateri's independent grocer at 497 Church Street.

⁴⁰⁹ Reither's Fine Foods International at 530 Church Street.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Jeremy Vincent, 16 Aug 2023.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #1, 15 Aug 2023.

It was a new experience of ‘village life’ in Toronto, of municipal gay citizenship. By 2000, Toronto’s gaybourhood had almost entirely transformed from a segregated gay ghetto to an accepted municipal community furthering political, economic, social and cultural development. Narrators and VGT members remember 1970s and 1980s Toronto for the devastation from institutional policies of discrimination and homophobia, morality raids, gay-bashing and HIV/AIDS-related deaths. This older generation of gay men recall the 1990s as a period of increased agency and ownership within a village community where they could endorse gay-friendly and gay-owned TCWV businesses. Sadly, it was also a time of more HIV/AIDS-related deaths. However, there were still privileges gained. Privileges for one group always come at a cost to others. TCWV became a gay residential *and* commercial enclave, a gay space of consumption and influence enjoyed by and catered to mostly gay, middle-class, cisgender, white men. With economic empowerment, legal gay rights and a new centralization of gay village citizenship, rifts started to appear within TCWV.

Neo-Queer is Here in a Gay Consumer World

The neo-queer generation also emerged during the gay ‘90s. Neo-queers adopted a critical approach stemming from Queer Nation’s radical roots against heterosexual privilege and the queer theorists who took up the cause in academic circles. Although local groups like Queer Nation Toronto and the broader chapters of Queer Nation disbanded in the 1990s, queer theory took hold and challenged a binary generation to confront straight privilege. The 1990s marked the origins of broadening our understanding of the fluidity of sexuality and gender. Social and queer theorist, Michael Warner popularized the term “heteronormativity”⁴¹² in 1991 – drawing

⁴¹² Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text*, 1991, No. 29 (1991), 3.

from the earlier work of feminist writer Adrienne Rich on “compulsory heterosexuality”⁴¹³ – questioning the view that women and men are assumed to be heterosexual within a gender binary. Warner urged “lesbian and gay intellectuals” to continue challenging “the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies.” He observed a “new ‘queer theory’ wave” that he was part of in which “a new style of politics has been pioneered by lesbians and gays, little understood outside of queer circles.”⁴¹⁴ Warner points to the fallacy of the heteronormative dictate of a “breeder-identity”⁴¹⁵ to reproduce – presupposing straight people only have sex to reproduce, that lesbian and gay parents do not exist and that sex always means monogamous coupling.

Warner also cautions against seeing all forms of identity as parallel forms of identity, including “alliance politics” of race, class, and gender. Doing so overlooks the multiplicity and complexity of identities and intersections within each of these categories.⁴¹⁶ Warner extends this caution to the multicultural “Rainbow Theory” and identity politics of gender, race, nationality, social origin, caste and religion that emerged in the 1980s focused on representational identities that now included sexuality. He states that Rainbow Theory “aspires to representational politics of inclusion and a drama of authentic embodiment.”⁴¹⁷ Warner suggests that when identity becomes presupposed as inherent and fixed, they can be “hyper-allegorized” to rigidly indicate differences and reinforce inequality. He recognized that although identity categories are

⁴¹³ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1978), 631-660.

⁴¹⁴ Warner (1991), 6.

⁴¹⁵ Warner (1991), 9.

⁴¹⁶ In 1989, critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to understand how race, class, gender among other individual characteristics reinforce social and institutional inequalities. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989, Issue 1, Article 8, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8> (accessed 26 Mar 2024).

⁴¹⁷ Warner (1991), 12.

important for marginalized groups to work together in the common cause for rights, queer identity could shift the self-identification of gay or lesbian out of a minority rights framework to imagine a broader collective of queer non-normative resistance. A change occurred for some who formerly identified as gay or lesbian and now identified as queer. They began to use queer to connect with others feeling a “mutual distaste for mainstream culture, alienation from gay and lesbian society...while also speaking against the creeping conservatism of an assimilationist gay and lesbian mainstream.”⁴¹⁸ These neo-queers no longer prioritized certain identities (gay or lesbian) and experiences (gay culture) over others and connected with broader non-normative groups such as punk, goth, rave or hip-hop in “alternative” queer clubs, particularly Toronto’s *queercore* subculture in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴¹⁹

Almost bookending the 1990s, Warner went on to publish another seminal work in queer theory in 1999 to critique ‘mainstream’ gays and lesbians who reignited the earlier homophile-style focus on assimilation and the pursuit of “normalcy” in their lives. As an example, Warner saw the push for same-sex marriage as undermining diversity and queer individuality. His book expanded a definition of queer to be inclusive of *anyone* non-conforming to heteronormative social expectations: “The term ‘queer’ is used in a deliberately capacious way in this book, as it is in much queer theory, in order to suggest how many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture.”⁴²⁰ Warner criticizes gays and lesbians who imitate family structures consisting of monogamous married couples having children. He points to gays and lesbians

⁴¹⁸ Curran Nault, *Queercore: queer punk media subculture* (London, Routledge, 2018), 16-18.

⁴¹⁹ Queercore was a queer and punk subculture started in Toronto in the 1980s that were drawn by the underground fanzine or “zine” *J.D.s* that “declared “civil war” on the punk and gay and lesbian mainstreams.” See Curran Nault, *Queercore: queer punk media subculture* (London, Routledge, 2018). For a further look at the history of gay disco and queer clubs see Ken Gelder, “Bar Scenes and Club Cultures: Sociality, excess, utopia,” *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London, Routledge, 2007), 47-65.

⁴²⁰ Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 38.

adhering to gender expectations of presenting as ‘masculine men’ and ‘feminine women’ including those following workplace cultural expectations of ‘professional’ dress and behaviour.

Warner goes on to describe the crux of the criticism that started to appear against TCWV and other gay enclaves by the late 1990s. Gays began to “increasingly understand themselves as belonging to a market niche rather than to a counterpublic.”⁴²¹ The commodification of gay villages like Toronto’s was designed around the inclusion of specific types of gay identity within a consumer culture. The filtering of a certain type of gay culture into mainstream society was viewed, at worst, as erasing, and at best, ignoring queer individuals for the sake of following normative capitalist values and stereotypes. Media images on television found in popular 1990s series such as *Ellen* or *Will & Grace*, and commercial advertising or corporate involvement in gay bars and at Pride events were criticized for ‘mainstream’ stereotypes that appeared to promote straight ideals of gay identity. Neo-queers did not adhere to mainstream. Social and cultural scholar Lisa Duggan built on Warner’s critique and used the term “homonormativity”⁴²² to describe gays and lesbians conforming to these stereotypes and adopting heteronormative consumerist ideals within neoliberalism’s free market economy. Like Warner, Duggan criticized a “depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”⁴²³

As TCWV became more frequented by white, middle-class gay men in the 1990s who had greater economic means to sustain The Village, their greater visibility and influence shaped the cultural and social landscape of these spaces throughout the decade. Within this gay space there was a tendency to prioritize certain identities, appearance and experiences over others to reinforce a specific gay cultural meaning of place that alienated those who did not fit into such

⁴²¹ Michael Warner (1999), 147.

⁴²² Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2004), 50.

⁴²³ Duggan, 50.

prioritizations. Homonormative ideals of domesticity and consumerism continued to take place in TCWV despite the concerns and marginalization of queer voices. Gay-owned and gay-friendly shops, restaurants and bars were being sustained by gay patrons (particularly white, middle-class gay men) willing to spend their capital on clothing, grooming, household products, dinners, dates, drinking and dancing – all available in The Village.

A particular gay cultural trend of consumption in TCWV in the mid-1990s and early 2000s was for fashionable underwear. Gay retail and adult sex goods store *Priape* moved into The Village in 1998 to tap into this underwear niche on top of selling their other goods. Gay men had already been buying up a variety of ‘sexy’ briefs and boxers to dance at weekly Sunday afternoon underwear parties at places like *The Barn* and *Black Eagle*. John M. Clum, who wrote several books exploring gay culture in theatre and film, recognized a new consumer focus of many gay men in the United States in the 1990s that had also spread to Toronto in which “aestheticism” was “replaced by hedonism.” Clum states: “The most displayed gay cultural product is not a play, musical, painting, ballet, or symphony, but underwear.”⁴²⁴

One narrator, Anonymous Interviewee #2, who moved to Toronto and has worked in TCWV since the 1990s, fondly remembers the underwear parties:

Sundays, the underwear party. And you’d be surprised on a Sunday how many men would go there and get in their underwear, and it was like a Saturday night. It was unbelievable. You’d have hundreds of men just dancing on a Sunday afternoon and you wouldn’t even realize that it was an afternoon. It felt like a nighttime. And yeah, it was the best. It was. I don’t see any of that ever anymore. The way that men were intertwining. It was more cruisy. The men were more eager to meet. There were no apps [like Grindr]. People would mingle. People would be on the dance floor. It was just a different time. The drugs were different

⁴²⁴ John M. Clum, *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* (New York, Palgrave / St. Martins, 2001), 25. See also Mark Simpson, “Gay Dream Believer: Inside the Gay Underwear Cult,” in *Anti-Gay*, ed. Simpson (London, Freedom Editions, 1996). Simpson was critical of the American gay community for promoting gay stereotypes that imposed a conformity on what a gay lifestyle was supposed to look like, thereby stifling development and suppression of diversity within gay communities.

back then too. And yeah, we were a bunch of men having a good time. That's all it was about.⁴²⁵

Despite some 'hedonistic' tendencies for gay men to dance at gay bars in stylish underwear, many were also coupling in long-term relationships – even doing both at the same time. When efforts were made in the 1990s to make same-sex marriage legal, some lesbian couples and gay couples were living together as if they were married, as they had long before gay liberation,⁴²⁶ but now with greater visibility and social acceptance. Some were even having commitment ceremonies and spending money on invitations, venues, DJs, catering and cakes along with tuxedos and gowns to have all the trappings found in preparations and celebrations of a heteronormative wedding. By the mid-1990s, the battle for same-sex marriage by lesbian and gays was in full swing in contradiction to the anti-heteronormative, anti-homonormative protestations of neo-queers. Neo-queers objected to what was perceived as lesbians and gays reinforcing heterosexual ideals of relationships and privileged capitalist values.

One gay apologist was seeking to show how gay men were virtually the same as straights in their desires for domesticity and mainstream living. British author, political commentator and former editor of *The New Republic* magazine, Andrew Sullivan, was garnering a popular following, media attention and influence with his article "Here Comes the Groom: A (conservative) case for gay marriage."⁴²⁷ By providing a gay conservative angle to the views of the queer left in favour of same-sex marriage, Sullivan was publicly revealing that not all gays

⁴²⁵ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁴²⁶ See Korinek (2018); Chauncey (1994); see also Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1991); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, (New York, Plume, 1992); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York, Routledge, 1993); Victor Macías González, "The Transnational Homophile Movement and the Development of Domesticity in Mexico City's Homosexual Community, 1930-70," *Gender and History*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2014), 519-544.

⁴²⁷ Andrew Sullivan, "Here Comes the Groom: A (conservative) case for gay marriage," *The New Republic*, Vol. 201, No. 9 (28 Aug 1989).

and lesbians should be seen as anti-straight activists with radical views and behaviours. Sullivan states, “[F]or many other gays – my guess, a majority – while they don’t deny the importance of rebellion 20 years ago and are grateful for what was done, there’s now the sense of a new opportunity. A need to rebel has quietly ceded to a desire to belong.”⁴²⁸

In 1995, Sullivan’s book *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* presented a significant work to the public debates about anti-sodomy laws, gays in the military and same-sex marriage in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Sullivan argues in favour of normalization and acceptance of gays within mainstream society while maintaining cultural difference. He takes a counter-position to the queer radical and rebellious approach against marriage to surmise why gays have not been accepted into mainstream society: “I believe strongly that marriage should be made available to everyone, in a politics of strict public neutrality. But within this model, there is plenty of scope for cultural difference...Perhaps it is the experience of rebellion that prompts homosexual culture to be peculiarly resistant to attempts to guide it to be useful or instructive or productive.”⁴²⁹

Where & How to be Gay

As neo-queers continued to rebel and avoid mainstream gays and lesbians in The Village, there were also gays who also did not always feel as welcomed in the growing gay-oriented and predominantly white establishments in The Village. Although organizing identity groups like *Hola*, *Zami*, *Gay Asians Toronto*, *Black CAP* or *Khush* provided opportunities for meeting at the

⁴²⁸ Sullivan, 22.

⁴²⁹ Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York and Toronto, Random House, [1995], First Vintage Books Edition, November 1996), 203-204. Sullivan was later criticized and mostly shunned from the media spotlight for his views in *The New Republic* 1994 article, “Race and I.Q.” Sullivan’s argument about the relationship between race and I.Q. scores was criticized for justifying racism and racial inequality. See Ben Smith, “I’m Still Reading Andrew Sullivan. But I Can’t Defend Him,” *The New York Times* (30 Aug 2020) <https://www-nytimes-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/2020/08/30/business/media/im-still-reading-andrew-sullivan-but-i-cant-defend-him.html> (accessed 28 Mar 2024).

519 Church Street Community Centre, Anthony Mohamed recalls some racialized groups of gay men sometimes went outside the Church-Wellesley area to socialize:

I can tell you, for example Zami, when we'd go to meetings [at the 519] we'd make a point of going outside of Church Street afterwards for ice cream. We wouldn't stay on Church Street because we wanted to feel comfortable, and we can feel more comfortable in other parts of the city. I can't remember where we walked to. I remember Greg's Ice Cream, but anyway, we walked to somewhere outside Church-Wellesley Village.⁴³⁰

However, Anthony points out that despite sometimes going outside The Village, a variety of organizing identity groups and LGBTQ2+ individuals did go to places like *The Steps* and TCWV gay bars, but saw them as more than drinking spaces:

Back in the days of the bar, the bars where people met, and to be clear, the bars were more than about hookups. It was our community centres outside of [going to a place just for drinking and hooking up]. A lot of the best political organization happened at the bars. Be it through those conversations, the political organizing and the discussions, and coming out to family. They [TCWV bars] were support groups in many ways, and we talked about it. Some people drank, some people didn't, but there wasn't that pressure of getting drunk or drinking even. It was more about connecting with people, whether it was the bartender, or the cute guy, or the group of mixed friends...I think anybody who has multiple identities would experience both inclusion and exclusion among Church Street. For example, *The Steps*. It was great. You'd always go get your coffee at Second Cup, sit on *The Steps*, cruise guys and chit chat, and it was a real mixed crowd that were on *The Steps*. Women were there, trans people were there, sex workers. I love that mix of people, and we felt like we were creating a village. But we didn't call it that. It just felt like we were creating something. There were those incidents of inclusion. Exclusion, honestly, it came more in way of cold shoulders, looks, comments that were insensitive to culture. Micro-aggressions that happen every day among people of colour.⁴³¹

The tendency to see a particular type of 'gay appearance' in TCWV is recalled by Anonymous Interviewee #3. He remembers his group of friends had a name for a style adopted by gay men along with the focus on gay physique in the 1990s and early 2000s that was popular

⁴³⁰ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023. Anthony was referring to the Greg's Ice Cream location at 208 Bloor Street West (1981-2020) across from Royal Ontario Museum.

⁴³¹ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

at *Woody's*:

I used to go to Woody's. We called it [amused laughter] 'The Pink Pretty Sweater Club.' They used to have all these contests, best leg contest, best ass contest. A few of us thought that certain men who'd go there would be very precious [amused laughter] ...Hair in the right place, eyebrows, whatever. And so that's why I think that's our definition.⁴³²

Racialized gay men like Andre Goh and Patrick Brown, who did not seem to fit the stereotyped 'gay appearance' in The Village, sought other spaces and establishments outside TCWV. Gatherings were either created among themselves or 'alternative' spaces welcomed racialized gays, lesbians and queers throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Andre states:

Church Street in and of itself, and the bars and clubs and, as you say, the establishment, that was not a space where I felt welcome at the time. Yeah, there just wasn't enough of anybody who looked like me. There were no spaces for you if you were East, Southeast or South Asian at the time. We just didn't have any spaces. We created our own. We had no choice.

Patrick recalls some more welcoming queerer spaces outside TCWV:

We went to a lot of really interesting spaces in the '90s that provided a lot of really amazing memories, meeting people, experiences. There were a lot of after-hours clubs. They were underground because some of them sold alcohol [amused laughter]. What was interesting about a lot of them is you'd hear through other people. The doors were in these alleyways and you'd have to have a code to get in [amused laughter]. You'd get in and the music was amazing. The crowd was amazing. Interestingly, it was predominantly white, but you felt very welcomed. It wasn't like the Church and Wellesley area where it felt exclusive.

Patrick talks about the importance of one downtown space just outside TCWV, Club Manhattan, that welcomed gay Black men by the 1990s.⁴³³ Patrick mentions the difference it made from going out to gay spaces in the 1980s and a gradual change in the 1990s when he started to feel more a part of the gay community:

In the early days, I really felt as if we were just tolerated. Because this was the gay community, and we're part of the gay community, but I didn't really feel a

⁴³² Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sept 2023.

⁴³³ Club Manhattan was an urban music dance club in the 1990s to early 2000s at 19 Balmuto Street with weekly Saturday nights for mostly Black, gay, bisexual and non-labelling men who have sex with men.

part of it. By the '90s, for me was when I started to feel like we're a part of something. Definitely not in the '80s. I think that's why [Club] Manhattan grew because a lot of gay Black men felt like we were just tolerated because they would ask us for ID more, the age ID more, in other words, to try and weed us out if possible. Okay, I felt a part of the gay community in the broadest sense, but feeling like you are part of this where everybody was like, "Yeah, yeah, come on in. This is a safe space." No, in the '80s, no. But by the '90s, things are definitely starting to change...In spite of a lot of other things, the Church and Wellesley area, I believe, was and still is to a huge degree impactful in terms of a sense of community. Like everywhere else, it wasn't perfect, but that's what we had. You have to just make the best of what you had. And looking back, I have no regrets.

How does a diversity of gay men like Andre and Patrick still feel a common sense of gay community, a common sense of gay culture and gay identity? In 2012, queer theorist David Halperin reflected back on a journey from the earlier homophile movement through gay liberation to just past the first decade of the twenty-first-century in his book *How to be Gay*. The book is an attempt to understand gay culture. *How to be Gay* is based on a course of the same name exploring the history and theory of sexuality that Halperin taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.⁴³⁴ The book's focus (as was for the course) is on gay male subjectivity "with how men *who already are gay* acquire a conscious identity, a common culture, a particular outlook on the world, a shared sense of self, an awareness of belonging to a specific social group, and a distinctive sensibility or subjectivity."⁴³⁵ Halperin suggests gay culture cannot simply be reduced to gay sexuality itself. Rather, gay culture is developed through "*gay men's characteristic relation to mainstream culture* for what it might reveal about certain structures of feeling distinctive to gay men" (emphasis by Halperin).⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ The course created controversy in 2000 by right-wing politicians in Michigan who failed in an attempt to veto course offerings in the state's public universities.

⁴³⁵ David M. Halperin, *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 6.

⁴³⁶ Halperin, 5.

Halperin argues that heterosexual cultural objects and discourses are given gay meaning as a “recoding of straight culture”⁴³⁷ and transformed into gay cultural practices. For example, the significance of traditional gay male culture evolved from features of “gay male femininity, diva-worship, aestheticism, snobbery, drama, adoration of glamour, caricature of women, and obsession with the figure of the mother.”⁴³⁸ Importantly, how these features are given meaning that transcends race, class or ethnicity. “[W]e are concerned not with *kinds of people* but with *kinds of discourse* and *kinds of interaction*, irrespective of who happens to be the subject of them” (emphasis by Halperin).⁴³⁹ This also means there is not a single gay male culture shared by all gay men, but many overlapping variations within different gay communities around the world based on common elements of discourse and interaction reinterpreted from one’s own mainstream culture.

Also, according to Halperin, gay culture “is not something that you have to be gay in order to enjoy – or to comprehend.”⁴⁴⁰ Perhaps this is why the more recent “hetrification” of gay spaces by straight people and popularity in RuPaul’s Drag Race by mainstream viewers are transforming traditional gay spaces. Gay culture is now being negotiated between and across straight, gay and intergenerational groups as meanings vary within these groups based on Schein’s “underlying assumptions” in his theory of the three levels of culture (see Chapter One).

Despite this contemporary adaptation of supposed gay culture, neo-queers of the 1990s were not willing to adopt the mainstream elements of gay culture as they continued to challenge heteronormative influences. Since not all neo-queers wanted to be part of gay life in TCWV, a vibrant construction of queer space and communities were forming into the early 2000s in other

⁴³⁷ Halperin, 425.

⁴³⁸ Halperin, 38.

⁴³⁹ Halperin, 136.

⁴⁴⁰ Halperin, 15.

parts of the city for those seeking something alternative to The Village – particularly on Queen Street West in Toronto. This alternative space became known as “Queer Street West.”⁴⁴¹

A United Fight for Our Rights?

Queers may not have frequented TCWV as much as the predominant gay male community but they continued to join with lesbian and gay activists along with ethno-racial organizing identities to strengthen political movements seeking human rights protections, particularly in Toronto.⁴⁴² However, queer activists’ political efforts in Ontario and across Canada throughout the 1990s were overshadowed by sexual orientation rights claims by larger organizations such as the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (CLGRO) and Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE). Queers were critical of the primary focus on the fight for same-sex partner employment benefits, same-sex couples’ right to adopt children, and same-sex marriage – all strengthened by earlier years of gay and lesbian organizing to address discrimination based on sexual orientation in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁴³ As such, the supposed victory of achieving same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005 was not unanimously accepted by all within LGBTQ+ communities. Canadian LGBTQ political studies scholar Manon Tremblay explains, “Essentially, same-sex marriage only serves people who are in a position to take advantage of such expanded recognition. It also maintains the idea of heterosexual marriage as a ‘norm’ to which queer people should aspire.”⁴⁴⁴ As the neo-queer generation saw beyond the binaries within sexuality and gender, a broader inclusiveness was moving beyond the earlier militant focus in the struggle against HIV/AIDS and ‘in your face’ fighting back against gay or

⁴⁴¹ Heritage Toronto, “Fifty Years of Queer Street West,” (31 May 2023), <https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore-learn/queer-street-west-toronto/> (accessed 1 Apr 2024).

⁴⁴² David Rayside, “Queer Advocacy in Ontario,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, Manon Tremblay (ed.), (Vancouver, Toronto, UBC Press, 2015), 89.

⁴⁴³ Manon Tremblay, ed., “Introduction” in *Queer Mobilizations*, 21.

⁴⁴⁴ Tremblay, 22.

queer-bashing. Queer activism into the 2000s turned “to combat state censorship on gender diversity, trans identities, and non-heteronormative sexualities; and more”⁴⁴⁵ adding to the growing LGBTQ+ acronym.

Samuel Lopez reflects on his journey from identifying as a gay man to becoming an activist co-founding *Hola*, a filmmaker and now “two-spirits” – working within queer communities since the 1990s. He remembers the sometimes-tenuous relationship of many gay men with queer individuals. Lopez views the corporatization of spaces like Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village within broader issues of territorial and economic privilege, recalling earlier days of LGBTQ+ activism and community that he thinks should be kept alive but are now seemingly ignored by many older gay men. Lopez reflects:

We have done that before. And we should take advantage of those moments and start gathering with a political mind. Start thinking that when everything was community-oriented, we were going somewhere. When we turned into corporations is when things totally fucked up...I don’t have to drink Budweiser or pop Viagra to go to Pride, but it looks like I have to. And none of that comes back to the community. And we don’t give a shit...I could see ourselves where we were at the beginning, 1993. We had presence. All those achievements. For you to have your rights and for me to have my rights, you don’t have to lose any part of your rights. It is not a pie. Human rights are not a pie.

Lopez uses an analogy representing discrimination to stress the importance of working together – even within LGBTQ2+ communities like TCWV where we may need to find a new way to organize:

It’s a question of discrimination. And we discriminate. We do that with coins. We separate quarters from loonies and toonies.⁴⁴⁶ We discriminate, and that is how we organize ourselves. But at the end of the day, when you’re going to pay \$3.50, you have to pull a toonie, a loonie, and two quarters, right? So, you put them together to pay. Teaches me that separating is not the solution for anything. We are together allowing your expression and mine at the same place being different. So, it’s a question of coexistence...but we don’t do that. And so maybe we need a new movement.

⁴⁴⁵ Tremblay, 11.

⁴⁴⁶ A loonie and a toonie are colloquial terms for Canadian one dollar and two dollar coins, respectively.

Whether a new movement will emerge is yet to be seen, but a further splintering within LGBTQ2+ Communities (as will be discussed in Chapter 5) may lead to TCWV becoming even less relevant to younger queers or a completely different space as older gay men from the binary generation disappear. The 1990s saw the rise of LGBTQ2+ identity groups in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis and beginnings of a neo-queer generation. The closure of older gay spaces in the Yonge-Wellesley area and the opening of newer gay spaces in the Church-Wellesley area in the 1980s helped secure this neighbourhood as the supposed hub of Toronto's LGBT communities, with the 519 Church Street Community Centre holding its place as a gay anchor since the 1970s.

The commodification of TCWV in the 1990s by predominantly white, middle-class gay men presented a double-edged sword. The mainstreaming of gay identity brought greater visibility and acceptance to some in The Village. It also brought criticism by neo-queers against homonormativity and a feeling of exclusion by those who did not fit the perceived TCWV mold of white, middle-class gay man. This highlighted the tensions between heteronormative gay assimilation and a call for radical queer authenticity with recognition of diversity beyond The Village. The emphasis on normative ideals within TCWV contributed to the marginalization of those within a *neo-queer generation* who did not conform to notions of sexuality, gender or appearance upheld by a gay, *binary generation*. This prompted neo-queers to begin finding and establishing queer spaces outside the gaybourhood. In doing so, they were paving the way for a *fluid generation* to build upon earlier ideas of difference and visibility in spaces outside Toronto's Church-Wellesley gaybourhood.

The next chapter will focus on how this research is informed by a knowledge mobilization strategy of community engagement. A key element of this research is to incorporate

community engagement to inform the oral history research. A community engagement workshop provided feedback and research themes to prioritize questions for this project's oral history interviews. Answers to these prioritized questions will be highlighted in the next chapter. A further goal of this project is to encourage historians to utilize knowledge mobilization strategies such as a community engagement workshop. The next chapter presents how community engagement was beneficial to this project and how a community engagement workshop can inform other oral history research projects.

Chapter 4: Community Engagement and Gay Memories

Let's Talk Workshop

How does a researcher conducting a community engagement workshop handle an older, angry gay male workshop participant? The answer is with a professional community engagement workshop facilitator and workshop participants who are graciously understanding. I was thankful at our workshop to have both. The workshop began with a land acknowledgement to show respect and reconciliation for the original Indigenous Peoples of the land on which the workshop took place. Introductions were made and I read a brief synopsis of the planned oral history research project to the participants that included the following:

History is about change over time, and like all neighbourhoods, change will continue to come to Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village, some quicker than others, and the neighbourhood has and will continue to change as people that use them change and age, and new generations come of age – and the physical, residential, services, and business environments also continue to change.

This is the major reason for my interest in capturing the stories of a generation – specifically gay men – who were among the first groups of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans and queer individuals to experience the human rights and freedoms that made discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal in Canada in 1996 after the long struggle over the many decades of those before.

They were also the last to go from having a supposed mental disorder one day to finally being de-pathologized seemingly overnight but not quite completely until 1987 when homosexuality was no longer medically diagnosed as a disorder. This variety of individuals helped make The Village a place that contributed to the socio-cultural and political influences that helped the neighbourhood thrive in the late 1980s and 90s – and helps it continue to thrive today.

Although I anticipate, welcome and encourage further research collaborations with those from the broader LGBTQ2+ communities, my oral history project will currently focus on older gay men who are affiliated with Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village for two reasons:

The first is the challenge that for many years the Village was shaped by patriarchy & systemic structures that gave many gay men the privilege of access and influence to build networks and gay spaces that were considered marginalizing to lesbian, trans, and racialized peoples. This does not imply, as we know, that only

white, cisgender men occupied or were influential in these spaces. Rather, white, gay, cisgender men were considered the main demographic for many years.

The second reason is to focus on this particular generation of gay men to explore specific hindsight perspectives about this view to provide a reflective opportunity to address this history in a more contemporary light as the Village, and this cohort of gay men have also developed and changed over time.

It is with this in mind that future research collaborations can hopefully draw from this current history project to broaden and address the more recent narratives coming out of this current project.⁴⁴⁷

After I read the synopsis, my research approach was promptly and loudly criticized by one participant for focusing exclusively on oral history interviews of older gay men. I knew the angry workshop participant had openly self-identified and was known as a prominent gay man in the community. He was also known for his commendable activism in supporting the gay community after the bathhouse raids by Toronto Police on *The Barracks* in 1978, *Hot Tub Club* in 1979 and *Operation Soap* bathhouse raids in 1981. This participant will not be named to respect his identity.

He shouted angrily at the workshop, “How can you focus only on gay men when there are others in the LGBTQ2+ community who were also part of the Church-Wellesley Village?” It was a valid criticism. I answered, “I’m focusing only on older gay men to get their unique perspectives about their experiences of gay Toronto as a starting point for the research but this does not preclude future research to include lesbians, bisexuals, trans, queer, two-spirit and even straight individuals. As a gay man myself, I also want to draw from my own experiences for the research to compare with theirs.”

⁴⁴⁷ Excerpts describing oral history research project to workshop participants at Community Engagement Workshop presented by researcher/author J. Gary Myers on 24 May 2023 at Elizabeth Beaudin Conference Room, The Lexington, Toronto, ON.

He continued, “We’ve heard enough from gay men!” Again, another valid criticism, but seemingly dismissive of my research interests. It also overlooked the variety of gay men I planned to interview. Racialized gay male voices of those already overshadowed by the supposed demographic that the older, angry gay man was alluding to in his comment, and to which he himself belonged – white, middle class gay male. Our facilitator confidently and calmly suggested to include this question for discussion within the workshop’s break-out and collective discussion groups. Despite the invitation to raise this question in group discussions, this issue did not come up again within any of the groups – and the angry gay man participated in the workshop until it was completed. At the end of the workshop, an older, self-identified lesbian participant known for work in Toronto’s heritage sector voiced aside to me and the facilitator, “Why so angry? Why so angry? A researcher has to start somewhere.”

Useful Before Research Begins

Knowledge mobilization makes research useful to society. It is a process of translating, disseminating and applying research ideas and findings with insights from a variety of interest holders – particularly non-academic – to create a positive impact from knowledge. Practicing oral history is similar to practicing knowledge mobilization. Like knowledge mobilizers, it is a process where oral history researchers develop relationships. In oral history, it is between interviewer and a variety of interviewees to convey knowledge about the past. In knowledge mobilization, community relationships are formed to hopefully contribute to benefits (i.e., make impact) beyond the academy. Researchers using knowledge mobilization strategies also develop relationships between the researcher and a variety of community collaborators who can contribute to research impact outside academia. But oral history is not the only way that historians can create impact beyond what is often considered the typical academic endpoint of research – dissemination.

Similar to traditional modes of oral history, knowledge mobilization also includes methods where relationships are developed with various interested parties. In oral histories both the researcher and interviewee(s) contribute to a shared project, develop a trusting, ethical, and ongoing relationship and are invested in the dissemination of the research project to the public. However, knowledge mobilization includes a key differentiator from oral history by going beyond the supposed ‘endpoint’ of dissemination by gathering community input *before the research begins*. Incorporating knowledge mobilization strategies into oral history (or any history research) means listening to and collaborating with non-academic interested parties up front – again before the research begins – to inform the researcher about potential interests and priorities of associated communities and help formulate some of the valued questions to ask. Working with those community partners beforehand can also lead to working with them after dissemination to facilitate the uptake (i.e., use) of research and connect it to real world projects. It can also lead to raising public awareness or policy change that creates meaningful impact and maximized social benefit.

Founding editor of the international journal *Evidence & Policy*, Annette Boaz and colleagues published a valuable definition of interested parties or community partners (previously referred to as “stakeholders”) as “individuals, organizations or communities that have a direct interest in the process and outcomes of a project, research or policy endeavor.”⁴⁴⁸ Within knowledge mobilization communities and among oral historians there is a call to share

⁴⁴⁸ Annette Boaz et al., “How to engage stakeholders in research: design principles to support improvement,” *Health Research Policy and Systems*, Vol. 16, No. 60 (2018), 5. Note: the term ‘stakeholders’ is now seen to have a negative connotation to many Indigenous peoples and has more recently been avoided by those in the field of knowledge mobilization. See Mark Reed, “Should we banish the word “stakeholder”?” (27 Mar 2023) <https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/post/why-we-shouldn-t-banish-the-word-stakeholder> (accessed 9 Apr 2024).

knowledge, which in the process dismantles boundaries of power between researchers and researched and creates inclusivity of knowledge production and stakeholder participation.

Despite the rocky start to the community engagement workshop, my doctoral research on gay nostalgia was made clear to participants about observing the changes in gay Toronto and Toronto's "gay village" and evolving intergenerational identity transitions. I actively engaged with interested parties affiliated with Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village to inform this research project before starting oral history interviews. This demonstrates how history researchers can go beyond oral history and practice knowledge mobilization. However, before providing further details about the community engagement workshop it is important to distinguish what is meant by both oral history and knowledge mobilization.

Oral History

The field of oral history has developed since American historian and journalist Allan Nevins and his colleagues at Columbia University contributed to the modern concept of oral history in the 1940s and created an oral history program at Columbia University in 1948, continuing today as Columbia University's Center for Oral History.⁴⁴⁹ Although conveying history in oral form is not new – history has been passed down by word of mouth among generations throughout humanity – Nevins's technique within the discipline of history, of recording (by shorthand-notetaking) the memories of politicians, business leaders, and government representatives in the United States, was formally adopted by many historians who began using tape recorders to conduct oral history "bottom up" interviews of "everyday people" since the 1940s.⁴⁵⁰ The Oral History Association was established in the U.S. in 1966 along with

⁴⁴⁹ Columbia University, *Oral History Archives* (2022), <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/ccoh.html> (accessed 9 Apr 2024).

⁴⁵⁰ The University of Texas at El Paso, *Institute of Oral History* (2022), <https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/oral-history/about/what-is-oral-history.html> (accessed 9 Apr 2024).

the Oral History Society in the United Kingdom in 1973, and broadened to include international oral historians, many now using contemporary digital technologies to conduct a broad range of oral history interviews across the globe. Oral historian Donald A. Ritchie succinctly defines the field in *Doing Oral History*:

Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization or other form of public presentation. Recordings, transcripts, catalogs, photographs and related documentary materials can also be posted on the Internet. Oral history does not include random taping, such as President Richard Nixon's surreptitious recording of his White House conversations, nor does it refer to recorded speeches, wiretapping, personal diaries on tape, or other sound recordings that lack the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee.⁴⁵¹

In Canada, in conjunction with public history programs, an early example of organizations incorporating oral history techniques in historical research was the Multicultural History Society of Ontario established in 1976. As a not-for-profit educational and archive institute, it focuses on immigrant, ethnic and Indigenous narratives.⁴⁵² Other examples include The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) founded in 2006 at Concordia University,⁴⁵³ and the Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg in 2012.⁴⁵⁴ Like knowledge mobilization, the development of oral history as knowledge production has created broader public accessibility and inclusion, along with the potential for change in public policy.

⁴⁵¹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 2nd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

⁴⁵² Multicultural History Society of Ontario (2024), <https://mhso.ca/wp/> (accessed 22 Apr 2024).

⁴⁵³ COHDS-CHORN (2024), <https://storytelling.concordia.ca/about-us-2/> (accessed 22 Apr 2024).

⁴⁵⁴ Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg (2024), <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/foundation/support-uwinnipeg/oral-history-centre.html#:~:text=The%20OHC%20was%20established%20in%20community%20outreach%2C%20and%20capacity%20building>. (accessed 22 Apr 2024).

Although knowledge mobilization and oral history share similarities with broad accessibility to research and potential public policy influence, there are distinct differences.

Knowledge Mobilization

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada describes knowledge mobilization as “an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users.”⁴⁵⁵

Knowledge mobilization is a collaborative and multidirectional process. It occurs among researchers, knowledge brokers and those intermediaries who develop relationships between academics and non-academic community-based partners. The goal is to improve the use of research and influence policy and practice, including creating public educational tools for social innovation and for creating research impact.

Research Impact scholar Julie Bayley includes “something preserved” among the categories of evaluating the types of research that can create impact along with something “new,” “changed” or “prevented.” Among many examples of what constitutes research impact she includes “preserving, memorialising, commemorating or conserving heritage.”⁴⁵⁶ From a specifically academic research perspective such as history, Knowledge Mobilization scholar David Phipps and colleagues explain, “*Knowledge mobilization helps make academic research accessible to non-academic audiences and supports collaborations between academic and non-academic*

⁴⁵⁵ Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, “What is knowledge mobilization?” (2023), https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/policies-politiques/knowledge_mobilisation-mobilisation_des_connaissances-eng.aspx#:~:text=Knowledge%20mobilization%20is%20an%20umbrella,by%20researchers%20and%20knowledge%20users (accessed 9 Apr 2024).

⁴⁵⁶ Julie Bayley, “Making a meaningful difference to society: An impact literate approach,” Research Impact Seminar Series [Online] (17 Apr 2024), <https://stories.universityofgalway.ie/research-impact-seminar-series/index.html> (accessed 17 April 2024). Dr. Bayley is the Director of Research Impact Development at the University of Lincoln (UK) and Director of the Lincoln Impact Literacy Institute (LILI).

partners such as community-based organizations.”⁴⁵⁷ Again, the simplest definition is *knowledge mobilization helps make research useful to society*. This term captures the movement of research into broad societal use.

Research can include processes of collaboration between *community* and *campus*. This is accomplished with the HOW being knowledge mobilization and the WHAT being social innovation or social benefit.⁴⁵⁸ This type of collaboration provides the potential for increasing societal impacts of research – including history research. There are also differences in terminology. For instance, the terms “knowledge transfer,” “knowledge exchange,” “implementation,” “diffusion and dissemination,” and “translational research” have also been used to convey how research can be made useful to society.

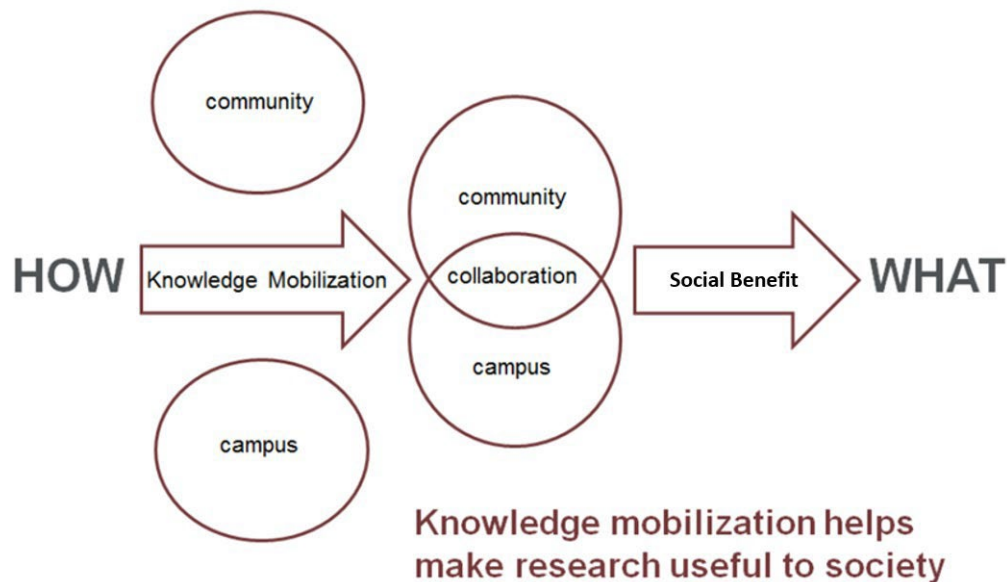


Image 56: The How and What of Knowledge Mobilization. Source: Diagram created by David Phipps (2013) for Knowledge Mobilization presentations and used with permission.

⁴⁵⁷ David Phipps, et al., “The Co-produced Pathway to Impact Describes Knowledge Mobilization Processes,” *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2016).

⁴⁵⁸ David J. Phipps and Stan Shapson, “Knowledge mobilization builds local research collaborations for social innovation,” *Evidence and Policy* No. 5, Vol. 3 (2009), 211-227.

Unpacking Differences

There is an overlap among oral history, the activities of historians, and knowledge mobilization. Within universities and other educational institutions that have a vested interest in *doing* oral history research, *using* oral history research, and *sharing* oral history research, the overlap can be presenting findings from oral history interviews to multiple audiences in meaningful ways. Because knowledge mobilization activities necessarily involve dissemination of research findings, yet can enhance the research further, knowledge mobilization calls for greater clarity about what historians can do to engage community *before* oral history interviews and *after* their research is disseminated. Oral history is a knowledge mobilization method in the way both historian and narrator jointly contribute to and dialogically shape the narrative and research. But before the interviews, oral historians can seek community engagement to enhance research preparation beforehand. Knowledge mobilization enhances oral history (and other history research) with broader participation and research usefulness. Such clarity will benefit historians by providing the value of incorporating knowledge mobilization strategies. In order to conceptualize the similarities and differences of oral history and knowledge mobilization, the table below illustrates the distinct, as well as overlapping, features (see Table 1).

Oral history research projects can include a variety of interested parties, such as other researchers, archivists, editors, teachers, students, and exhibit curators to create outputs – after the research is completed. This can include book publications, exhibits, videos, media interviews, public lectures and conferences. Further dissemination can include social media and websites with digital storytelling or podcasts to supplement journal or book publications. Additionally, elementary and secondary school teacher resources can be made available with interactive teaching modules or archival sources to present oral histories.

Community engagement, lectures, conferences, videos, teacher resources and archival sources are knowledge mobilization strategies to the point of dissemination. However, knowledge mobilization can also help history research go beyond the usual modes of dissemination. Knowledge mobilization promotes broad impacts of history research with deeper inclusion in the research before and beyond the point of dissemination. Incorporating knowledge mobilization to enhance the field of history requires more than research dissemination with publications, exhibits and resources alone. I have published with co-authors on how much more effective knowledge mobilization can be beyond simply disseminating and communicating research,⁴⁵⁹ which can be applied to history research.

| Core Elements | Oral History | Knowledge Mobilization |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement happens before research with interviewees to gain trust Ongoing relationships are developed between researcher and oral history narrators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders (beyond the research participants) are engaged before the research to gauge interest and priorities Ongoing relationships are developed between research and research stakeholders |
| Dissemination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarly outputs, conference presentations Accessible formats such as social media, online content, installations at galleries, archives Public comes to the research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scholarly outputs, conference presentations Accessible formats such as social media, online content, presentations, and archives Public comes to the research |
| Uptake | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not usually the role of the researcher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated presentation to stakeholders (beyond the research participants) in their locations Stakeholders continue to participate in research use and direct broader projects stemming from research |
| Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not usually the role of the researcher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher remains available to discuss various uses of research by stakeholder organizations |
| Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public awareness Scholarly impact Secondary research stemming from initial research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public awareness Scholarly impact Change in policy, service, or practice by community/interested parties organizations Secondary non-academic, independent community projects stemming from initial research |

Table 1: Similarities and differences of oral history and knowledge mobilization. Source: By author J. Gary Myers (2022).

⁴⁵⁹ Melanie Barwick, David Phipps, Gary Myers, Michael Johnny, and Rossana Coriandoli (2014), “Knowledge Translation and Strategic Communications: Unpacking Differences and Similarities for Scholarly and Research Communications.” *Scholarly and Research Communication*, Vol. 5, No. 3: 0305175, p. 14.

Going beyond oral history with knowledge mobilization for broad societal impacts of history research requires historians to engage not just those individuals the researcher anticipates interviewing as narrators in the oral history project. This is not to say that oral historians or all historians need to create broad societal impacts of their research. Rather, historians can choose to partner with several community members along with oral history narrators to gather evidence from a wide range of interested parties that shapes the direction of history research before and beyond dissemination. It is actively engaging community in the history research process from the start to inform the researcher about interest in the research, the direction the research may go and its potential use. This is where history researchers may not be comfortable letting non-academics critique research interests and potential uses or collaborate in research with community-based partners. Oral historians are familiar with the importance of being open to the direction those interviewed may lead the research. This oral history process with a community engagement workshop is open to the direction workshop participants may lead the research – including questions that may be asked in oral history interviews.

Back to Workshop Talk

I initially identified key community members for input to inform the oral history research project across a variety of sectors within, connected to or interested in the history of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. This included the following:

- The ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives
- Heritage Toronto
- Toronto Archives
- Local historians and educators from the LGBTQ2+ communities
- Staff from the 519 Community Centre
- Writers and activists from *The Body Politic*
- Representatives from the Church-Wellesley Neighbourhood Association
- Local business owners
- Members of gay Toronto sports leagues and social organizations
- The AIDS Committee of Toronto

- Casey House
- CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange)
- Creative staff from Buddies In Bad Times Theatre
- The Senior Pride Network
- Progress Place mental health services
- The City of Toronto

A list of over 75 potentially interested individuals affiliated with Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village and Toronto's heritage sector was compiled. Each of these individuals were informed about the community engagement workshop by email, LinkedIn and by word-of-mouth explaining the overall nature of my oral history research project. On follow-up emails, prospective participants who showed interest were invited to participate in the community engagement workshop. An initial list of 26 interested prospective participants was compiled. A call for availability of best dates to attend the workshop was requested and scheduled using a Doodle poll.

A total of 15 community members attended the community engagement workshop. Attendees were from four broad participation groups:

- 1) **Heritage** - 7 confirmed to attend, 5 attended.
- 2) **Community Organizations, Social Services and Education** - 10 confirmed to attend, 6 attended.
- 3) **Business/Commercial** - 5 confirmed to attend, 3 attended.
- 4) **Health Services** - 4 confirmed to attend, 1 attended.

Workshop participants were first seated at four 'intra-sector' tables according to their community affiliation identified by colours on name badges and tables to represent one of the four broad group sectors. The sole attendee from Health Services joined the Community Organizations, Social Services and Education table, and the planned four tables became only

three.⁴⁶⁰ At the beginning of the workshop, an agenda was provided with a few notes (see below).

| Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village Community Engagement Workshop | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Researcher: J. Gary Myers, PhD Candidate, York University Facilitator: David Phipps, Assistant Vice-President Research Strategy and Impact, York University Elizabeth Beaudin Conference Room, The Lexington Condominiums, 2nd Floor 45 Carlton Street, Toronto ON 24 May 2023, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.</p> | | |
| <p>Workshop Description: This two-hour workshop will seek input of community members to guide oral history research exploring gay nostalgia and memories of the changing face of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village.</p> | | |
| <p>Workshop Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide input to guide priorities for oral history research. 2. To inform research on gay nostalgia of potential interest to community members. 3. To seek ways to enhance Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in the research project 4. To establish relationships that will facilitate the subsequent use of the outputs of the research by community members. | | |
| <p>Workshop Deliverable: up to 10 research themes relevant to community participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A theme is something you would like to know or learn from this research. It is something that is meaningful and/or useful to you and your organization. | | |
| AGENDA (2 hours) | | |
| Time | Activity | Description |
| -30 mins | Registration, refreshments | Arrive at least 5 mins before workshop starts |
| 15 mins | Welcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Acknowledgement • Introductions (name, organization, initial thoughts about the project) • Research description (5 mins) • Workshop process including colours and numbers on name badges |
| 20 mins | Sector tables by colour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage • Community, Social, Education 1 • Community, Social, Education 2 • Business/Commercial • Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 mins: individual ideation • 5 mins: present to group • 10 mins: assemble and name themes • Target 3-4 themes per sector group |
| 20 mins | Multi-Sector tables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person stays at table to present 3-4 themes to others; others move to other tables • Feedback to build on themes • 5 mins per theme |
| 15 mins | Sector tables | Finalize themes based on feedback → sticky notes |
| 15 mins | Present each theme on feedback grid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback grids on tables | One sector participant per theme |
| 25 mins | Feedback grids | Provide feedback on the grid (sticky notes) selecting 3-4 themes that resonate with you |
| 10 mins | EDI, Q&A, next steps ¹ | Fond farewells |
| <p>¹ After this event, workshop participants will be given opportunity to review themes prior to finalization.</p> | | |

Image 57: Community Engagement Workshop Agenda. Source: By author J. Gary Myers (2023).

⁴⁶⁰ Initial plans were for five intra-sector tables (as indicated on the Agenda); however, due to lower numbers of attendees than expected the number of tables was decreased.

A note on research ethics: this is not a research workshop. The research has not yet started. You are here as an individual and/or organization with an interest in the research and how it might be used to create a positive benefit for the Church Wellesley Village and the people who visit. The workshop is a community engagement event and is not subject to research ethics⁴⁶¹. Ethics approval is currently being obtained for the subsequent oral history research.

Chatham House Rules: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

Image 58: Community Engagement Workshop Agenda note on research ethics. Source: By author J. Gary Myers (2023).

I also presented a synopsis of the intended oral history research project. Initial comments and questions took place (including the angry one). The various stages of the community engagement workshop model were followed (see Image 57). An invitation was given to brainstorm initial *research themes* to include in the oral history project. This step began with individual ideation followed by presenting each person's ideas to the affiliated intra-sector table. Research themes were then consolidated into others at each intra-sector table. Comments and questions within each table facilitated an initial rating and target of three to four themes selected per intra-sector group.

At Survey Round One, one person from each intra-sector group stayed at the table to present the three to four themes while others moved to 'multi-sector' tables to hear themes selected from each table. Selected themes were given feedback with further questions and comments.

At Survey Round Two, each person returned to their intra-sector table where selected themes were given broader group feedback, rated and ranked with further comments and questions. It was suggested that three to four finalized research themes per intra-sector group be selected. Research themes were written at the top of feedback grids⁴⁶² (see Diagram 3) on large

⁴⁶¹ Tri Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Article 6.11 https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2018.html (accessed 10 Apr 2024).

⁴⁶² For an overview on feedback grids, see Kevin Dao, "Team reflections using a Feedback Grid," *Medium* (27 Feb 2021) <https://kevdao.medium.com/team-reflections-using-a-feedback-grid-ff5ba905557c> (accessed 10 Apr 2024).

sheets of flip-chart stationery. Each intra-sector group member was invited to write on sticky notes to provide feedback corresponding to the questions asked in each quadrant of their research themes on feedback grids comprised of the following: *What worked? What could be improved? Questions? Ideas?*

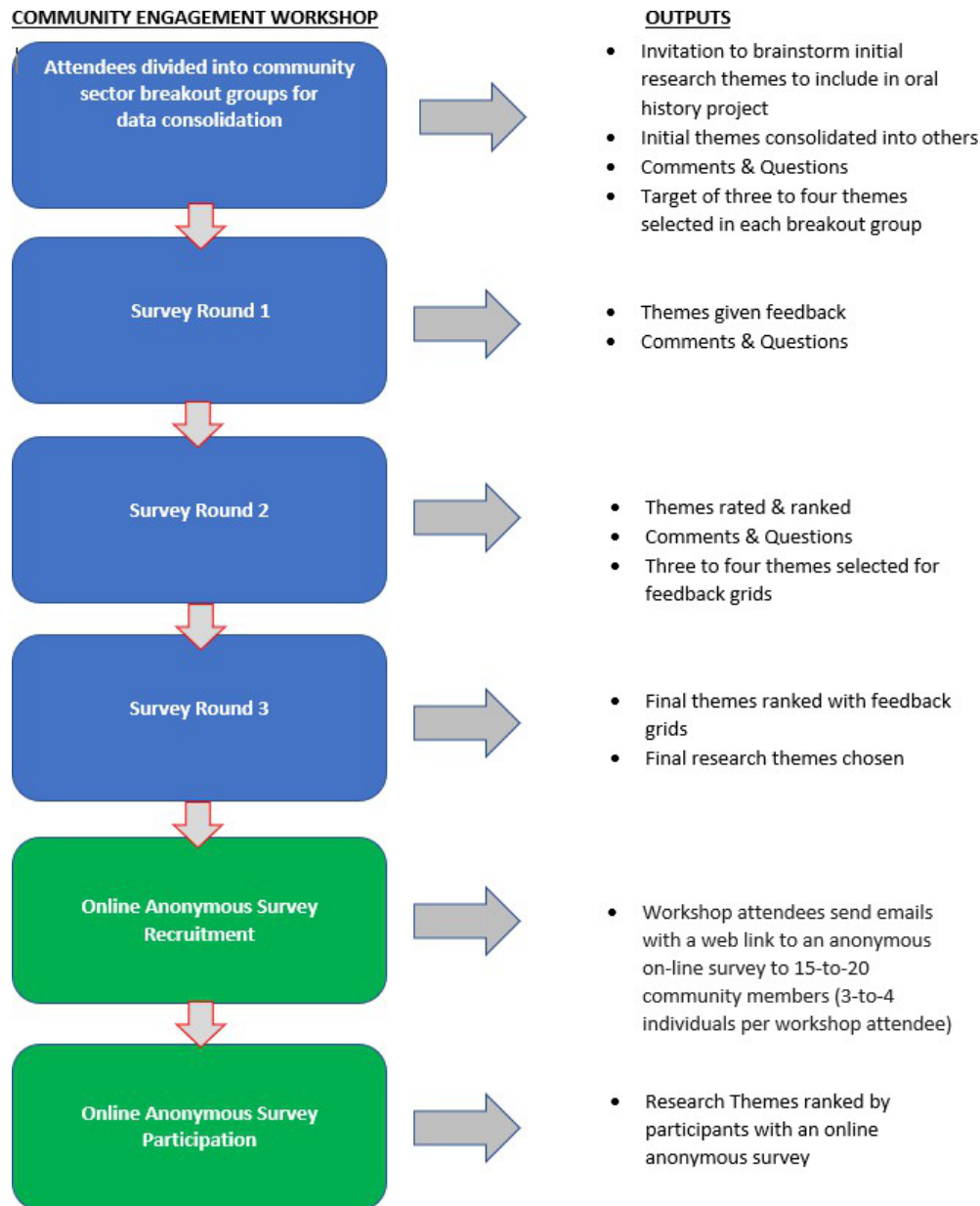


Image 59: Community Engagement Workshop Flow Chart. Source: Diagram adapted by Gary Myers from model in Scott C. Adams et al., “The Exercise Oncology Knowledge Mobilization Initiative: An International Modified Delphi Study,” *Frontiers in Oncology*, Vol. 11: 713199 (2021), 3.

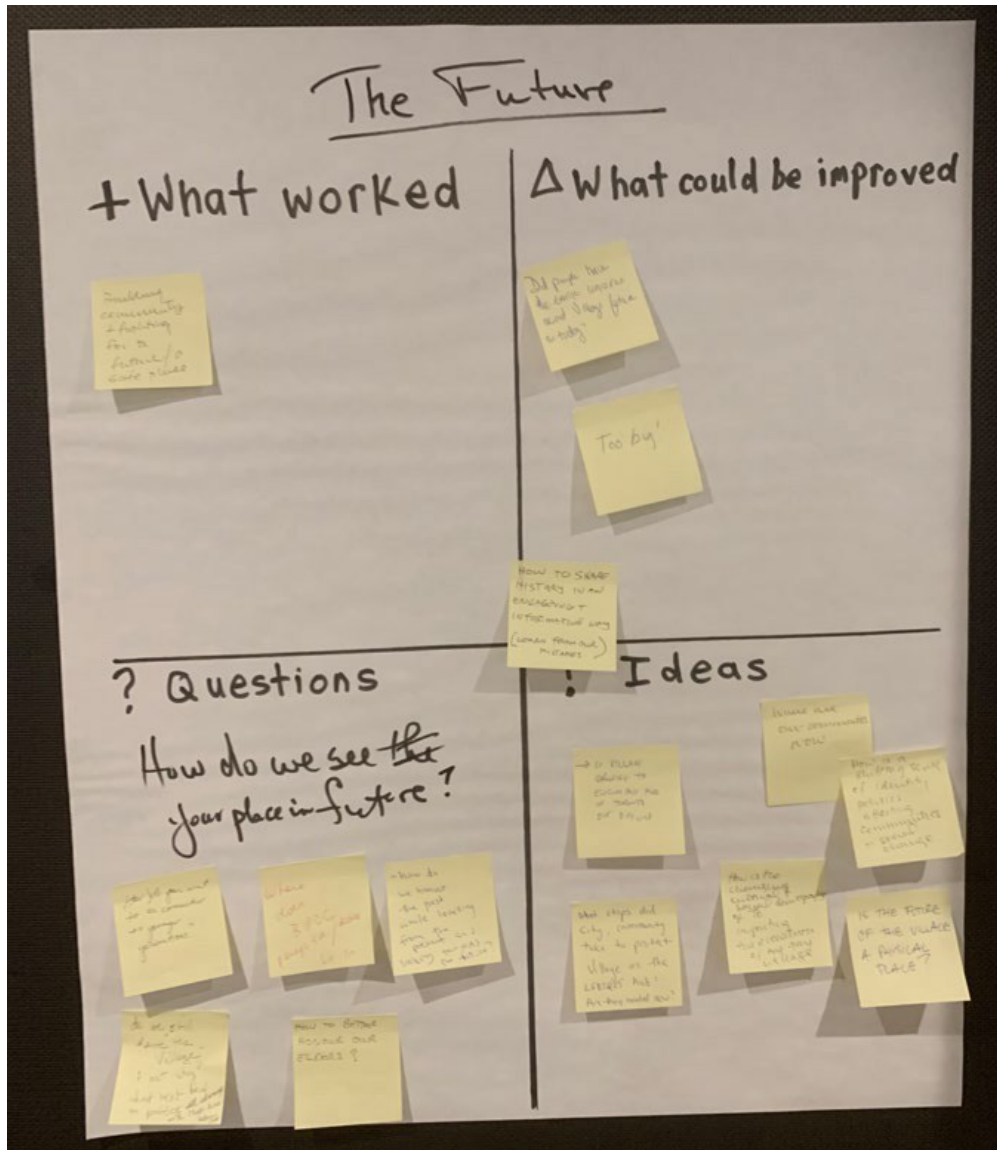


Image 60: A Feedback Grid from Community Engagement Workshop. Source: Photo by author J. Gary Myers of an example of one of the actual 12 feedback grids used at the community engagement workshop, 24 May 2023.

At Survey Round Three, a total of 12 research themes on feedback grids were suggested and posted for viewing on the walls. The 12 research themes were presented with further clarifications by a representative from each intra-sector group. All community engagement workshop participants were then invited to write on sticky notes answering the questions or providing comments in each quadrant of research themes contributing to all feedback grids. (See Appendix 2 for a transcript of the feedback with comments and suggestions from all sticky notes on the 12 research themes generated at the community engagement workshop).

This feedback and comments are significant as they represent the voices of community that informs my oral history project. These community voices provide insight and opportunities for future research with topics pertaining to Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village and potentially other research projects. A synthesis of all comments and suggestions on the 12 research themes was created to provide direction for some of the oral history interview questions to ask the older gay men being interviewed for the project. (See Appendix 3 for a synthesis of the feedback comments and suggestions on the twelve themes generated at the workshop).

The transcript and synthesis of the 12 research themes were sent by email to all workshop participants within a week of the workshop and a request was made for any revisions, comments or clarifications of the documents within two weeks. Workshop participants were sent a follow-up email with a weblink to an anonymous online survey (using SurveyMonkey). They were requested to send the survey link to a further 15 to 20 other community members they recommended (3 to 4 individuals per workshop attendee) to provide broader community input. The 12 synthesized research themes were included in the anonymous online survey for final prioritization and ranking.

Survey Results & Oral History Interview Questions

A total of 18 people answered the anonymous online survey titled, "Oral Histories of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village Community Engagement Research Themes Ranking Survey."⁴⁶³ Survey participants were asked to rank the 12 synthesized research themes in terms of the priority of all research themes listed in the survey with "1" being the highest priority and "12" being the lowest priority. Survey instructions stated once all responses had been submitted, the top three themes would be chosen as guiding themes for the research. These guiding themes

⁴⁶³ SurveyMonkey, "Oral Histories of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village Community Engagement Research Themes Ranking Survey," <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/9CDJF37>. NOTE: Survey is now closed.

were used to formulate three questions to include in the oral history interviews. The top three chosen research themes in the survey were as follows (see Table 2):

- Synthesized Theme #1: “Different Perspectives on the Future of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village” with a ranking score of 10.17
- Synthesized Theme #4: “Evolution of Safety from Bars to Community Organizations & Spaces, and the historical relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and Toronto Police” with a ranking score of 8.44
- Synthesized Theme #3: Social Justice & Political Action with Contemporary LGBTQ+ Senior Needs” with a ranking score of 8.22

Q1 How would you rank the following research themes in terms of the priority of all research themes listed in this survey? 1 (Highest Priority) to 12 (Lowest Priority). Please use the arrows to move research themes up or down to rank until you have sorted all 12 into your final order and then press Done (below) to submit your preferences. Once all the responses have been submitted, the top 3 themes will be chosen as the guiding themes for my subsequent research so I can conduct research that generates results that are of interest to you.

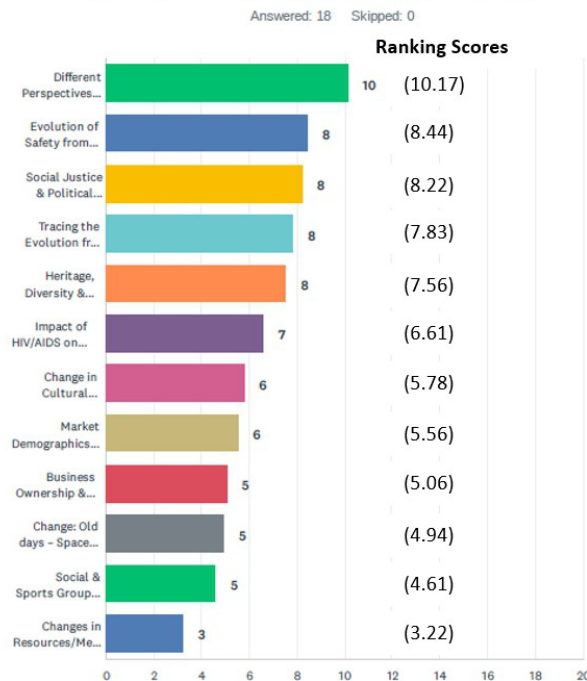


Image 61: Survey results of rankings of synthesized themes of “Oral Histories of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village Community Engagement Research Themes Ranking Survey.” Source: SurveyMonkey and ranking scores overlay by author J. Gary Myers (2024).

The three questions created to include in the oral history interviews stemming from the community engagement workshop and themes ranking survey are as follows:

- What are your thoughts on the future of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village?
- What would you say has been the evolution of safety from bars to community organizations and spaces, and the historical relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and Toronto Police?
- What do you see as contemporary LGBTQ+ seniors’ needs?

Although only one of these questions reflects a historical focus, community engagement workshop participants were given the opportunity to brainstorm around any topics of interest pertaining to Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. It was not my intention to specifically use any of the other research themes to formulate further questions for the oral history interviews or directly influence the approach to my dissertation. Prior to the community engagement workshop, I had already started thinking about the topic of intergenerational differences and evolving gay identity versus queer identity in my M.A. thesis.⁴⁶⁴ The suggestion in research theme #2 about the evolution from homophile to gay to LGBTQ was unexpected and I was pleased to see that community members were interested in this focus.

My interviews were semi-structured to provide flexibility and greater interviewee responsiveness, spontaneity and adaptability in exploring the stories of these older gay men. Prominent Oral History scholar Lynn Abrams advocates for semi-structured interviews. She emphasizes that the most valuable insights often emerge when interviewees are given the freedom to shape the narrative. “A ‘successful’ interview – one that perhaps produces a nice coherent and fluent narrative containing a balance between information and reflection – is likely to be the product of shared values between the parties, a good rapport and the willingness of the

⁴⁶⁴ J. Gary Myers, “Exploring Gay Nostalgia (1950 to 200) on the *Vintage Gay Toronto* Facebook Website: Intergenerational Differences Between Older Gay Men and Younger Post-Gay Queers and the Future of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley 2SLGBTQ+ Village (20 Jul 2021).

interviewer to permit the respondent to shape the narrative, avoiding unnecessary interjections.”⁴⁶⁵ It was this approach that I brought to my oral history interviews for this project.

During my interviews some of the responses coincidentally touched on topics suggested in some of the workshop research themes. This includes their memories of being ‘closeted’ as gay men to ‘coming out’ as referred to in research theme #5 as the transition from a period of “hiding to marching.” Many interviewees talked about the impact of HIV/AIDS, coincidentally suggested in research theme #6. Gentrification of gay spaces with condo development is a significant factor of change in The Village and was also mentioned by several interviewees. It is not surprising that this would be suggested as research theme #8 in the community workshop due to the significance of this issue.

As discussed in Chapter One, I was committed at the outset to find racialized narrators to counterbalance the history of ‘whiteness’ in gay Toronto and TCWV prior to the suggestion of including BIPOC individuals in research theme #9. I did ask interviewees a specific question about their experiences of seeing or not seeing lesbians, trans or racialized people at gay bars or social spaces before 1980 and after in The Village as part of my initial research plan. This was to address the commonly known criticism of the early years of TCWV for being predominantly shaped by white, cisgender, gay men who had the privilege of access and influence to build networks, communities, and gay male and mostly white spaces.

Finally, interviewee comments about how they feel about ‘community’ in The Village emerged organically as part of their memories during the interview process. Much of the focus on a loss of community came from a question I asked about what the Church-Wellesley Village meant to them previously and what does it mean to them now. There was no intentional strategy

⁴⁶⁵ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London and New York, Routledge, 2010), 11.

to draw further from research themes apart from including the specific ones in the interviews that were prioritized in the survey stemming from the community engagement workshop.

Oral History Interviews & Ethics

Oral history interviews were scheduled, and I met casually with prospective interviewees prior to the interviews to establish a rapport and explain the nature of the research and what participants would be asked to do. Ethical standards were followed explaining the risks and potential discomforts from participation in the research. This included the benefits of the research and to the research participant, emphasizing that participation is voluntary and that the participants can stop participating at any time, for any reason, and that participants can refuse to answer any questions. I assured participants that if they decided to withdraw from the oral history research project that all data collected pertaining to their interview(s) would be destroyed and it would have no impact on their relationship with me or with York University. I also assured participants that I could use a pseudonym to protect their identity. If participants did not wish to remain anonymous, I would follow their wishes by using their real name to identify them. Four interviewees requested anonymity, two used a pseudonym, while 21 chose to be identified by their real name.

Follow-up with those interviewed also took place to allow interviewees to review transcripts and make any corrections or deletions. Research participants were informed and asked for consent for the secondary use of interviews, including archival and other research projects before interviews were conducted. Interviewees had the freedom to choose how widely or narrowly their contributions will be used. The four interviewees who wanted to remain anonymous and two using pseudonyms were informed that only the interview transcript would be available for use in any other archival or research projects and not the digital recording of the

interview, which was deleted after the oral history research project was completed. The anonymous interviewees also provided consent about this on the informed consent form. The next section will present some of the answers from the older gay men interviewed for this project in response to questions formulated from the survey rankings stemming from the community engagement workshop.

Some Answers to Question #1

When considering the question about *the future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village*, the cohort of older gay men interviewed imagine the continuing changes to the area will make it less of a gay *space* and *place*. David Hallman suggests a greater inclusiveness in The Village and across the city has provided a larger scope of feeling safe that may continue to change the neighbourhood. However, he thinks the area will still remain important to his generation and others as a neighbourhood for gathering:

A lot of the conversation around this has been how people don't have to have The Village anymore because you can be safe in other parts of the city. There are some bars in other parts of the city and with inclusiveness people are socializing more beyond the kind of silo of gay men. There's been a lot of talk about how that's going to undercut The Village, etc...'cause we don't need those venues as much as we use to. And that's all true. I think that's valid but there is something about gathering places and even just the street that I think is going to continue to be really important and it's predominantly for those of us of an older generation but not exclusively.⁴⁶⁶

Larry Laforet agrees that bars outside The Village are attracting younger gays as the older gay bars and restaurants he remembers have closed. He expects this to continue in the future:

Well, it doesn't feel like a village anymore, basically. I mean, so many places have closed and young people like my nephew who's gay...it just doesn't register to him that he would need to have a village to feel safe. He just goes where he wants. He goes where his friends go [amused laughter].⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

Hugh Brewster points to the changing dynamics of gay bar “hook-up” culture and the current use of location-based technology. He considers the area to have always been a space that attracted younger gay people and will continue to do so regardless of such technology:

For a while there it looked like everybody was going to meet through Grindr...and hookup apps and so on but I gather among the twenty-somethings, and let's face it, it's twenty-somethings, maybe 20 to 35-year-olds, who really keep the bars and gay places going, that's your youngest and most social period when you're coming out and wanting to meet people and so on. But I gather that as places to socialize, younger gay men want to go out and women too still want to go out and meet people in person. There's one thing about meeting people for sex... I mean, back in the day, going to the bar was about meeting people for sex. Let's face it. You went out. You hoped to meet somebody you hoped to score and then that kind of waned and then Grindr and Tinder and all that kind of stuff came along as more effective places to meet people. It wasn't like, it's nearly closing time [amused laughter]. Doesn't look like it's happening [hooking up for sex].⁴⁶⁸

Jim Elliott thinks a sense of gay community will continue to diminish with the death of gay bar culture. However, he sees the biggest changes in the gaybourhood coming from condo development:

I agree with a lot of people that one of the biggest problems we've got now is all the condos going up. I can understand the financial incentive. It's made property value so high that businesses paying property taxes, it's putting them out of business. Most of the new people coming into the area know it's a lot of gay community and they don't have a problem with that. I'm worried that over time, with people moving out of The Village, especially as you get older you get money, you buy a house in the suburbs or the beach, that gay community could disappear completely. The death of the bar culture is contributing to that. There's a few bars still around. We've got some nice bars in The Village. Woody's, wonderful place, but I can see that going away because as people put up condos, condo buildings don't want bars or restaurants usually in them, maybe restaurants but not bars, and so we're going to lose that.⁴⁶⁹

Bob Dirstein includes gay bathhouses in what future condo owners may protest to remove from the neighbourhood:

You know, will they be happy having Steamworks [gay bathhouse, 540 Church Street] on the second floor? [amused laughter] Or will somebody complain,

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

“There's a bathhouse downstairs. I don't want that in my building. Will the syphilis spread up through the air ducts?” [amused laughter].⁴⁷⁰

Anonymous Interviewee #1 sees changes occurring at places like Woody's along with condo development that will continue to contribute to a lost sense of gay community in the future:

The Church-Wellesley Village is more on decline from the heights of, say the Woody's era, and its founding and all the stuff going on. Woody's is still there, but it's not quite the same kind of bar. It's not a gay magnet like it was back when, but we now have our rights, so you don't have to go to a gay-specific area. The other bars are all dying off. Church Street was left as the default, you know. I see it more on the downside of things. Its glory days are past. The '80s and '90s were our glory days in Toronto, I think. I guess it's important as a symbol of what has been, as a locus in Toronto. It's no longer a sole, little place where you would want to go, because with our gay rights we don't have to be limited. We don't have to sneak around, and we can go to any bar, you can be with a guy. If there's any problem, they'll throw out the harassers, not you. So that's changed and I think that's especially with younger people. And I think there are younger people who go to Woody's, but with their drag shows and that, there are practically even a lot of straight people to come to see the shows. So, it's not like it was. It's going to change because you know, there's a condo project approved for right there on the Church-Wellesley area. And I think also, right around O'Grady's, there's going to be a condo. And all of those people are not going to be gay. So right away, the whole composition of the community is going to keep shifting and shifting.⁴⁷¹

Anonymous Interviewee #4 recognizes the current transition of The Village but – unlike many in his gay cohort – looks forward to future changes:

So, I don't like the transition. But I'm really excited to see what will happen as the development happens, and the neighborhood changes. I mean, on our own street [in TCWV], there's been like six condos that have come up in in the last twenty years, and the streets completely changed. So, I'm hoping to see that expanded over and over and over again. And to see some really interesting businesses come to the retail sector in the neighborhood, if that still is the way things go, who knows? Hard to say.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #1, 15 Aug 2023.

⁴⁷² Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #4, 3 Oct 2023.

Patrick Brown points to intergenerational differences and greater social acceptance that he thinks will continue to affect the future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village with different meanings older and younger generations associate with it:

It's hard to speculate, but I would say that as society becomes more accepting, where homosexuality is less and less of an issue, I think you'll have safe spaces throughout the city, like you'll have little communities throughout the city wherever people live. And you know, you might have little [gay/queer] bars at Yonge and Eglinton, in other areas. I don't want to say that Church and Wellesley will become irrelevant, but I don't think it will mean what it meant to us back in the '80s and '90s to this generation and future generations, because the reason that it even existed was because we weren't accepted. When you look at even how the Black spaces came about, they came about because we didn't feel accepted in the gay white spaces. Once acceptance becomes the norm, people don't feel the need to have this little enclave.⁴⁷³

Some Answers to Question #2

The second question asked in oral history interviews was about *the evolution of safety from bars to community organizations and spaces, and the historical relationship between LGBTQ+ communities and Toronto Police*. Andre Goh recalls his time discussing Toronto Police issues and the relationship with the police while on the Toronto Mayor's Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues in the 1990s:

There was no relationship for the longest, longest, longest time. I think the first time the police were pulled in, hauled in to consider developing a relationship with the gay community was in about '94, '95. Susan Eng⁴⁷⁴ was Chair of the Toronto Police Board and William McCormack was Toronto Police Chief. I was Chairing the Mayor's Committee on Gay and Lesbian Issues. You could tell he [McCormack] was furious he had to be there. He did not want to be there. But she wanted the police to start building a relationship because there was none before that. It was after McCormack that a relationship, let's say the ice began to thaw. Because while he was there, nope. He would do the face service. Nothing. No follow up. And I don't think Susan was able to get him to do anything. The only

⁴⁷³ Interview with Patrick Brown, 19 Oct 2023.

⁴⁷⁴ Toronto lawyer Susan Eng was former Chair of Metro Toronto Police Services Board from 1991-1995. Eng had a tense relationship with Toronto Police Chief William McCormack over policy issues to reform Metro Police including race relations and Toronto's LGBTQ communities. McCormack served as Toronto Police Chief from 1989-1995. See Jennifer Lewington, "Fifty years of watching the watchers," *The Globe and Mail* (13 May 2006), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/fifty-years-of-watching-the-watchers/article18162711/> (accessed 18 Apr 2024).

thing at the time was a PSA [Public Service Announcement] was produced about bashing, gay-bashing. Jointly, between the Mayor's Committee and the police. It was the Police Board, but then McCormack had to endorse it. Which I think he just hated.⁴⁷⁵

Goh provides an example of gays avoiding the police based on his own personal experience in Toronto:

The police were dangerous. If you saw a police car, let me give you an example. I remember my roommate and I leaving Boots⁴⁷⁶ one weekend. A van went by, eggs were thrown at us. My roommate, a little intoxicated, screamed something. The van stopped. I pulled him, we ran. We went into, there was a donut shop in the basement. The owner or the person who worked there at the time, it must have been something familiar because he immediately locked the door and turned off the lights and we just waited. And then he said, "Shall I call the cops?" And my roommate suddenly sobered up and said, "No, no, no. Don't call the cops." That would have been in early '90s. Gay-bashing was rampant back then. It was all over the place. There were no safe spaces. You never went out by yourself. It was just too dangerous. If you were non-white and alone, you might not come back. Could be cops. Could be someone else. So that whole Cherry Beach thing.⁴⁷⁷ Oh, I remember hearing that all the time, "Be careful that you don't want to end up at Cherry Beach." I mean, if you were there [in The Village], you're safe. Six feet out, you've crossed that line. You're not safe anymore. It did matter. If you went up to Wellesley Street, you're not safe. So, it was so small, and it was such a niche.⁴⁷⁸

Leo Mitterni provides one of the main reasons for being afraid of Toronto Police in the earlier years:

In those days, you were afraid of the police because they could just stop you for any reason and make your life difficult, especially because so many men were closeted and didn't want that to get out.⁴⁷⁹

Hugh Brewster recalls earlier attempts to improve the relationship between gays and Toronto Police:

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

⁴⁷⁶ Boots, gay dance bar at Selby Hotel, 592 Sherbourne Street.

⁴⁷⁷ Cherry Beach is a lakeside beach park at the foot of Cherry Street on the eastern part of Toronto Harbor where Toronto police were known to take gay men to assault them illegally. See *Heritage Toronto*, "Cherry Beach Toronto History" (2024), https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore-learn/toronto_harbour_waterfront_history/cherry-beach-toronto-history/ (accessed 18 Apr 2024).

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

Back in the days of Gay Liberation, George Hislop⁴⁸⁰ was always trying to reach out to the police and forge alliances with the police because they were pretty anti-gay. I mean, you know the bathhouse raids and the subsequent demonstrations, well, they brought it all to a head that this had to stop. The arrests and the harassment of gays by the police was very palpable. And it also pointed out the fact that gays just were not considered citizens. I mean they were still considered to be semi-criminals the way that we were all so heavily policed. That really changed with modern gay Pride.⁴⁸¹

Jim Elliott also remembers the earlier days of police harassment, mixed views about the Toronto bathhouse raids by some police officers, and lingering gay fears about Toronto Police. He thinks things have become somewhat better, particularly in comparison to when he lived in the United States, but he still has reservations:

Referring to the police, when I think back to the 1960s, late '60s, early '70s, if I had got assaulted or something like that, I would not have dreamed of calling the police because I would feel that they wouldn't take it seriously. I might have more problems with the cops than I did with the person who assaulted me. That has, I think, changed a lot. It's interesting, I have cop friends, quite a few of them, and the '81 bathhouse raids pissed off an awful lot of cops. This was the vice squad guys. The rest of the cops said, "This is a waste of our time. And why are we doing this? It's just pissing off people who live in the community." Things got a lot better over the years with the police after that. Again, it's something about living in Canada that makes a lot of difference compared to having lived in the States and I'd say it got a lot better. It has gone up and down depending on the chief of police. I would call a cop now if I had a problem but I'd still be nervous, which is bad. I shouldn't have to feel nervous about calling a cop. And you see this a lot in discussions mostly from cis white straight males and the religious right that "cops are your friends." They don't show it and they don't show it to us [gay people]. They don't show it to minorities, visible minorities. It's not what it should be.⁴⁸²

Lionel Collier also thinks the historical relationship between gays and Toronto Police has seen some improvement but remembers his own experience with police.

The police were very homophobic in the '80s. Like one day, I was walking home towards Sherbourne Street along Carlton [Street], and I was coming from the No Frills [grocery store] on Parliament [Street], and there were two cops sitting in a

⁴⁸⁰ George Hislop (1927-2005) was a Canadian gay activist, businessman and founder of CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto).

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

⁴⁸² Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

car. And one of them said to the other one, “Look at that little faggot over there.” And I thought, “Oh my god, they're talking about me.” And I thought, “Oh, I'm not safe with the police either.” And I told one of my friends about it and he said, “Oh, that's terrible that the police would behave that way.” But I felt that there were lots of homophobic police in the '80s and '90s. It was part of their culture to be openly homophobic. And if they weren't, then they couldn't be part of the group. It was part of their group mentality. I think that's changed now. But the police have a long history of harassing gays and lesbians in this city.⁴⁸³

Larry Laforet shares another personal and traumatic experience more recently in the 1990s as an example of his interaction as a gay man with Toronto Police:

I had a stalker for six years in the '90s from '95 to 2001. It was a guy, and it was very difficult to get the cops to take me seriously. Like, I remember the first time I went and the cop kind of laughed and said, "Oh, so who's gonna play Glenn Close⁴⁸⁴ in the movie?" And I said, "He pushed his way into my apartment." And he [the police officer] said, "Oh, he's trying to get you in the bedroom?" I had to move three times to try and get away from him. And it got so bad that I started carrying pepper spray. I came home one night and he was in front of my apartment door. [The apartments] had mail slots in the doors, and he would constantly be in there looking at me. I carried pepper spray, and I got home one night, he was in front of my door and I ran down the hallway. He chased me, and I ran down the stairs and down to try and come in the other way. Like up the stairs and I just got the key in the door, but he caught up to me and he pushed me into the apartment and we started struggling and I sprayed him in the face. And I still had the cop saying, "Well, he could charge you" and I'm like, "Well, you guys aren't doing anything. I can't take it anymore." I mean, I nearly had a nervous breakdown over it. The cops did not take that kind of thing very seriously back then.⁴⁸⁵

Grant Campbell reflects on his own naiveté in his attitude as a gay white man about the historical relationship with Toronto Police – particularly in light of how police are viewed in other communities:

With me, it was simple puritanism. It was just like, “I'm better than that. I don't do that sort of thing.” I look back on it now and I think, “Where did this pompousness come from?” But, because of that, I remember the outrage over the raids on the baths. And I remember not daring to say to any of my gay friends that I was bewildered at their outrage, because I come from an affluent white community. And I have been taught ever since I was a little thing that the police

⁴⁸³ Interview with Lionel Collier, 21 Sep 2023.

⁴⁸⁴ Glen Close is an actor known for her role as a stalker in 1987 movie, *Fatal Attraction*.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

are my friends. The friendly neighborhood cop is there to protect me and any interactions I ever had with the police up until then had been very amicable. They've been supportive and friendly and burly and comforting and kind of hot. And the notion that in a good Canadian community, the police would be an enemy was utterly foreign to me. And it has been a real eye-opening experience to learn how the police are viewed in other communities, and I always held when I was younger, to the notion that if the police are bothering you, you're doing something wrong. And it took me much longer than many other people to break that homophobic notion that by having sex with men, you're doing something wrong. It's part of the internal patterning that is there. And so, I am a real late arrival at this issue.⁴⁸⁶

Bill McMaster considers the bathhouse raids by Toronto Police as a pivotal moment for gay pride in Toronto in fighting back against the police. He suggests considering the challenging historical relationship between the gay community and Toronto Police there is still a need to continue developing this relationship on both sides:

Well, I think that the bath raids themselves, what came out of that was really, in my opinion, was the beginning of the gay pride in Toronto, because that's the first time that it really got people off their butts and got them out. And they were actually protesting. They were actually basically saying, "We're here. We have rights. You have to accept the fact that we're here and you have to learn to work with us." The police, we've had this on again, off again, love hate relationship. I'm one of the people that believes that the police should be included and should need to be much more involved. They work for us. We don't work for them, and they need to learn that. They need to learn that they need to support us and help us and to become much more a part of the community. A number of times they have tried with the local police coming in and spending time in the community. And I think that's where the future needs to go. And we need to have that back. We need the police on the street. Not sitting in cruisers or whatever, but I think we need both groups to work together to make it better.⁴⁸⁷

Finally, Anonymous Interviewee #2 has worked in TCWV since the 1990s and has seen improvement of the relationship with Toronto Police and their active and sometimes difficult involvement in The Village today:

The police have joined forces with the Church-Wellesley Village. I hear a lot of gay men and women say that the police do not help. Yes, that's true in some cases, at some point, but whenever there is a problem, from my own experience they are

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Bill McMaster, 8 Aug 2023.

there and they try their best, and they are very patient most of the times, if not all the time. They [the police] get spit on. They get yelled at, they get called homophobic, you name it. Every hurdle that they have to go through they try to keep their composure as much as they can. And I know they would not be that tolerant in a straighter environment. They do try to be less aggressive with the gays and lesbians, and I've seen it. A lot of people will disagree with me. All you have to do is work six months in The Village and you'll see how the police are not as bad as everybody thinks they are.⁴⁸⁸

Some Answers to Question #3

Question #3 about gay seniors' needs is particularly relevant to this cohort of gay men as most are retired and have been thinking about their own care requirements as senior gay men.

Terrance "Teach" Saunders has recently retired after more than 35 years as a certified Toronto elementary school teacher. He reflects on declining mobility, loneliness and loss:

I think the number one fear among the men that I know is that the weight of having to consider that the house that you loved, you may not be able to access because of mobility issues. And in many instances, even if the house is paid and there is no mortgage, your aging presents a lot of challenges. So, the concern is around loneliness. Research shows that if you're by yourself, it's better to be with company to live a healthier life. It's interesting too, because a number of the men who I met when I first came here, a lot of us are in that sixty-five, sixty-five plus [age]. We talk about how the whole piece around losing so many friends, death, removing a lot of people, changes around aging, and prostate cancer, general unwellness.⁴⁸⁹

John Montague suggests the importance of anti-homophobic education for retirement and long-term care staff and the current importance of a gay community of seniors in The Village today:

The biggest fear is ending up in some supportive housing where there's a lot of homophobia, let's call it what it is. There needs to be some kind of very basic education for the staff. The other thing, and I remember hearing this way back in the '70s. Somebody said to me one day, the biggest problem of 'the homosexual' is loneliness. I think that is a natural consequence of losses, which gradually happens with ageing. And then the combined fear that, okay, if I start losing my memory and I'm living alone and I have to go into supportive housing situation, even if I have money, like where's that gonna be, and what's that gonna look like?

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

And even if the staff are nice to me. Do I have to move out of the Church-Wellesley area because there's no place here to go.⁴⁹⁰ I don't want to just live in a nursing home where everybody's got Alzheimer's like they do at Sherbourne and Wellesley [long-term care facility]. That's the reality. You know, when I go to the Second Cup at Church and Wellesley now, you go there in the morning or early afternoon, it's 90% [gay male] senior citizens. And they're all together a lot. Most of them are socializing with each other. It's like a community centre, and I'll bet that most of them live alone. They don't all but I know some of them do. But that's a lifeblood for those people.⁴⁹¹

Tony Souza agrees that sustaining a gay community as seniors is important but also feeling a sense of security. Having organized the first Board of Directors of the *519 Church Street Community Centre* in 1975, he suggests the *519* is still a place where gay seniors can receive support:

Well, I think gay seniors like other seniors need security. They need to know that they're secure in their housing or their income or whatever. But they also need that community of people. Because often, many people have been coupled. And then, one partner dies, and then they haven't had that kind of community of people who are around them that will support them. And so, I think that for many people that's important. And I think the *519* provides some services for gay seniors so they can socialize and meet others.⁴⁹²

Anthony Mohamed has worked in healthcare and hospital settings throughout his almost 30-year career. He continues to promote health equity and safe spaces to address homophobia, sexism, ableism, ageism, homelessness and anti-faith bias. He thinks there is still work to do in addressing seniors' needs for LGBTQ2+ communities:

I think there's a lot of work in that area that still needs to be done. You know, I've heard horror stories of people having to go back into the closet, or their families are not recognized as families, especially around chosen family. I think a lot of work needs to be done in long-term care homes and also around families. But then there are incidents that I've heard of where it's more around best practices that we

⁴⁹⁰ The first “rainbow wing” long-term care home for LGBTQ2+ seniors opened at Re kai Wellesley Centre at Sherbourne and Wellesley streets in Toronto in June 2022. See *Xtra*, “Is this the future of queer elder care” (9 Mar 2023), <https://xtramagazine.com/love-sex/relationships/queer-elder-care-247158#:~:text=Most%20remarkably%2C%20the%20Wellesley%20Central,programming%20at%20the%20Rekai%20Centres>. (accessed 19 Apr 2024).

⁴⁹¹ Interview with John Montague, 19 Sep 2023.

⁴⁹² Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

need to come up with. For example, I know of a trans woman who is living in a long-term care home, and every now and then she forgets, because of her dementia, that she transitioned. The staff really want to help her and be supportive. But she'll open the closet and see all these traditional women's clothes and say, "Where are my pants? Where are my shirts?" And they're not sure how to respond. So, I feel like as community care providers, we need to come up with best practices around how best to serve, because I think there's a lot of people who want to help, but they just don't know how, and there are real challenges there. Part of it is the homophobia that exists throughout society that affects older folks. The other side of it is the isolation that LGBTQ2S elders feel, especially for seniors who are already isolated. And even though they're sexual beings, they're not seen as sexual beings. So, the lack of sex, the lack of opportunities for relationship, just to socialize anywhere, I think those are major issues. My opinion on all of those specific queer spaces, is it's not that we need to change, it's that the society needs to change. I want to see all long-term care homes, or all seniors' homes, or senior services be queer and trans friendly, and create spaces, and if they don't create it, we should create it. But seniors are getting tired, and the seniors within our community need help from the younger generation to get in there. And from all our straight allies, straight and cisgender allies, they need to come in and really make the space as queer as possible. But again, it's an act of bravery.⁴⁹³

Anonymous Interviewee #3 suggests the need for more retirement homes to welcome gay seniors:

It's sort of like you're in the closet, then you're out of the closet, then you're back in the closet when you're supposed to be living your best life [as a gay senior]. That would require some special needs. So, along the lines of retirement, I could see the benefits of having, let's say a retirement home that welcomes gays and gay couples who are retiring. I can see the pluses.

Jeremy Vincent recalls stories of friends who are half a generation or a generation older than himself and had to go back in the closet when they went to a seniors' home. He doesn't want that for himself and urges educating all senior care staff to be open to people from all backgrounds:

I thought, "If I'm going into a seniors' home that last thing I'm going to do is go back in the closet." But when you're older, you're by yourself and you're a gay person, a lot of times you don't have a family, kids, whatever. And then you're by yourself, you're reliant on the staff at the home to take care of you. Well, if you're gay, and they are, "Fine, yeah, whatever" and you're in a diaper for half a day, a

⁴⁹³ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

soiled diaper, there's an issue there. You don't have a family member to come in and say, "No, no, no, no. This is how it's gonna work." You don't have that. That's a big issue. And we are getting more aware of that now. Some of the people who work there are from a very religious background, not a problem. Your clientele is not gonna fit into that box. They are all the boxes. You got to be open to all the boxes. And also, if you're a senior citizen who's seventy-five, eighty years old watching TV and somebody says, "I don't want that gay shit on TV." Well, [if] a gay person pretty well capitulates and the other person gets their way, it just keeps on going. And what you started out as a kid being gay and being ostracized, you are now doing it as an adult, a senior adult, where I want to see those get better.⁴⁹⁴

Grant Campbell points to the importance of generations learning from each other about aging and how the HIV/AIDS epidemic removed opportunities for many to learn about that life process. He points out the uncertainty of the future and how attitudes can change in either direction:

I think it is absolutely crucial that gay seniors have a chance to interact with each other and continue to learn how to perform sexuality. I think one of the things that the AIDS epidemic did was rob us of a great many older figureheads, people that we can model our senior lives on, and we need to keep learning how to be gay as we get older. There are a lot of stereotypes about older people, and we can't necessarily accord with them. At the same time, things have diluted a tremendous amount. We're not facing necessarily the same homophobia that we would have 30 years ago. It's easier to find people who are supportive. And then on the other hand, I think will that last, or are we going to see a new intolerance coming in? And how are we going to stay safe? As we get older, as we get more vulnerable as our friends die? Connection with younger members of the community. I think we can't afford to take the attitude that I took when I was coming out, which is that "If you're over forty, you have nothing to say." We need to cohere across the age boundaries. We need to cohere across a whole lot of boundaries, while at the same time preserving our opportunities to be ourselves. And I think it's going to take a lot of work in terms of developing social programs developing cultural connections. One of the things that I watched from time to time on YouTube, there's a thing of talking to old gay men⁴⁹⁵ and I find it really empowering to see these guys talking about [being older gay men and their life experiences] with such resilience and such humour, and such insight.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Interview with Jeremy Vincent, 16 Aug 2023.

⁴⁹⁵ See as an example, YouTube, "Older Gays Share Their Coming Out Stories" (10 Oct 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVGHraraVu8&t=10s> (accessed 19 Apr 2024).

⁴⁹⁶ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2024.

Finally, Andre Goh talks about the importance of creating and sustaining your own gay senior social groups to have a care circle and avoid the loneliness that many seniors experience:

I'm part of a group called Midnight Lotus, which is senior gay Asians. And I remember two years before the [Covid-19] pandemic, chatting with friends and saying, "I want to form a social club" so we can get together, maybe have dim sum once a month, chit chat, catch up, share ideas with each other. Where are you going to retire? Where do you go for holidays? Things like that. From that, we formed a club that got funding, called Midnight Lotus for gay Asian men, friends and allies. Support for each other, primarily. So, the focus as our community ages, if we need to go in a [retirement or long-term care] home, where do we go that would be home? As an older Asian male, where are better places to go for holidays, safer places, welcoming places. Things like that. If we want support about pensions, retirement, who should we talk to? Who can we reach out to? What about health services? Is there a pharmacy that we should all be supporting more or going to who can help us around all the medications that we take? Apparently, everything. So, the issues are different now. You know, it's too bad because I think for selfish reasons I needed support. I was in a long-term relationship that ended, and I found myself aging and single, and I thought, "I don't want to be one of those people who someone finds a week later in the shower with the water still running."⁴⁹⁷

Putting It All Together

This chapter has presented a step-by-step process of how a community engagement workshop can enhance oral history research. Going beyond oral history with knowledge mobilization means helping to make the societal impacts of history research knowable by engaging interested community partners before the oral history interviews begin. By including a community engagement workshop in my doctoral research project, I am demonstrating the provable effects and influences outside academia that can enrich oral history research. The workshop research themes and synthesis helped formulate the oral history interview questions deemed most important to TCWV community members interested in participating in the workshop and survey. These questions incorporated into the interview process fielded some

⁴⁹⁷ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

important answers by interviewees, as shown above. The workshop research themes and synthesis also provide a breadth of potential research topics for future research.

Part of my focus was also to make this history research project meaningful to community members affiliated with and interested in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. I wanted to provide an opportunity for those interested from community to contribute to history research. There is also the potential for future uptake and implementation for their own organizations and individual communities in preserving some of TCWV history. It is my intention to meet individually with those who attended the TCWV community engagement workshop after the completion of this dissertation. This is to engage interested community partners after the research to surmise any interest (uptake) for further initiatives or projects drawing from this dissertation of use within their own organizations. I also hope this work will inform other future history research projects exploring different perspectives of TCWV history.

A further goal is to encourage historians to utilize knowledge mobilization strategies. This can support research impact outside of the academy in collaboration with external community partners as the outputs of historical research are not usually taken up and used by non-academic organizations outside of the heritage sector. Also, oral history scholars are not known to formulate some of their interview questions by conducting a community engagement workshop. Interested parties from community can be comprised of individuals from various backgrounds that have a common connection to the history research topic – as was the case in my oral history research project. History scholars engaging with community demonstrates a commitment to public engagement that can foster trust between scholars and broader society. Research can be informed by community. Research can also be made more accessible and

understandable to non-academic audiences when they are invited to participate in the research process.

In reflecting on the community engagement workshop, I consider the three prioritized research themes as an integral part of this oral history research project. Although inclusion of these three research themes is purposely contained in this particular chapter, the benefits are fourfold:

1. They have demonstrated how a community engagement workshop can inform questions being asked in oral history interviews.
2. Provide the narratives as a follow up to the workshop to reconnect with individuals from community sector groups for potential uptake and use within their own organizations.
3. Inform future research projects.
4. Community engagement and knowledge mobilization were part of my Canada Graduate Scholarship proposal and subsequent funding from SSHRC.

These proposed themes are not necessarily intended to shape this dissertation outside this chapter, except the second of the prioritized themes (which will be addressed shortly). They articulate the interests of TCWV community organizations and affiliates. The voices of the narrators provide a response to those interests for potential uptake and future research. This chapter also fulfills funding requirements. I do see potential for future papers, conferences or public presentations, a potential book publication or podcasts describing the process to encourage its future use in oral history research. I also see research theme #1 and different narratives on the future of TCWV as particularly important to future research. Perhaps 10 to 20 years from now, future researchers may look back on how TCWV has changed to examine how these *narrative predictions* can contribute to a comparative analysis with *the reality of those future changes*. Will condo development reshape TCWV to make it unrecognizable within the

next decade? Will a gay community disappear from the area completely? Will there be the death of bar culture in TCWV?

As mentioned, the second of the prioritized themes (Synthesized Theme #4) is the only one reflecting a historical focus and contributes to this dissertation's focus on gay nostalgia with insight into experiences of *afterglows* and *afterburns* described in Chapter Two. A reminder that nostalgic afterglows and afterburns occur with emotional experiences when one was or was not feeling *safe, comfortable* or *welcomed*. Examples of these are the negative or mixed emotions experienced regarding safety inside and outside The Village. They are connected to significant identity and cultural formation as is the case with experiences of gay-bashing and the historical relationship between the gay community and Toronto Police.

Finally, the community engagement workshop and research themes were not intended to necessarily address gay nostalgia. The narratives throughout the other chapters of this dissertation are meant to do so. Gay nostalgia is used in this dissertation as an overall framework in which to understand and interpret this cohort's stories about gay experiences in Toronto and TCWV. Oral history interview questions were not directly about how the interviewees felt nostalgic. Rather, their answers can be understood through this dissertation's theoretical framework of gay nostalgia. The intersections of their experiences of *gay culture* (such as bars, cruising, bathhouses, drag, fashion, books, music, film, dances, divas, celebrities and pride marches/celebrations, gay sports, and the HIV/AIDS crisis) and *historical gay identity* shapes their memories and is understood in this way as gay nostalgia.

In the next chapter, I explore the concept of gay community and multiple identities to consider who were part of the community within TCWV, including trans people. It points to gay subcultures and their historical contexts. This chapter also looks at intergenerational differences

between older gays and younger queers and conflicts that have occurred. It also takes a reflective look at what advice narrators would give their younger selves.

Chapter 5: Over The Rainbow (2010-2023+): Looking Back & Facing Forward with Reflections on a Fluid Generation

The *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua* means I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.⁴⁹⁸ In tradition, “The past is central to and shapes both present and future identity.”⁴⁹⁹ x

in connection to cultural ideas and understandings of previous generations. The present and future is guided by looking to the past. When we recognize the important intergenerational links with past, present and future, we can transmit this knowledge “down through the generations” to “know what they did, what they valued, how they viewed their world, and how they behaved.”⁵⁰⁰ It provides a reference point for knowing and connecting to past life lessons (good and bad) in each transitory generation. It is not a linear way of thinking about an intangible past that is behind us and gone forever. Rather, it is ambidirectional that connects a retrospective view with a reflective learning view.

Drawing from this understanding, this oral history project provides narratives from a past historical gay identity and culture as a continuum to inform and shape present and future understandings of that gay identity and culture – to not forget or erase them. It is about past experiences of older gay men in gay Toronto and the changes that have taken place in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) to inform the present and the future. It looks to the past to inform the present with a “perspective of time, where the past, present and future are

⁴⁹⁸ Jaylene Wehipeihana, a guide was respectfully consulted. She has worked with Higher Education institutes x

providing the details about this research. She states in an intermediary text correspondence, “I think it’s fine for him to use the saying. The proverb is about using the past to inform the future, looking at our past in order to build our future.”

⁴⁹⁹ Lesley Rameka, “*Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua*: ‘I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past,’ *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec 2016), 387.

⁵⁰⁰ Rameka, “*Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua*,” 392.

intertwined.”⁵⁰¹ It involves contemplating the future of TCWV to acknowledge past successes and mistakes. Through this perspective of TCWV we can see how the *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations are distinct *and* intertwined and can inform one another’s experiences.

This project has examined gay nostalgia defined within a historical and ongoing gay identity and cultural lens. It has focused on intergenerational transitions in gay Toronto and TCWV since the 1970s. This includes “The Great Migration” of gay *space* and *place* from the Yonge-Wellesley area to Church-Wellesley by the 1980s. This section will show examples of how gay identity and gay culture have been and continue to be multifaceted during these periods. As such, common and individual experiences make up this diverse cohort within the memories of a gay Toronto milieu, past and present. This work serves as an opportunity to capture memories of varied individual gay experiences and a sense of gay loss in Toronto and TCWV intersecting with collective gay experiences since the 1970s. Many of the following examples also highlight intergenerational differences that this cohort experienced in the context of their *binary* and *neo-queer* generations, not or no longer experienced by a *fluid* generation.

To further capture an intergenerational focus and reflection on change in TCWV, the next section will also present the many gay bar/dance clubs, gay-oriented spaces and establishments that were gay-owned and gay-friendly between 1980 to 2023. This shows the extent to which change has occurred in TCWV over these years. Finally, this chapter concludes with a fun retrospective walk backwards into the future to reflect on the past as this gay cohort gives advice to their younger selves.

⁵⁰¹ Rameka, “*Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua*,”395.

Gay ‘Community’ & Generations: “One community with multiple identities”⁵⁰²

Oral history narrators and Vintage Gay Toronto (VGT) members looking back on the past while moving forward feel a nostalgic sense of loss of their history and community and they feel uncertainty about the future. It is a felt loss of past gay *space* (as physical location) and gay *place* (as cultural meaning). There is a feeling that their past histories of gay culture and community are being ignored, replaced, erased or forgotten by the *fluid* generation. It is a common feeling of loss and uncertainty that many individuals face as their histories unfold into longer strands of memory with the dynamic passage of time. Some older gay men speak of a disconnect with a younger *fluid* generation, including those who self-identify as gay. Anonymous Interviewee #2 has worked in Toronto gay bars since the 1990s and continues to frequent TCWV as an older gay man interacting with a younger generation today. He recounts:

When I see how the young gay men treat or talk to the older gay men, it's so sad. I believe every suppressed group always respected their elders, because they know what their elders fought for, for them to be there. You would never see a young Black man turn his back on an old Black man. The young gays today, first of all, have no sense of gay history. They don't realize what even men like me that have got hit by police officers, got chased by police officers, went through so they could come out. And yet when you're in a bar, all they see is that old man. They don't give them the respect. And I'm not saying they need respect; respect needs to be earned. But by just [making a sound of disgust] “Ugh. Look at that old man.” It's kind of sad, because “That old man is why you're here today enjoying your drink, and enjoying your walk up and down that street.” And it's sad for me, I just think it's so sad. And it's never going to change. They have no gay history knowledge. I watch movies, I watch documentaries. I see stuff because I want to know my history. And it's the saddest thing. I wish today's younger gay generation or queer generation, whatever you want to call it, would look at some of the documentaries or some of the movies of what we went through and maybe they would appreciate older men and even women because lesbians played a huge part in the whole HIV/AIDS crisis. I wish they knew more of their history. I asked a young man today; they don't even know who Harvey Milk⁵⁰³ was. They don't know gay history, like when gay marriage was passed [made legal in Ontario in 2003 and in Canada in 2005]. You know, like I said, I had to go see Ellen

⁵⁰² Quote from interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

⁵⁰³ Harvey Milk was the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in San Francisco, California in 1977. He was assassinated the following year at 48 years old.

[DeGeneres] come out [while I was with a group] in a bar.⁵⁰⁴ They [younger gays and queers] don't realize that knowing your history will make you appreciate the generations before you a lot more.⁵⁰⁵

Jeremy Vincent points out the challenge of older gay men trying to talk to younger gays and queers:

As someone who's sixty-five, I'm very friendly to everybody. In certain environments, in a bathhouse it's strictly sex, but at Out and Out⁵⁰⁶ or going to a coffee shop or whatever, I'll talk to people, but they immediately think, "Oh, this old man is coming on to me." Once they kind of realize I'm not, then they're like, "Oh" they're very friendly.⁵⁰⁷

Along with a generational disconnect, there is a shared notion for many about a loss of "gay community." This is one of the important threads of memory that weaved through many of this project's narratives. Like culture, community is a complex and slippery notion due to the myriad influences that shape it. As a concept, community embodies a sense of belonging and shared identity. Going back to Benedict Anderson's notion of community in Chapter One, community is an "imagined" notion of collective identity that is socially constructed yet shapes communal bonds and experiences. These bonds and experiences are contingent on who decides to stay, join, leave or adapt to changes that reshape the community's fabric over time. This also extends to how an older generation continues to connect with a younger generation. As this project's focus is on older gay men, it is important to remember the common element of *aging* that inevitably alters and reduces one's previous notion of community in general. As we age, our journey through the later stages of life often see a shift in our social networks, desires or ability to frequent the same places, and our sense of belonging. As gay men pondering our young

⁵⁰⁴ Many gays and lesbians participated in viewing parties at gay bars and at home parties watching the famous 'coming out of the closet' episode in 1977 of U.S. actor/comedian, Ellen DeGeneres during this broadcast of her popular situation comedy television show.

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁵⁰⁶ Out and Out is a LGBTQ2+ not-for-profit social club in Toronto that is volunteer-run. It was founded in 1980 and continues today.

⁵⁰⁷ Interview with Jeremy Vincent, 16 Aug 2023.

adulthood, we may remember going to bars and bathhouses more frequently, joining gay choirs or sports leagues, dancing for hours in a club, marching as an activist or Pride parade participant. This does not mean that aging precludes any of these activities, as David Hallman demonstrates. David was 73-years-old when interviewed for this project. After retiring in 2007, he keeps active and engages regularly with those from his own and younger generations to keep a sense of gay community in his life, including still going out dancing:

I'm very busy with volunteer work. I'm living a life as if I were still working full time and I am working full time just not getting paid for it. I have four volunteer jobs that keep me very active. I was at a concert last night, the Toronto Summer Music Festival. I was in Stratford last week going to plays, six plays and meeting with lots of friends. I'm sexually active, still very sexually active. So, on the Friday of the beginning of Pride weekend, I ran into some friends. We had coffee together on Church Street. They had just come from Prime Timers.⁵⁰⁸ They had a special Prime Timers event for Pride. And I'm delighted that those kinds of organizations exist, and they find a lot of social enrichments through that. I'm too busy [hearty amused laughter]. And I don't need that at this point. I don't need specific organizations. I relate a lot to people my own age, but I also relate a lot to younger people. When I go to dances at the Phoenix, the PitBull dances at the Phoenix⁵⁰⁹ or Pride events, there's a wide range of age, and there's an exuberance and a joy and an exhilaration and sexiness to be in situations with predominantly other gay men, which is something that I really value, and obviously from the success of these dances is of value to others. It may not benefit the bars as we knew them as much, but the sense of community is still very strong and it most manifests itself at times where there are, for me, these big dances.⁵¹⁰

Despite the ability for some older gay men like David to find ways to still form gay community and connect with younger generations, inevitable life transitions can disrupt gay social networks over time. Gay social organizations may end, and gay friends can lose touch, move away or die. We may decide to “settle” with a life partner or spouse that may lead to less

⁵⁰⁸ Prime Timers is worldwide social group for older gay and bisexual men, with a Toronto group, founded by a retired professor in Boston in 1987.

⁵⁰⁹ PitBull is a gay entertainment company (2010-Present) known for hosting dance parties at Phoenix night club, concert and theatre venue at 410 Sherbourne Street in Toronto. These dance parties are frequented mostly by gay men.

⁵¹⁰ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

gay socializing. Our physical and/or cognitive declines can impact our abilities to ‘dance the night away’ or participate in Pride events like we did before. Dan Benson also continues to connect with a younger generation to form gay community and presents some of the challenges of being an older gay man and sustaining a connection with a younger generation:

I think a sense of community extends into a sense of belonging. Society, North American society, Western society in general, it’s very youth oriented. And I think as we age, get older, I mean, we’ve been joking about, going to the bars in our 30s and thinking, “Oh, God, you know [quick laugh] well past our best before” and then thinking now, thirty odd years later. And society tends to devalue us as older people, certainly Western society. So, I think there’s this sense of community and belonging and value, I think would be the words that I would think. It’s interesting because I joined Forte⁵¹¹ a couple of years ago. One of the things I’ve been reflecting on is that I think I’m one of the oldest. I don’t think I’m the oldest, but there’s only a couple of people who are older. The vast majority are in their 30s and 40s. I would say probably 30s. And there is a bit of a sense that the old guys are here and that’s nice [amused laughter]. “Isn’t that nice to see all these old guys?” But I’ve been debating the sense of belonging and value within the group and wondering how I can prompt that, and part of that is just the practicalities of being older. We rehearse at seven o’clock, we rehearse from seven to about 9:30 p.m. At the break at about 8:30, they say okay, who’s going out, they always go out to a bar afterwards, and it’s usually just a pub. And of course, I say oh, yeah, tonight, I’ll go [amused laughter]. By the time 9:30 rolls around, you got to be kidding. And I’ve been out with them a number of times. I remember once, I’m like, “Okay, I’ll have a soda water” and the kid beside me, he says, “Oh, I’m so hungry.” And he ordered a burger and a load of fries, and he chows down on this at like going for 10 o’clock at night, and looking at him and saying, “Bless you my son because if I did that A) I’d be ill; B) I would never sleep, and C) I’d put on 20 pounds. Anyway, there’s a sense of whether you fit in, right? So, finding that sense of belonging and community and value, I think, becomes more challenging.⁵¹²

Community has *individual* and *collective* implications. One can individually experience gay community among a group of gay friends *locally* in a particular gay space like TCWV at a particular ‘gay’ time. One can also experience a notion of connectedness to *a wider gay community* through supposed elements of gay culture, events, mechanisms and symbols (see

⁵¹¹ A Toronto gay men’s chorus founded in 1997.

⁵¹² Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

Chapter One). Tony Souza recalls the lesson of community and solidarity in dealing with Toronto police after the bathhouse raids in 1981:

I think if there's a lesson we learned from this, it's about community and solidarity. That the moment you find community and you find solidarity, you get braver. Individually, we couldn't do much, but you need people, and you need a community that's supporting you. You're brave on your own, or even as a smaller group, but you know, building up and making liaisons, all of that stuff was really important in terms of the development of courage. I had this community around me who would rally around me, so I wasn't alone. And I think that's the lesson you learn from this history is that it's community and solidarity and it's working together and having a common vision.⁵¹³

Hugh Brewster points to a slightly later timeframe when he considers a more cohesive and mostly accepted local gay community formed in Toronto's Church-Wellesley area. He also suggests some of the factors that contributed to a sense of community in TCWV and how different it is from when he first came out in the 1970s. He remembers:

I would say from '84 on things had changed. The fact that that was a sort of gay [residential] neighbourhood, and things were becoming a little more out and then AIDS and AIDS organizations and everything else fostered that sense of community and things happening on Church Street and Church and Wellesley. It became a neighbourhood. The gay Pride parades which are more festivals than political demonstrations, that all came about in the aftermath of the bathhouse raids, and to instill a sense of community and all the rest of it. The very notion of there being gay colored or rainbow-colored crosswalks and flags and everything else, the whole notion of Pride Month, far less Pride Week was beyond any kind of [earlier thinking]. When I came out, I sort of bought into both the excitement and shame of the subculture, the twilight world as it was called, that there was this whole world that straight society didn't understand or know much about. So, flying under the radar, since most of the world didn't really think there were gay people, that could work to our advantage. It was just a profound change, and the fact that there's a Gay Village and it's signposted as such and known as such and is a tourist draw all of that is just a huge thing. To have all that happen within a decade or two is unbelievable, just revolutionary.⁵¹⁴

Larry Laforet recalls a sense of gay community emerging when certain gay-friendly, gay-owned and gay-oriented establishments and services began to be available in TCWV. He

⁵¹³ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

suggests some of the factors that seemed to foster a broader sense of community in Toronto's gaybourhood:

*Toby's*⁵¹⁵ was there. And then there was this bizarre steakhouse which I can't remember the name of, *Bigliardi's*⁵¹⁶ or something. Anyway, that was in the middle of the block next to *Woody's*⁵¹⁷ and yeah, I mean, part of it was you wanted to support the community. So, that's where you went to have dinner or drinks or whatever. And they used to publish this thing called the *Pink Pages*, which had all the gay owned businesses so, you know, that's where you got your insurance agent and where you got your doctor and everything else. I mean, 'cause again, you felt like you were part of this community, and you felt safe there. Whereas if you went outside of it, it was uncomfortable.⁵¹⁸

Larry agrees with Hugh Brewster about the significance of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto as a significant component in forming a sense of Toronto's gay community:

It was a lot around AIDS. I mean, I don't remember there being activism for marriage equality or legislation, stuff like that. I remember there being a lot about going to meetings and about AIDS awareness, you know, safe sex stuff. And I remember doctors being very angry with the government about not getting what they needed to in terms of research and going to fundraisers, lots of fundraisers for the community because the government wasn't looking after people. I mean, the community had to look after their own. So, there were *DQ*⁵¹⁹ and all those things fundraising.⁵²⁰

Dan Benson remembers other popular fundraisers that brought together and supported the gay community but reiterates how different a sense of community in TCWV is for him as an older gay man:

I was involved in *Fruit Cocktail*.⁵²¹ It was amazing. I think that was a real turning point for me being out on stage like that performing. There's an incredible sense

⁵¹⁵ *Toby's* Good Eats was a burger restaurant located at 542 Church Street was popular with gay patrons in The Village from the mid-1980s to 2007.

⁵¹⁶ *Bigliardi's* Seafood & Steakhouse was located at 463 Church Street from 1977 to 2009. It is currently *Flash*, a gay member's strip and dance club (2011-Present).

⁵¹⁷ *Woody's* (1989-Present) became a popular gay community bar at 467 Church Street with *Sailor* (1994-Present). *Jingles* (c.1980s) was a gay piano bar previously at that location.

⁵¹⁸ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

⁵¹⁹ *DQ* were drag show/variety show fundraisers to support HIV/AIDS care between 1987-2007.

⁵²⁰ Interview with Larry Laforet, 20 Jul 2023.

⁵²¹ *Fruit Cocktail* was a fundraising cabaret event of musical and comedy skits started in 1982 to raise money for various gay, lesbian, and other community groups with the founding of the *Lesbian & Gay Community Appeal*. It is

of community, of working together on this big show. Yeah, there were some little rivalries, and God knows some of the queens that were up as the stars were a bit much to handle. But they were talented. They were incredibly talented. I think the first *Fruit Cocktail* I was in was '82 or something, so I would have been 26. There was a sense of solidarity. There were also the *GCDC dances*⁵²² that were held at the Masonic Lodge across from the Canadian Tire at Davenport and Yonge [streets]. And upstairs there was a dance floor and there was a balcony around it. It's funny because upstairs was where all the boys were, and it was playing the latest, the current music, and downstairs tended to be more of a lesbian group, but they played music that I liked more. They were still playing disco music. They were playing pop stuff from the '60s and '70s. So, it was like upstairs had sort of moved on, and I hadn't [quick laughter]. The main floor you went up and there was a main floor, and then as I said, there was a balcony around it, sort of the gallery, and so you could look down on it, you could participate... We tend to go down occasionally [to TCWV] for restaurants and there is this sort of nice sense of, "This is my tribe, my tribe." I think there's that sense of, "This is my tribe" but even going down for Pride, I went down for Pride and staffed a booth for a couple of hours. Yes, "This is my tribe," but I feel a bit more on the periphery of it, I think, as an older gay man.⁵²³



Image 62 (left): The 'fruits' of Fruit Cocktail, 1987. Source: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZxpYipYWDk> (1:06:29) (accessed 27 May 2024).

Image 63 (right): "Kiwi" Geremy Vincent who performed at Fruit Cocktail in the 1980s and 1990s and continues to represent Community One (formerly Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal) as one of the five fruit mascots at fundraising events. Source: Photo provided by Geremy Vincent and used with permission, 2024.

now Community One Foundation with the iconic Fruits from *Fruit Cocktail* alternating over the years (Kiwi, Pineapple, Banana, Blueberry, Orange, Plum, Apple and Tomato) as Foundation mascots who continue to attend fundraisers and community events.

⁵²² GCDC dances (Gay Community Dance Committee) was a volunteer-run fundraising organization for various lesbian and gay community groups that divided the profits among participating groups. GCDC hosted dances in Toronto at the Masonic Temple Hall at 888 Yonge Street between 1981-1992.

⁵²³ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

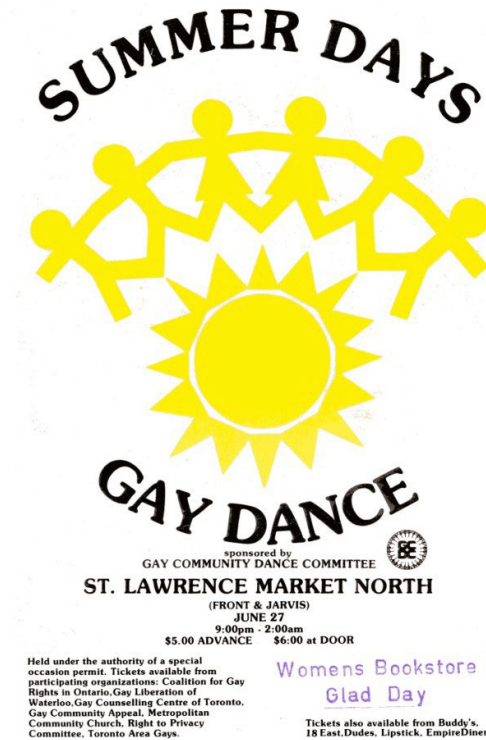


Image 64: Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC) poster advertising first dance at St. Lawrence Market North in Toronto on June 27, 1981. Source: ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, Folder 46, 1989-534N.

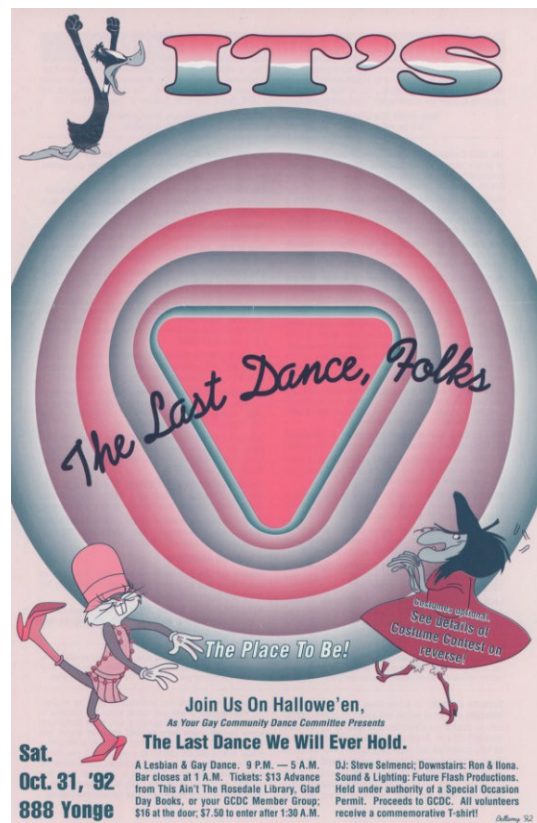


Image 65: Gay Community Dance Committee (GCDC) poster advertising last dance at Masonic Temple Concert Hall on October 31, 1992. Source: ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives, 1992, F0219-01-068.

Jim Elliott also remembers a sense of community at the *GCDC dances* and gay dance clubs along with gay sports leagues:

One of the things that happened with the dance clubs, and it wasn't just Toronto, it was everywhere, is the same people went every weekend and we all knew each other, and we partied together dancing and there was a real community feeling. I don't think that exists anymore. Thinking of dancing in that period, *Gay Community Dance Committee* and the *GCDC dances* which were originally at St. Lawrence Market North,⁵²⁴ awful place to dance, cement floors. But then, of course, we were at the Masonic Temple, and those parties were just fantastic. And, again, a community feeling that I really don't see anymore. There was more sense of community when we went out and did things. I suspect it's probably still going on, but for me, I was also very active in *Cabbagetown Group Softball League*.⁵²⁵ I was social director in '81, the year we had the Gay World [Softball] series in Toronto. And those sort of community activities, I think still goes on to some extent, but it was really a part of it [forming gay community]. We were all involved. Everyone I knew was involved in this stuff and we'd go out for these things, and we'd go out dancing as a group, and of course the dance clubs are pretty much gone now. *Fly*⁵²⁶ was the last decent dance space we had in Toronto. Really the last decent, but we did a lot of that socializing which is gone.⁵²⁷

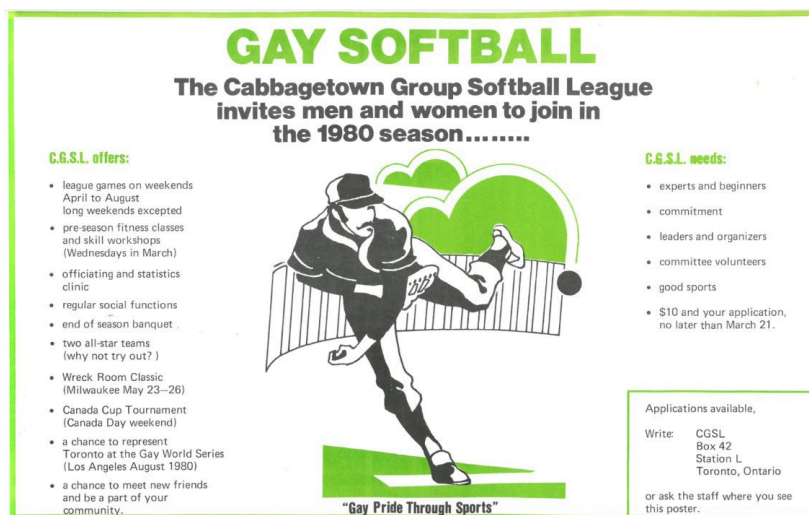


Image 66: Cabbagetown Group Softball League (CGSL), “CGSL recruiting poster,” 1980. Source: *The ArQuives Digital Exhibitions*, <https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/items/show/912> (accessed 17 May 2024).

⁵²⁴ A public market in Toronto and the site of several market buildings since 1803. A GCDC dance that Jim Elliott refers to would have taken place in the north building that was built in 1968 and is now demolished with the construction of a new building that was expected to be completed in 2023.

⁵²⁵ *Cabbagetown Group Softball League* (CGSL) is Toronto's longest-running non-profit LGBTQ2+ sports league founded in 1975 and continuing today.

⁵²⁶ Fly Night Club was a gay dance club at 6 Gloucester Street between 1999 to 2014. It was reopened as Fly 2.0 and continued between 2014 to 2019. A residential and commercial space is being constructed at 6-8 Gloucester Street as a rental tower called The Ivy.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

VGT members speculate on the reason for a lack of gay community today:

Christopher Scott: “We have no more unifying factor like we’ve had for decades. First it was the mobilization of the community during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Then it was a strong fight for equal rights. Those things brought us together regardless of how we felt about other issues. Now, without a unifying cause we’re left to our basic differences as everyone else in society is. Don’t get me wrong. I realize the fight is not over. For many they still struggle discrimination and biases against them. We can’t stop moving forward. Now or ever. We also can’t take our rights for granted as they can be taken away just the same as they are given. Never forget that.”⁵²⁸

Charles Jones: “Our community is so fragmented now. I miss the early days (and nights) when we all lived, loved, laughed, and partied together.”⁵²⁹

Leo Mitterni imagines how much bigger the gay community would be in Toronto without the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. He also mentions how different gay community feels today as an older gay man:

The numbers would have been so much higher if we hadn't lost so many [to HIV/AIDS]. There would have been a community of itself. I could have been in with my peers, and shared the same that I shared earlier on, but I don't because those peers are gone. It would have been so different. Because it was so new after Gay revolution. That was the height of it for me at that time. ‘90s was depressing because the party had stopped, and too many funerals. I guess it's nice that people are being who they are wherever they are now. But I do miss that kind of sense of, “This is our community.” I mean, it will always be, but it doesn't have that same feeling anymore to me now that I’m older.⁵³⁰

Andre Goh mentions the physical space of TCWV today lacks a community gathering space like the previous *Steps*:

The Village doesn’t have a space anymore where people can congregate and where it's public. That doesn't exist anymore. There is no space. It’s quote unquote ‘safer’ but apparently not. We’ve had serial killers pick us up one at a time.⁵³¹ And my frustration is, the 519 [Community Centre] could have, should have become a

⁵²⁸ Christopher Scott in response to a post by Wes Bowmaster, “June is pride month! Not much pride out there anymore,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (3 Jun 2020).

⁵²⁹ Charles Jones, “Our community is so fragmented now,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, January 29, 2019.

⁵³⁰ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

⁵³¹ Referring to the Bruce McArthur murders targeted at Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. See Tu Thanh Ha and Justin Ling, “Bruce McArthur pleads guilty to murder of eight men linked to Toronto’s Gay Village” (29 Jan 2019), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-bruce-mcarthur-pleads-guilty-to-murder-of-eight-men-linked-to-toronto/> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

safe space, and not just the building, but the space around it for the community. We have competing interests. Other communities also require safe space who've now taken over the space, so, there's nowhere else to go. My wish list is right at the corner of Church and Wellesley [streets] on the northwest corner. I think it used to be an independent pharmacy. If all that can be knocked down and create a square, a public space for forums, for community gatherings, for everything. We don't have that anywhere now. Which is terrible as a community, because almost every other community in this city have spaces like that. Our community is *evolving* and *devolving* and being sucked into other communities. So, we don't have histories. Our histories are lost. Which, for me, as I get older, and having lived here for over forty years, very sad to think that, not me personally, but me, the community, we don't exist. There's nothing about us except for nostalgia. *The Steps* should have been immortalized, because then generations would learn about it and utilize it. No more *Steps*. Nothing now. It's just a hideous space [amused laughter].⁵³²

Anthony Mohamed refers to the identity politics of the 1980s in recognizing a broader notion of community that included those who self-identified as gay while also going beyond the 'gay community' in TCWV. He reminds us of those who often felt excluded from the gay community while fighting for the same rights:

I like that we spoke to each other even though the identity politics were happening, and people were finding their identity. We did come together on many occasions, especially around the political organizing to try to get Bill 7 passed,⁵³³ all of that kind of stuff. So, there wasn't a distinction that we weren't one community. We were one community with multiple identities. And, I don't know, people would argue that now even. I think it was important because we were discovering ourselves as well as discovering the community. And almost everyone you spoke to, at that time, felt like we were one community. But among the people of colour groups, we definitely felt excluded. Women felt excluded. Trans people felt excluded. And Two-Spirit was not even a thing at that time. We never even thought about the connections to reconciliation or to that. And I'm really glad that we've moved to a point where we recognize that, and I think the identity politics of the '80s really helped, because we were able to identify the different communities that we were a part of.⁵³⁴

⁵³² Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

⁵³³ Bill 7 was the amendment in 1987 to the Ontario Human Rights Code with the addition of sexual orientation in prohibiting discrimination. See David Rayside, "Gay Rights and Family Values: The Passage of Bill 7 in Ontario," *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 26, Summer (1988), 109-147.

⁵³⁴ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

LGBTQ2+ is sometimes referred to in the singular as community or “one community with multiple identities” as Anthony has presented. It is also referred to in the plural as LGBTQ2+ communities to focus on the distinctness of these multiple identities. The term LGBTQ2+ community is often used to refer collectively to emphasize shared common struggles, solidarity and goals related to LGBTQ2+ identities who face similar societal challenges related to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. What happens when these shared goals conflict within the notion of “one community” or different generations?

Homocentric

The LGBTQ2+ communities are a complex unification of social relationships comprising both shared interests and continuing conflicts among the *binary generation*, *neo-queer generation* and *fluid generation*. These conflicts have emerged within this acronym dynamic and externally from ‘culture wars’ about lifestyles, values and morality, now particularly focused on the trans community. LGBTQ2+ communities have been linked together since the 1990s. Early criticism in 2007 came from gay rights advocate and journalist John Aravosis. He asked whether sexual identity (LGB) should be included with gender identity (T) in the fight for a federal gay civil rights Employment Non-Discrimination Act. At that time, it was still legal to fire someone for being gay in 31 states in the U.S.⁵³⁵ Born in 1963,⁵³⁶ Aravosis can be considered part of the *binary generation*. He questions “because activists insist on including rights for transgendered people too. Has gay inclusiveness gone too far too fast?”

Aravosis felt “all legislation is a series of compromises...If we waited until society was ready to

⁵³⁵ The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) went through several sessions of U.S. Congress from 1994 to 2013 before being passed in Senate but dismissed in the House. In 2014, gay rights advocates in the U.S. withdrew support for the bill over religious exemptions to focus on the Equality Act to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which is still being reviewed (as of 2024) by committees. See Wikipedia, “Employment Non-Discrimination Act” (16 Apr 2024); Jennifer Bendery and Amanda Terkel, “Gay Rights Groups Pull Support for ENDA Over Sweeping Religious Exemption,” *Huffpost* (8 Jul 2014), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/enda-religious-exemption_n_5568736 (accessed 26 Apr 2024); and Wikipedia, “Equality Act (United States)” (21 Jan 2024), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equality_Act_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equality_Act_(United_States)) (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵³⁶ Wikipedia, “John Aravosis” (20 Sep 2023) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Aravosis (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

accept each and every member of the civil rights community before passing any civil rights legislation, we'd have no civil rights laws at all." Aravosis sees it as a political balancing act: "Conservatives understand that cultural change is a long, gradual process of small but cumulatively deadly victories. Liberals want it all now. And that's why, in the culture wars, conservatives often win and we often lose."⁵³⁷ It appears after 20 years, not much has changed.

In response to Aravosis, trans historian and gender and sexuality theorist Susan Stryker states, "Transgender people are not beggars at the civil rights table set by gay and lesbian activists. They are integral to the struggle for gender freedom for all." Stryker derides this "me-first" perspective as "homocentric." She points out all have gender in common: "Gender and sexuality are like two lines intersecting on a graph, and trying to make them parallel undoes the very notion of homo-, hetero- or bisexuality." She also points to trans activists who have been part of the community's fight for rights as long as LGB communities.⁵³⁸ Stryker recognizes a generational shift in the 1990s "when a new generation of queer kids, the post-baby boomers whose political sensibilities had been forged in the context of the AIDS crisis, started coming into adulthood. They were receptive to transgender issues in a new way – and that more-inclusive understanding has been steadily building for nearly two decades."⁵³⁹ The generation to which Stryker alludes here is what I refer to as the *neo-queer generation*. Their history and

⁵³⁷ John Aravosis, "How did the T get in LGBT?," *Salon* (8 Oct 2007) <https://www.salon.com/2007/10/08/lgbt/> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵³⁸ In 1966, drag queens and trans individuals rioted in protest of police harassment at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. See *The Guardian*, "Compton's Cafeteria riot: a historic act of trans resistance, three years before Stonewall (21 Jun 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jun/21/stonewall-san-francisco-riot-tenderloin-neighborhood-trans-women> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁵³⁹ Susan Stryker, "Why the T in LGBT is here to stay," *Salon* (11 Oct 2007) https://www.salon.com/2007/10/11/transgender_2/ (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

influence on queer theory have ubiquitously educated the more recent generation on social media. I refer to them as the *fluid generation*.

The continuing and unresolved conflicts not only have political polarization – including here in Canada – but also an *intergenerational* and *intragenerational* divide. There are also gender, racial and socio-economic divisions. The trans issue reflects concerns raised in the oral history interviews that stemmed from one of my pre-planned oral history questions: “What were your experiences of seeing or not seeing, lesbian, trans or racialized people at gay bars or social spaces before 1989 and after in The Village?” As mentioned in Chapter 4, my intention was to address the commonly known criticism that in the early years the TCWV was predominantly shaped by white, cisgender, middle-class gay men. These gay men had the privilege of access and influence to build networks, communities, and gay male and mostly white spaces.

The connected concerns that stemmed from this question were twofold: a few interviewees were concerned about the contemporary use of *queer* as a replacement for *gay*; others mentioned the loss of *exclusive gay male space*. I want to be clear in this project that, as a historian, it is not my intention to pass judgment on those I interviewed. It is to convey a range of perspectives of a cohort of gay men I interviewed along with the views of some VGT members. For some of this cohort, these concerns are not an issue. For others, they are. To deny giving them voice, though controversial, is to suppress what is a part of history research. To set the context, I will first discuss some answers to my pre-planned oral history question on exclusivity/inclusivity.

Seeing or Not Seeing?

As an older, racialized gay man, Patrick Brown states he did not begin to see more gay Black men in Toronto until the late 1980s and early 1990s:

Not in the early days, of course, but later on, maybe by the end of the '80s, beginning of the '90s, I had started to meet more and more people from the Caribbean, which was great because, not only because they were gay, but from a cultural standpoint and sharing familiar stories we have to navigate socially. There would be a certain amount of mixing but back then, the few Black people who were out, it's not that there weren't, I mean, I'm sure there were many Black people, it's just that a lot of people from the Caribbean and Africa were not comfortable going to the bars. Because they hadn't reconciled their sexuality internally. A lot of Black people back then would meet someone, have sex, and then go back to their real world. One of the things I did notice is that a lot of Black people back in the early days, because we were so few and far between, we were always suspicious of each other. And the suspicion came, there was always this accusation that a lot of Black men, if they were in the bars that were predominantly white, they weren't into other Black men, they only liked white men. So, if you looked at them, they would avert their eyes to let you know that "Listen, I'm not about y'all" [amused laughter].

Patrick says he went to several Black gay bars in the United States in the 1980s and recalls some of the major differences to those in Toronto:

You would see them, lesbians, and that's one of the things, once I started going to the States I noticed in Toronto that there were very few bars that were, for lack of a better term, co-ed. That kind of saddened me that we had to make the separation. And in fact, I remember back in the '80s, Komrads wouldn't let females in at all. If you went with a female friend, they would hassle them instead of letting them in. And I was like, "Wow." So, I do remember that poignantly, and I remember going to the States and seeing especially the Black bars in the States that had lesbians, gays, everybody was there. And I was thinking, "You know what, you can get this." But trans, I think Komrads probably had been the bar that you would have found trans, because you had a lot of drag shows in Komrads. So, I think yeah, that was normal, even in the '80s. That was a thing, and I remember getting into Komrads in the early '80s... At Club Manhattan⁵⁴⁰ there were a lot of Asians and white men too, but mostly white men who are into Black men, or you'd find white men who just loved the music, and they would come with their other white friends, and they'd just come for the music. It was fairly mixed, and of course there were a lot of South Asians too, because in the Caribbean there's a mix, but you also found South Asians from South Asia, and Asian people from Hong Kong there. So, it was actually, it was a nice mix.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴⁰ Club Manhattan was an urban music dance club in the 1990s to early 2000s at 19 Balmuto Street with weekly Saturday nights for mostly Black, gay, bisexual and non-labelling men who have sex with men.

⁵⁴¹ Interview with Patrick Brown, 19 Oct 2023.

Anonymous Interviewee #3 also recalls the limited number of Black gay men like himself that he saw out in gay Toronto in the 1980s because of its primary location downtown.

He also mentions his own limited encounters with racism in gay Toronto:

There were small, little pockets of Black people in different places. There weren't many at all. Because I think we were still, they were not out, so to speak. I recall friends would tell me they would come downtown, and they'd be looking around, and I wonder what happened to me because I was looking around [amused laughter]. I'm just going to the club. That's it. I think maybe for me too, I didn't think any of my straight acquaintances or family members would be around [when I was in downtown Toronto], and if they were around and in the club than they need to explain [amused laughter]. So yes, there were very few, very few. And so, we're talking about the strip here on Yonge Street. We're talking about *Katrina's* and *The Manatee* and *The Quest*. It was a very small space, but the music was really great. And I can't remember what night in the week, but they had a lot of Black people. Well, to me it was a lot of Black people [amused laughter] ... You see three or four and then all of a sudden you see eight and whoa! I was never fearful of walking into any of those spaces. I don't know what it is. Never fearful. I felt at home really. There were other Black people there, so I guess that was fine for me. I was going to college at the time, in those three, three-and-a-half years, or whatever. And so, walking into a space that was predominantly white was never an issue for me. I know there's a different space between college and sitting in a gay bar, but we had to do these groups and it was my first time actually working with people from Asia, Chinese, specifically. Never an issue. And I was walking into *The Manatee* with this Black guy, and no problem. I had no problem. And then, you know drag queens, and a lot of them back in the day, were Black, and I imagine a lot of them today are Black. So, I felt okay. I felt okay. I was there to dance. Dare I say I could dance [amused laughter] ... You know, so I guess because of that too, there wasn't a sense of feeling out of place. I was hitting, hitting the floor and the music whenever there was something that I really liked. It's interesting, I would never go to these places alone. There was always a connection, "Oh, you're going out to the club." "Then I'm coming out." I would never leave my home alone and say, "Oh, I'm just going to go into the club." Ever... You know it's interesting, because that issue of racism in the bars, I have never experienced, at least blatant enough for me to recognize it. And I'm sure it was there, but I never felt it. I would walk in, and I'm there to dance, and that's what I did. I'd go buy a drink and I was served with good customer service, nothing to bark about, back on the floor and dance up, and I meet different people, white, Black, Brown, whatever.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴² Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

Terrance “Teach” Saunders also agrees with Patrick and Anonymous Interviewee #3 that there were fewer Black gay men at Toronto gay bars in the early 1980s, but both Terrance and Patrick did experience racism in gay Toronto (see his quote in Chapter One⁵⁴³):

I was trained to find people that look like me. I saw the other kinds of beautiful men, but I also was looking for people that look like me. I remember there was this beautiful Maltese boy who had a Black lover at the time, I later found out, and there were groups of Black men. There were groups of Black men but small in comparison. What was very, very interesting too, there were also men from the Caribbean who may not have identified as Black because they were biracial. I'm thinking about friends from Guyana, Trinidad where there was a lot of racial mixture. So, as we would say, they were ‘white-looking’ [amused laughter] but may not have been. You know, may have been the product of a lot of racial mixing. Brings into play the sort of resident Black gay community that was here [in Toronto in the 1980s]. You see all these men and then we all meet in these [gay] spaces, and we smile and say, “Hello, how are you?” [amused laughter].

Terrance indicates this is what led to connections with the few other Black gay men in Toronto at the time until they became more visible after the International Lesbian and Gay People of Color Conference (ILGAPOC) in 1988:

I remembered again when the People of Color Conference⁵⁴⁴ happened because I remember as part of AYA, when the People of Color Conference happened, I think it's referenced in Philip Pike's documentary *Our Dance of Revolution*⁵⁴⁵ and I remember Douglas Stewart,⁵⁴⁶ Courtney McFarlane...⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴³ As mentioned in Chapter One, census data indicates a greater rise in ethno-racial groups in Toronto started in the mid-1980s.

⁵⁴⁴ International Lesbian and Gay People of Color Conference (ILGAPOC) planned by the 101 Dewson Street Collective which formed a Toronto group of Black/People of Color to host the event in Toronto (1988) and attended by delegates from the Caribbean, England, and the U.S. The 101 Dewson Street Collective was founded in 1985 in the home of lesbian couple Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin and became a collective of queer activists and organizers living in the space, such as Debbie Douglas and Courtney McFarlane.

⁵⁴⁵ Roaring River Films, *Our Dance of Revolution: The History of Toronto's Black Queer Community* (released 9 Jun 2019) <https://ourdanceofrevolution.com/> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁴⁶ Douglas Stewart is a gay activist and founding member of the 101 Dewson Street Collective with Debbie Douglas of *Zami* (1984), the first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality. Stewart was also founding member with Camille Orridge of Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) and first Executive Director of Black CAP, community support and educational organization in response to HIV/AIDs in Toronto's Black, African and Caribbean communities (1989-Present). See *Queer Events*, “Douglas Stewart” (2021) <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer/individual/douglas-stewart> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁴⁷ Courtney McFarlane is a gay activist, visual artist, and poet and was a member of the 101 Dewson Street Collective. McFarlane was founding member of AYA (1994), a social support group for Black gay and bisexual

...Debbie Douglas,⁵⁴⁸ Makeda Silvera,⁵⁴⁹ Stephanie Martin.⁵⁵⁰ I remember there [at 101 Dewson Street Collective] hearing about the People of Color Conference, and the planning. I remember being at a planning and the kinds of things they were doing, and actually attending that conference. And burgeoning activism, and finding spaces where you felt [it was important] participating in queer politics. And Pride came, and the beginnings of the Pride festival and just watching those early days. Visibility. I couldn't understand why people didn't get it. I couldn't understand why people didn't get it.⁵⁵¹

Anonymous Interviewee # 4 mentions the alternative Club 101⁵⁵² as a mixed space in the mid-1980s. He says it felt more welcoming than some of the other Toronto gay bars and dance clubs, including *Komrads*. He suggests things started to change by the late 1990s:

It [Club 101] was a very mixed crowd. It didn't feel segregated. Everyone was welcome. There was a good mix of people of colour. *Komrads* was different. *Komrads* was very white. But I didn't let that stop me from going. I just ignored it in general. And to be frank, I didn't really pay enough attention to that particular perspective. I just saw me, and I just saw them. We were all just gay guys out having fun. It was fun. I was always with my friends. So, I didn't really confront any kind of racialized issues, per se. I got ignored a lot. I was a skinny little Brown kid who was like five-foot-seven and weighed ninety pounds. Everybody thought I was fourteen so they wouldn't come near me. I just never even thought about that. I was just out with my friends. If I happened to meet a guy or somebody introduced me to a guy, and we who got along, that was a bonus. But it wasn't the main reason to go out to do that. [By the late 1990s] it was very different in the sense that I didn't feel like I was marginalized in any way. I didn't feel like I just had to dance by myself on the dance floor. If I just stood around and waited five minutes, I would usually meet someone. People were friendlier. I

men throughout the 1990s and Black Yes! organizing committee member for Blockorama events at Toronto Pride starting in 1999. See *Queer Events*, “Courtney McFarlane” (2021), <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer/individual/courtney-mcfarlane> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁴⁸ Debbie Douglas is a lesbian activist and was a member of the 101 Dewson Street Collective. Douglas was founding member with Douglas Stewart of Zami (1984), the first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality. See Emma N. Awe, *101 Dewson Street* (2021), <https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCGSD-101-Dewson-Street-Booklet-.pdf> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁴⁹ Makeda Silvera is a lesbian/feminist activist, organizer, writer who helped establish the 101 Dewson Street Collective in 1983 with her partner Stephanie Martin where they founded Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press in 1985. See Emma N. Awe, *101 Dewson Street* (2021), <https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCGSD-101-Dewson-Street-Booklet-.pdf> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁵⁰ Stephanie Martin is a lesbian/feminist activist and organizer who helped establish the 101 Dewson Street Collective in 1983 with her partner Makeda Silvera where they founded Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press in 1985. See Emma N. Awe, *101 Dewson Street* (2021), <https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCGSD-101-Dewson-Street-Booklet-.pdf> (accessed 26 Apr 2024).

⁵⁵¹ Interview with Terrance “Teach” Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

⁵⁵² Club 101 was an alternative dance bar (1984-1986); previously Jarvis House Tavern (1963-1983); Hotel Jarvis (1929-1963); McFarlane’s Hotel (1898-1929); became Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1989) hosting weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night Rock & Roll Fag Bar (1988-1989) at 99-101 Jarvis Street.

put on a little weight by then so, I probably looked better. Didn't look like a skinny fourteen-year-old [amused laughter].⁵⁵³

Jim Elliott lived in the United States and, like Patrick Brown, mentions the major differences between gay spaces in the U.S. and Toronto. He also reflects on lesbians and being around people with similarities:

Toronto is a very diverse community. But when you look in The Village, it's not you know, and maybe that's because the places I was going to like *The Barn*, it was 95% white men. I suspect that's probably not really changed in too many of the bars. That changes in other places. When I go down to Atlanta, you have much more variety mainly because the Black population in Atlanta is so high. So, you get a different thing there. But yeah, there's not really a mix [in The Village]. We used to see more of a mix with lesbians. The lesbian population has got to be the same percentage probably as the gay male population.⁵⁵⁴ We don't really mix. We did with Cabbagetown Softball League, by the way. That was a social thing outside. I suspect all the sports organizations do. The reason why, quite frankly, has nothing to do with being gay. You hang around with people who you can identify with. For better or for worse, growing up white male, you're going to hang around with other white males. And I don't really see in Toronto any real mixing. The white male community tends to stick to itself. Communities tend to associate with people of their same background, whether they're gay or straight. I wish that was not the case.⁵⁵⁵

Leo Mitterni reminds us of the importance of lesbian allyship not only during the HIV/AIDS crisis but also during the Toronto bathhouse raids:

The good thing that happened early on was when the gay and lesbian communities came together during the bathhouse raids because up until then it was very separatist. It was not very nice. I think it was stereotypes of not accepting people for who they are. I feel that there was this protectiveness. I know there were a couple of lesbian bars, but they were in the east and it was like [imitating a deep voice] “Oh, did you hear about the woman at the door and her

⁵⁵³ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #4, 3 Oct 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ Census data did not start categorizing lesbians and gays, along with other sexual orientation until 2018. Along with self-reporting for census data and combining “Lesbian or gay,” it is difficult to know what the percentages of gays and lesbians were during the time to which Jim Elliott refers. See Government of Canada “Frequently Asked Questions About the Self-Identification Questionnaire” (15 Apr 2021), <https://science.gc.ca/site/science/en/interagency-research-funding/policies-and-guidelines/self-identification-data-collection-support-equity-diversity-and-inclusion/frequently-asked-questions-about-self-identification-questionnaire#12>, (accessed 30 Apr 2024); See also *Statista*, “Number of non-heterosexual persons aged 15 years and older in Canada between 2015 and 2018, by sexual orientation and province or territory,” <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1381955/population-lgb-canada-province/> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

big German Shepherd.” It was this very strange thing. They didn't come together. I was lucky enough to have met lesbian friends early on, and I'm thinking, “Well, this doesn't make sense.” But it was quite separate. The bath raids had happened. The first demonstration, which was huge, I don't know if you were part of that or saw that. It was huge. That shocked me, and I felt I was one of the downtown people, and (lesbian) Chris Burchell⁵⁵⁶ really led that.⁵⁵⁷

Leo also recalls different individuals from various communities, including the Black, South Asian and East Asian communities who came to the Hassle Free Clinic in TCWV in the 1980s. He also recounts a particular racialized ‘internal gay-bashing’ incident at the gay bar *Chaps*:

It wasn't safe for them back then. I had to actually take on some of the [gay] bars and the bath houses because it was terrible how people were being treated. I always was that kind of person who realized that because people come from different cultures and didn't always fit in right away. Basically, people were being pushed aside and bullied. Because, like anybody else, you grew up with the people you're comfortable with. That was being totally misinterpreted, like they [gay Asians] were in groups for their own support comfort and so being harassed. It was horrible. At the baths, it was horrible. I witnessed this being Italian. There was a group of Italians that all went to the baths together. And they were walking down [the bathhouse halls] together exploring, and it had nothing to do with the fact that, whether they're gay, it was a new experience, and you have more security when you're with your own people. But that wasn't being seen that way. I have to say that it was a terrible time. It slowly started to change.⁵⁵⁸

Hugh Brewster suggests stigma, fewer numbers and a focus on other issues can account for the lack of visibility of lesbians and racialized gays in TCWV in the 1980s and 1990s:

This was a very white city. I think the big immigration from the Caribbean and Africa didn't really happen until the ‘80s and ‘90s. They were already facing stigma and so being out gay, was not [really seen]. I mean, we would have welcomed anyone at *The Body Politic*, but it was hard enough to get lesbians.

⁵⁵⁶ Chris Bearchell (1953-2007) was a lesbian activist and writer, often ‘only lesbian’ writer for *The Body Politic* (1975-1987) and collective member (1978-1987). She was also co-founder of LOOT – Lesbians Organization of Toronto (1976-1980). Her statement, “No more shit” became recurring protest chant at bathhouse raids marches in 1981. She was also a member and first Chair of the CLGO – Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (founded in 1975), and advocate for Maggie’s sex workers rights group founded in 1985. See *The ArQuives*, “Chris Bearchell, 1953-2007 (2024), <https://digitalexhibitions.arquives.ca/exhibits/show/npc/item/68> (accessed 27 Apr 2024); *Queer Events*, “Chris Bearchell” (2021), <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer/individual/chris-bearchell> (accessed 27 Apr 2024).

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

⁵⁵⁸ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

There was usually just like one lesbian on the collective at the most because women's liberation was far more attractive to women and a much bigger movement. And so, there were a lot of lesbians in the women's movement, but in the gay movement, not so much. I mean, there were some, but it was a much smaller community than gay men. So white gay men were really the vanguard and what most people were. Now a little later, I think in the '80s or '90s, there was a place called El Convento Rico⁵⁵⁹ and that was Latino and ethnic and exotic you know, it was a popular place for 'white bread' gays like cis gays like me to go to. But no, it was largely a white male gay scene.⁵⁶⁰

Tim McCaskell talks about different spaces where lesbians and those from different racialized groups would go in the 1980s and 1990s:

It was largely 'boys town.' There was never really a major lesbian bar on Church [Street]. *Slack Alice* was the only one. Other than that, I mean, the rents became too high there, and lesbians, as women had 60% of the earnings or spending power that the boys did. And so, it was mostly a boys town. There was always a kind of a racial mix, but people also don't remember that Toronto wasn't very racially mixed in 1970. I think the census shows it was close to 96% of European background. So, there were small groups of people who were always the kind of people that were there. Richard [Fung, Tim's partner]⁵⁶¹ talks about it in *Orientalisms*.⁵⁶² [There was *The Quest*]. It was back on Yonge Street, but it became a kind of a bar where a lot of gay Asians hung out, as the Asian community began to grow. Black gay men tended, up until probably the '90s, more likely to, if they were into other Black gay men, more likely to be into house parties and things like that. Indigenous communities, these guys hung out at the *Parkside* more than anything. More than the *St. Charles*. I think, as in any kind of predominantly white area, there was probably a feeling by some racialized groups that this sort of wasn't their space. But on the other hand, it was the only space, and so even if you didn't like it. Look at *The Body Politic*. Asians talk about the kind of racism there in the bars and things like that. But, you know, there's no place else to go. And so that's where you end up going and dealing with the good times or bad times that come with that.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ El Convento Rico was a Latino nightclub (1992-Present) at 750 College Street that has welcomed Toronto's Latin American 2SLGBTQ+ communities with dancing and drag performances.

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

⁵⁶¹ Richard Fung is gay award-winning filmmaker, activist, educator, and community organizer. He is the founder of GAT – Gay Asians of Toronto, a social organization for political advocacy and support of gay Asians in Toronto (1980-2002). His artistic works and writings have been influential on LGBTQ studies. He is a retired professor of Integrated Media and Art and Social Change who worked at OCAD – Ontario College of Art & Design from 2003. I wish to express my thanks to Richard Fung for interviewee referrals for this project. He declined to be interviewed for this project.

⁵⁶² Richard Fung's first documentary *Orientalisms* (1984) presented lesbian and gay Asians to counter the stereotypical opinion that gay people are white people.

⁵⁶³ Interview with Tim McCaskell, 5 Sep 2023.

Samuel Lopez who performed in drag as Samantha at *El Convento Rico, La Pantera Rosa* and various venues in TCWV points to working with Black drag queens. He mentions the need early on for racialized gays to be organized in the 1980s to be more visible:

I was interacting a lot with Blacks. And some of them were the drag queens that were doing the shows and because they ran the show of drag queening. I became friends with them. I could tell that they were marginalized. Everyone seemed to have what was a barrier to something, an issue. Michelle Ross⁵⁶⁴ and her friends were part of this, but we were not organized, we were not organized. So, the experiences were very, like on a one-on-one basis. And so, it was also difficult for us as ethnics, I guess, to unite. But it was the message that we needed to send because we had a common denominator, a common enemy kind of thing. And it's the system. The system is created for whites.⁵⁶⁵

Terrance "Teach" Saunders remembers the places he went to besides the gay bars in Toronto and meeting other Black men he had seen previously in Toronto gay bars:

I think for us there was always this sense of you're looking for a Black night out or you're looking for a DJ that plays the kind of music that resonates with you. And it was always hit and miss. Or, and again to go back to my early days in living in Toronto, going into very defined heterosexual spaces. There was a club, I remember in my early days at York [University]. And with all of the people who lived in Founders,⁵⁶⁶ there was a friend from Bermuda, a friend from Iran, and we all went to a club called Retreat Two and it was R&B music, but what was interesting in it is, a couple of times I would go there, and I would meet the men from *Katrina's* [gay bar], the Black men there. But again, you're in those spaces where we were not identifying. We are there for the music. We are there for the men, but no one is doing anything to sort of trouble the water [amused laughter]. Also, there were house parties given by Dudley⁵⁶⁷ and Michelle Ross in their apartments' where Black men gathered frequently. I remember attending one of Michelle Ross's parties in her apartment on Parliament Street back in the day! I guess we cannot undermine the importance of the homophobia and what Church Street represents, and the homophobia in African-Canadian communities. And so, any space other than identifiable space. So, if you say you're going to Church and Wellesley it's pretty well determined what you're about. I think, because of their

⁵⁶⁴ Michelle Ross (1954-2021) was a Jamaican-Canadian drag queen icon especially known for portraying singer Diana Ross. She performed from 1974 until her death in 2021. See *CBC News*, "A Toronto drag queen who 'wowed audiences' has died and people are paying tribute" (30 Mar 2021), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/drag-queen-michelle-ross-death-tributes-social-media-1.5969148> (accessed 27 Apr 2024).

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

⁵⁶⁶ Founders College and student residence at York University.

⁵⁶⁷ Terrence was uncertain about Dudley's last name, but described him as a gay Black man from Jamaica.

own sort of internal struggles around identity, Black men prefer to go to spaces where they were not so targeted, and labeled, and felt comfortable in.⁵⁶⁸

Terrance ponders the changes for younger Black gay or queer generations:

I think as it relates to men of African descent, Canadians of African descent, gay, queer peoples of African descent in Canada, I think younger generations because of more policies that protect them grow up less inhibited about the spaces to where they can go, and they are very, very aware of their rights. So, they will probably feel very comfortable just going anywhere. I think as well as among them, those who want specific spaces and are thinking of longevity as entrepreneurs might want someplace distinct from it. I don't know. I feel when I'm out [in The Village], as recently as last evening, that the comfortable spaces are the spaces where men are basically in that category called 'bears.' Because that's my generation. But even in that space where there are quote unquote bear/daddies,⁵⁶⁹ there's very little African-Canadian presence, I am usually there with my friends who are all Black men and when it does exist, it's very rare to see Black men with Black men [amused laughter] ... So, nothing has essentially changed. Nothing has essentially changed.⁵⁷⁰

These perspectives indicate there were fewer gay Black men and other racialized gay men seen in Toronto's gay bars in the early 1980s. These numbers began to increase by the late 1980s as racialized gays and lesbians began to organize with the need to join forces. Certain gay spaces were more welcoming than others while many racialized lesbians and gays continued to experience internal racism and/or marginalization within the community. This included lesbians despite being recognized as allies after the 1981 bathhouse raids and the HIV/AIDS crisis into the 1990s. Also among those in Toronto's gay community were trans individuals considered not as visible between the 1970s and 1990s. Such invisibility may have occurred as trans people were often mistaken for gay men or lesbians.

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

⁵⁶⁹ For a listing of popular 'gay' sub-cultural 'types' see *Ruben Galarreta*, "Gay Tribes" (2024), https://www.rubengalarreta.com/featured_item/everything-you-need-to-know-about-gay-tribes/ (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁵⁷⁰ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

What About Trans?

Trans identity and gay identity are distinct concepts often conflated or misunderstood. Assumptions that gender non-conformity in expression means the person is gay adds to such misunderstandings. There are trans men and women who identify as gay. There are trans men and women who identify as straight. There are trans individuals who are fluid and identify as queer. Some trans women present in a feminine way. Some trans men present in a masculine way. Some are fluid. In addition, drag queens and the trans community have a complex relationship with some overlapping and distinct differences. Drag performance does not necessarily reflect gender identity off-stage. Trans is not necessarily about outward presentation or performance as it refers to one's internal gender identity being different from sex assigned at birth. However, drag has provided a space to some trans people for gender expression.⁵⁷¹

In some cases, *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations look to the past for guidance on the present and future of gender and sexual identities. Both the gay and trans communities and others within the LGBTQ2+ community have shared experiences of discrimination and marginalization. They have faced societal prejudice, stigma and denial of basic rights. The Lesbian and Gay Rights Movement of the past helped many (but not all) to gain rights and freedoms that some take for granted today. Lesbians and gays of the *binary* and *neo-queer* generations recall the closeted struggles to find a voice in solidarity to fight for acceptance.

The historical pathologizing of gay sexuality is recapitulated in the pathologizing of trans gender expression now seen within the *fluid* generation. It is a similar moral panic but with

⁵⁷¹ See Canadian Centre for Gender + Sexual Diversity, "CCGSD Queer Vocabulary" (2022), <https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CCGSD-Vocabulary.pdf> (accessed 28 Apr 2024); *The Conversation*, "Explainer: the difference between being transgender and doing drag" (26 Jul 2018), <https://theconversation.com/explainer-the-difference-between-being-transgender-and-doing-drag-100521> (accessed 28 Apr 2024).

different traits. For example, gay men were presented as a danger as predators to children⁵⁷² and men (who fear of being hit on sexually).⁵⁷³ Trans women are now presented as a danger as predators to children⁵⁷⁴ and women (who fear of sexual assault in washrooms).⁵⁷⁵ As was the case with lesbians and gays decades ago, we cannot change the perception of those who label trans and non-binary people as mentally ill or delusional. We can try to remove similar prejudices and help others see them with more consideration. Continuing to support one another's struggles continues to promote equality for all and maintain the hard-won rights today for the *fluid generation*. Again, some trans individuals may not be gay, but some are. This should not make a difference when 'walking backwards into the future with our eyes on the past' as the all generations seek to maintain and secure human rights, dignity and acceptance.

While this project probes how nostalgia about gay Toronto and TCWV can be seen through the memories of a specific cohort of older gay men, it is also a foundation to reflect on a transitional period of Toronto's gay past. This research is a starting point and does not preclude future research to include lesbians, bisexuals, trans, queer, two-spirit and even straight individuals of all generations. The trans community often finds itself obscured within the earlier landscape of Toronto and TCWV. Although I have not included trans and other voices in this project due to the focus of this specific research, it is not my intention to overlook them or others

⁵⁷² *Toronto Star*, "Homosexual backlash feared" (3 Aug 1977), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Toronto Star (1971-2009), A3.

⁵⁷³ *Toronto Star*, "Malcolm Phlarb's Ordeal In The Weird Washroom" (20 Jul 1961), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Toronto Star (1971-2009), 7.

⁵⁷⁴ *The Conversation*, "Calling drag queens 'groomers' and 'pedophiles' is the latest in a long history of weaponising those terms against the LGBTIQA community" (16 May 2023), <https://theconversation.com/calling-drag-queens-groomers-and-pedophiles-is-the-latest-in-a-long-history-of-weaponising-those-terms-against-the-lgbtqi-community-205648> (accessed 15 May 2024).

⁵⁷⁵ *Vox*, "Anti-transgender bathroom hysteria explained" (22 Feb 2017), <https://www.vox.com/2016/5/5/11592908/transgender-bathroom-laws-rights> (accessed 15 May 2024).

within the LGBTQ2+ community. As mentioned earlier, the gaybourhood has historically been represented by a bastion of cisgender, gay male visibility within the white world of The Village. The unique challenges faced by trans individuals sometimes went and often continues to go unnoticed amidst the broader 'gay rights' narrative. It is my hope that this research will provide opportunities for future research with further inclusive representation as a follow up to this project.

In terms of trans connections with older gay men in Toronto, Leo Mitterni presents his own contacts and outreach support experiences with trans individuals. He points out the long journey of hiding and lack of support that trans and gay people have had in Toronto that has only started changing for the trans community recently:

There was nothing for trans. And I was fortunate enough to co-facilitate the jail outreach where there was a trans female. Hardly knew at the time, and nobody would have known that she was trans. And it just highlighted the issue to me that, "What would you do to support others? Who would you go tell you're gay or trans?" Because there was nothing in the burbs or downtown. For the trans community, things started to change perhaps not that long ago. There's a more visible community and more response to needs and more. That started more recently than before. Before, there wasn't as many. We didn't have people helping people to transition medically or anyway. One of my good friends was the first trans operation at Toronto General Hospital. It was a horrible experience for her because you had to be at the Clark Institute⁵⁷⁶ to get assessed that you were going to do this, surgeries not as perfected as today. Luckily today we have made a large advancement in this area.⁵⁷⁷

Lionel Collier says the 519 Church Street Community Centre was one space where he encountered trans female youth at meetings of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Group in the late 1970s and the 1980s. He also mentions how some trans women in Toronto (and other cities) survived:

⁵⁷⁶ For information about the controversial history of the Clark Institute see Andrea James, *Transgender Map* (16 Oct 2019), <https://www.transgendermap.com/guidance/resources/canada/ontario/camh/clarke-institute/> (accessed 27 Apr 2024).

⁵⁷⁷ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

Well, we all sat in a circle. Because it was a lot of talking, and a lot of competing personalities. And some people were real attention getters. We tried not to discriminate against people, and there were some trans there at the time and they would get all dolled up and show up and they were really fun. And of course, they were out on the streets at night trying to turn tricks. And that's what we used to see a lot of that you don't see at all now because they had no other way of making a living. And there were large numbers of them. Fifty or seventy-five working the streets in downtown Toronto, and they did it quick. They did a lot of business. They had a lot of customers. It wasn't like nobody wanted them. I mean, they were very popular and in demand, and a lot of straight guys would pick up a trans person just because they wanted a blowjob. They didn't care what was underneath of that wig, as long as they got their blowjob, they were really happy. And I guess it may be the straight women were less promiscuous at that time. Or it was just a quick and easy way for a guy to get off. Just drive around downtown and pick someone up.⁵⁷⁸

Terrance “Teach” Saunders mentions his experience with a possible trans person at university in the early 1980s and our evolving understanding of gender:

I remember there was this one guy who was from Montreal, and he was just very, very ...now we would call it gender expressions. Gender expression was very his. The language wasn't around to talk about it in those days.⁵⁷⁹

Terrance’s description of ‘gender expressions’ to describe his encounter with someone who we might more readily identify as trans or non-binary today is an example of the potential confusion and lack of understanding in the past.

Anonymous Interviewee #2 has worked in Toronto gay bars serving trans women and men as part of the clientele and speaks to the evolving understanding of trans women in The Village. He sees a significant shift in safety and acceptance of the trans community in TCWV:

The trans women were welcomed, but I could see them feeling a little bit out of place. But we also, back then, we thought trans women were gay. We don't see it that way anymore. If you're a trans woman, and you like men, now you're considered to be straight. But back then, we did not see it that way. I do notice now, the community, The Village, the Church-Wellesley Village is probably a safer haven for trans people. Because even back then, there were not that many, but they were safe. They weren't that safe either, though, but they were safer than

⁵⁷⁸ Interview with Lionel Collier, 21 Sep 2023.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

any other area of the city. Now, I think the LGBT group got so strong that there will not be any tolerance of hate.⁵⁸⁰

Hugh Brewster points out the similarities of the issues trans individuals face today with those of lesbians and gays in the past:

For trans people, what they're going through now is very similar to what gay people, gay and lesbians went through, the kind of resistance and accusations or grooming. I mean, everyone thought that gays were predators and so they resurrected that whole thing that we're a danger to young people which for years was the thinking, you know, 'gay equals predator' was the great conflation. The book banning and all of that stuff. That's cyclical. It's very familiar but they always lose in the end and it's a small, small number of people making a fuss about not very much.⁵⁸¹

Dan Benson in his work as a United Church minister sees the important shift of centering trans and Indigenous voices:

From the congregation I've been serving, I have three student ministers and one is trans, one is female, straight cisgender female, and the other is cisgender straight white male. They both tell me that in seminary they don't have voices, and even some of the gay students are saying, it's really about the trans experience and opening that up, and the Indigenous voices that have typically been suppressed. So, in terms of, I think, what's happening in places like the 519 [Community Centre] and some of the political forums, "We've [gays and lesbians] got our cake and are able to eat it." So, as the LG part of the alphabet, now it's much more about the trans and the two spirited people.⁵⁸²

David Hallman recounts the controversy between Sky Gilbert and the Toronto trans community. In 2018, Gilbert, a Toronto gay writer, actor, playwright and drag performer who co-founded Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, wrote a poem published on his website called *I'm Afraid of 'Woke People.'* It was in response to Vivek Shray, a transgender woman of colour and author of the book *I'm Afraid of Men.* Gilbert turned the ensuing controversy into a play, *A Nice Day in the Park* performed in 2020 to address the conflict. Hallman highlights the continuing

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁵⁸¹ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

⁵⁸² Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

controversy over trans issues in the gay community. He points to the importance of The Village as a space of solidarity to continue welcoming trans people to be visible, start conversations and educate.⁵⁸³

Trans folks started to have more of a voice and there was a huge flare up. Sky Gilbert wrote a piece where he was attacking trans and the rising trans movement saying you're devaluing my masculinity as a man. And he had theatre shows going on at Buddies at that time. And this created a huge reaction, and they had some events at Buddies that I went to. I just had to listen to the stories because trans folk have very different experiences than anything I was exposed to. And I really needed to be in a learning phase to listen, just to listen to stories. And I have some friends who I've had long conversations with telling me their stories of both racialized and trans folk feeling very threatened on the street. But there is an alignment, but they couldn't see that. So many of my friends, they just couldn't, and I don't mean to be judgmental, but they just could not make that connection to what we had been through and what was being experienced by other members of the population now who were now very much in the mud. Being in The Village, it felt really great to be able to be living here in The Village because I could have easy access to both types of conversation with my ongoing friends and to access the events that Buddies had, and to encounter trans folks on the street. I wouldn't be able to do that without the regularity that I have [living in The Village today].⁵⁸⁴

These comments present how some gay men I interviewed did share limited social spaces and connections with trans individuals in the 1970s and 1980s under what appears to be more professional circumstances, at more formal group meetings or seeing them as street-engaged workers. Like gay men in the closet, many trans people may not have disclosed their trans status to others making it difficult for gay men or anyone to know if there were trans people in their social circles. Also, gay men and trans people may not have always shared the same communities limiting interaction and connections. Different personal interests and life experiences could have

⁵⁸³ *Toronto Star*, "Buddies in Bad Times co-founder Sky Gilbert severs ties with theatre company" (27 Nov 2018), https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/buddies-in-bad-times-co-founder-sky-gilbert-severs-ties-with-theatre-company/article_c267b24d-8ea0-50d6-a742-7108ff425c2f.html (accessed 27 Apr 2024); See also *Toronto Star*, "More than a year after he cut ties with Buddies in Bad Times, Sky Gilbert addresses the conflict in 'A Nice Day in the Park'" (25 Feb 2020), https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/more-than-a-year-after-he-cut-ties-with-buddies-in-bad-times-sky-gilbert/article_7df2d085-b3f9-577a-a309-724a88ec7368.html (accessed 27 Apr 2024).

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

also played a role. More recently, we have seen a greater focus on trans issues with a growing awareness and understanding among some gay men. Despite this, others continue to challenge an alignment with the trans community. Building upon this, I turn to other examples in the next section.

Queering the Conversation of Gay & Trans Identities – Vintage Gays & Queers

Included with gays who do not see the alignment between historical and contemporary gay and trans struggles are some of the members on the *Vintage Gay Toronto* (VGT) Facebook website. VGT was started by David Bennett in 2014 to provide historical accounts by VGT members of their gay experiences in Toronto from 1950 to 2000. Bennett continues to be VGT website administrator. I do not claim that the VGT website is representative of all gay men with a connection to gay Toronto history or TCWV. Nevertheless, it is a valuable historical resource that does capture important archival materials along with common memories and narratives of inclusion, community and strength. Some narratives also contain individual expressions of controversial ideas and thoughts and should not be extrapolated to all who self-identify as gay men. Contentious notions adopted by some VGT members exclude and potentially silence voices of dissent among broader LGBTQ2+ communities. These reflections are not always aligned with other LGBTQ2+ narratives. There are social, cultural and subcultural mechanisms at work in the construction of some of these historical memories on VGT as a way of bolstering and promoting idealized visions of a gay past that continue to support divisions in LGBTQ2+ space in Toronto.

The tone of the VGT website began to shift in 2017 with more indignant comments disparaging a younger *fluid* generation of millennial queers. Some VGT members referred to the

growing alphabetization of the sexuality and gender acronym, 2SLGBTQQA+⁵⁸⁵ as the “alphabet community” or “alphabet soup,” and found the greater use of the word “queer” by a younger generation as problematic:

Andrew Dykstra: “While every accommodation is made for every letter of our alphabet community (as it should be), it is the older people in our community who must suck it up if we say we still feel a sting from the word “queer”. I know that not everyone feels that way, but as far as I can tell, there is little sympathy for the sensibilities of older people...I’m afraid the ever-extending acronym is merely the symptom of an increasing lack of focus and direction in the guise of inclusivity, which we have been lulled into buying into from those interlopers who have hijacked the homo movements for their own end.”⁵⁸⁶

Jeffrey William McCade-Storey: “This is the product of children that got a trophy for play, earned and therefore learned nothing. I grow tired of revisionist histories and an alphabet soup Pride. You do not have a birthday party and put all the guest names on the cake.”⁵⁸⁷

Neil Webster: “I hate the word queer. It was the word of choice to hurt, shame, ridicule or otherwise keep us in ‘our place’. There is a word no one would use today that begins with N and the Q word belongs right beside it. For those who like it have obviously never had it thrown at them to hurt or embarrass them or never had it used to explain why you were denied employment or housing or even a meal or drink in a bar or restaurant.”⁵⁸⁸

VGT member Joseph van Veen posted a statement by then Toronto Mayor John Tory acknowledging the 35th anniversary of the 1981 Toronto bathhouse raids: “A dark day in our

⁵⁸⁵ The acronym 2SLGBTQQA+ represents diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions: 2S is used by some Indigenous individuals as two-spirited who embody both masculine and feminine or outside the binary concept of gender; LGB refer to sexual orientations of lesbian, gay or bisexual; T refers to gender identify that differs from sex assigned at birth; Q is an umbrella term for queer that refers to a fluid variety of non-heteronormative sexual orientations and gender identities; the next Q refers to those questioning or exploring their sexual orientation or gender identities; I refers to those born with physical or biological sex characteristics not in the typical binary definitions of male or female; A can refer to asexual individuals who do not experience sexual attraction, aromantic who do not experience romantic attraction, and allies who support and advocate for 2SLGBTQQA+ rights; + refers to the growing number of sexual orientation and gender terms. See *Healthline*, “47 Terms” (2024), <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-types-of-sexuality> and *Healthline*, “68 Terms” (2024), <https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders#a-d> (accessed 22 Jan 2024).

⁵⁸⁶ Andrew Dykstra in response to a post by David Bennett, “It’s about goddamn time! Children, listen and take note,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (5 Feb 2019).

⁵⁸⁷ Jeffrey William McCade-Storey, in response to a post by David Bennett, “It has come to my attention that some members have joined the knockoff group ‘Vintage Queer Toronto (Canada)’” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (16 June 2020).

⁵⁸⁸ Neil Webster in response to a post by J.P. Larocque “St. Charles clock tower was an important early example of queer visibility in Toronto,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (3 Jan 2020).

history that mobilized Toronto’s LGBTQ community to fight for their deserved rights.” The VGT Administrator replied:

David Bennett: “For the sake of historical accuracy, it was just LGB back then...but I’m afraid the ever-extending acronym is merely the symptom of an increasing lack of focus and direction in the guise of inclusivity, which we have been lulled into buying into from those interlopers who have hijacked the homo movements for their own end...More often than not the word queer often dilutes or attempts to obscure the purely gay male aspect of our places or homosexual culture in the attempt to sound less offensive. Today, gay or homosexual has become a dirty word and to even proclaim or assert maleness in some quarters has become offensive.”⁵⁸⁹

In 2018, the VGT website came under fire from gay activist and LGBT historian, Will Kohler, owner of the LGBT news website *Back2Stonewall*. The website reported “Gay Male Facebook Group Refuses to Accept Trans Men.”⁵⁹⁰ The article stated that the VGT administrator, David Bennett, was contacted by the *San Diego Lesbian and Gay News* after hearing about a controversial membership policy since it began in 2014. The policy requires potential members to answer three questions about *age*, *sexual orientation* and *gender* to gain admittance: “VGT is exclusively for gay MALES (actual, born, genetic) over 18 years old. Are you a gay male in the actual definition? (Membership requests will be declined, failing to answer all 3 questions).”⁵⁹¹ When Bennett was asked if trans men could join, he replied, “Sorry, no. The group is for actual homosexual men. Dysphoric females are not and can never be men, so are therefore naturally (and quite obviously) excluded.”⁵⁹²

In 2020, Bennett posted that former VGT members joined what he called a “knockoff group,” *Vintage Queer Toronto* (VQT) and accused VQT of stealing VGT’s entire back history of

⁵⁸⁹ David Bennett in response to Neil Webster in response to Larocque, and also David Bennett, “It’s about goddamn time! Children, listen and take note,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (5 Feb 2019).

⁵⁹⁰ Will Kohler, “Gay Male Facebook Group Refuses to Accept Trans Men,” *Back2Stonewall* (19 Jul 2018) at Wayback Machine web archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180723081058/http://www.back2stonewall.com:80/2018/07/gay-male-facebook-group-refuses-to-accept-trans-men.html> (accessed 28 Apr 2024).

⁵⁹¹ I can verify that I had to answer these questions to become a member of Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website.

⁵⁹² Kohler (19 Jul 2018).

images. Such comments created further criticism from other VGT members with more intergenerational name calling and accusations of transphobia:

Brendan Hendry: “What a shame that people could’ve come here and really seen and learnt some amazing stories from an older generation! Ya know, learn some wisdom and shit. Only to find out it’s a bunch of angry old dudes who have some deep, weird hate for members of their own community and younger kids! Get over yourselves. You should feel embarrassed of how you think. Some of you who grew up fighting for gay rights seem to have forgotten how to fight for others in your own community and it’s vile. That shit will eat away at you. Get over yourselves. I only hope that other group thrives with inclusivity and this one gets shut down. Six years of hard work down the drain cause you’re a weird transphobic douche!”⁵⁹³

Along with accusations of transphobia, there were also accusations of racism. Conflicting views on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest at Toronto’s 2016 Pride parade made some VGT members think about the Toronto bathhouse raids. Some VGT members feel their own 1981 protest against the bathhouse raids was being forgotten as the initial and continuing reason for Pride marches and parades. Some members felt that the 2016 Pride parade was hijacked by BLM. Ignoring that some LGBTQ2+ millennials are also racialized and continue to experience police brutality and systemic racism, one member’s comment started a further online conflict with accusations of prejudice and racism. Others tried to help members focus on the bigger reality of white privilege, systemic racism, and human rights:

Viktor Kaczowski: “[The 1981 bathhouse raids protest] A fight that is not yet over...sadly the millennials won’t get it because black lives are more important than their own...we need to focus on our battle as homosexuals, and not get hijacked by someone else’s agenda, no matter how valid their battle may be.”⁵⁹⁴

Brad Clary: “I don’t see BLM shutting down the Santa Clause Parade or the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Or mega-phoning demands during the Taste of Danforth...They had no fucking right to stick their agenda into GAY PRIDE. I don’t give a shit about anyone’s skin color or where they

⁵⁹³ Brendan Hendry in response to a post by David Bennett, “It has just come to my attention,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (16 Jun 2020).

⁵⁹⁴ Viktor Kaczowski in response to a post by David Bennett, “Enough is Enough: Stop Police Violence,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website (6 Feb 2019).

came from. If you have issues, I won't deny them, but I don't have to put MY IDENTITY aside to kowtow to ANY group."⁵⁹⁵

Joey Molaski: "We owe BLM a debt of gratitude. If it were not for BLM, this same fascist police force would still be disgracing our pride parades. Our lily white asses of privilege don't get picked on like POC [people of colour], and therefore we cannot equate our experiences with theirs. I am embarrassed by some of the racist rhetoric here."⁵⁹⁶

Robert McQueen: "All of this has divided our community and there is way too fucking much infighting... What happened to it [Pride] being a celebration of our rights, as human beings. We should all be ashamed."⁵⁹⁷

Despite controversial statements, accusations of privilege, racism, transphobia, and intergenerational differences, two VGT posts, in particular, indicate how older *binary* and younger *fluid* generations of gay men can become more aligned. A younger VGT member briefly summarizes the evolution of the gay community as always changing, and an older VGT member indicates a more holistic, human perspective on how to overcome gender, racial, socioeconomic, and intergenerational differences:

Waseem Shayk: "The needs of the community have always evolved. They went from queer visibility in the 50's, 60's and 70's, to survival and access to treatment in the 80's. Can you imagine a group of HIV- gay men in the 80's saying, "we fought so hard at Stonewall to be normalized, and these HIV+ gays are just ruining that for us with their agenda?" We didn't say that because we understood that poz or neg, the fact that this risk affected many of us meant that it became a priority for all of us (including lesbians who fought alongside gay men, despite having little risk of contraction amongst themselves). Similarly, if we can just step away from the mindset of "MY legacy", "what *I* fought for", "MY pride" for a bit, and just hear out those who ARE affected by the actions of TPS [Toronto Police Services], we might not be so divided. After all, I hope that part of what you fought for was for future generations to determine what the community needs themselves and to fight for it."⁵⁹⁸

Neil C.P. Mudde: "As an 80 year old gay man, I believe that after some of the gains we got we might have been more supportive of other marginalized groups – the older LGBTQ+ members, some of whom are in a LTCH [long-term care home] without anyone from our community

⁵⁹⁵ Brad Cleary in response to Kaczkowski in response to Bennett (6 Feb 2019).

⁵⁹⁶ Joey Molaski in response to Kaczkowski in response to Bennett (6 Feb 2019). As of April 2024, VGQ has 2.4K members and VGT has 1.4K members.

⁵⁹⁷ Robert McQueen in response to Kaczkowski in response to Bennett (6 Feb 2019).

⁵⁹⁸ Waseem Shayk in response to "It's about goddamn time! Children, listen and take note."

visiting, the homeless, our Indigenous people, our black community, the poor, etc...as human beings we are all in this together...we ought to share and care...and it's never too late!"⁵⁹⁹

Exclusion on the VGT website of this younger generation of queers, trans people and lesbians, along with racist criticisms made by VGT members ignores the contemporary recognition of non-discriminatory LGBTQ2+ rights and systemic racism that continues to exist. As such, some of the gay nostalgic posts of VGT members are considered problematic and inflammatory. Many present a different perspective and capture the openness and inclusiveness of many older gay men to share their gay nostalgia and histories on VGT. So, what is it that makes VGT restricted to 'actual, born, genetic' gay men?

Biology or Discomfort?

Since the backlash and creation of the Vintage Queer Toronto Facebook website in 2018, the vexatious postings on both VGT and VQT appear to have diminished with a return to a greater focus on the history of gay and queer Toronto. The launch page of the VQT website states, "Welcome to Vintage Queer Toronto. Homophobic, racist, or transphobic comments or posts will not be tolerated."⁶⁰⁰ In full disclosure, I continue to be a member of VGT, and only more recently of VQT, and find the majority of posts to be a valuable contribution to the history of gay Toronto, despite contentious comments. When I started this research project, I decided to not post on the website, but only observe until my research is completed.

The main biological argument against identities and rights of transgender persons, illustrated on the VGT website, appears to be solely based on genitalia, chromosomes and sex characteristics assigned at birth. This misunderstands the distinction between biological sex and gender identity. If we ask a cross-section of gay men about why they self-identify as gay they

⁵⁹⁹ Neil C.P. Mudde in response to "June is pride month!"

⁶⁰⁰ Vintage Queer Toronto, *Facebook* (15 Jun 2018).

would probably suggest they have an innate sense of gayness. Many can feel a sense of *being* gay or lesbian without actually having same-sex sex with another man or woman. Others can feel a sense of being straight or bisexual while having same-sex intimacy with another man or woman. The gay feeling, sense, longing, and desire is what makes it significant, not purely what is done with your bits. It is that feeling of attraction and allurement when I was five years old about that man visiting my parents that I could not describe at the time.

Where is the biological proof of being born gay? As much as gay men (me included) may like to agree with the sentiment in the catchy pop-song by Lady Gaga, “baby you were born this way,” there is still no conclusive ‘gay gene’ to be found. Research in the 1990s⁶⁰¹ and more recently, as Matthew McLaughlin explains, “demonstrate how authoritative the masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual binaries were and continue to be within popular and academic understandings of human sexuality.”⁶⁰² This is the lingering element of the *binary generation*. Gender identity is a person’s innate sense of *being* male, female or another gender. In both cases, gender identity and sexual orientation are neurological and psychological (in a well-adjusted sense), not purely biological. According to C.E. Roselli, “Sexual differentiation of the genitals [pre-natal] takes place before sexual differentiation of the brain, making it possible that they are not always congruent.”⁶⁰³

In the case of sexual orientation, reducing sexual attraction to the unrealistic requirement of only one type of sexual activity is like saying one must only put a penis in a vagina. For

⁶⁰¹ Simon LeVay, *The Sexual Brain* (Boston, The MIT Press, 1993).

⁶⁰² Matthew McLaughlin, “Is There a Gay Brain? The Problems with Scientific Research of Sexual Orientation,” *The Great Lakes Journal of Undergraduate History*, Vol. 6, No. 1, <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/gljuh/vol6/iss1/4>, 46; See also Melinda C. Mills, “How do genes affect same-sex behaviour?,” *Science*, Vol. 365, No. 6456 (30 Aug 2019), 869-870.

⁶⁰³ C.E. Roselli, “Neurobiology of gender identity and sexual orientation,” *Journal of Neuroendocrinology*, Vol. 30, No. 7 (2018), Doi: 10.1111/jne.12562 (accessed 29 Apr 2024), 5. See also Riley Black, “Stop Trying to Out-Science Transphobes,” *Slate* (3 Mar 2021) <https://slate.com/technology/2021/03/transphobes-science-trap-basic-human-rights.html> (accessed 29 Apr 2024).

gender identity, reducing gender to the unfounded requirement of biological proof is like saying one must not think about being gay because everyone is straight. Older gay men have been down this moralistic binary road before, and we know where it has gone.

I suggest the main reason why trans men (and women and lesbians in general) are restricted from the VGT website is not biology, but discomfort. As mentioned in Chapter One, particular to gay nostalgia are emotional experiences that can be based on feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*, the three elements significant in fostering both gay identity and gay culture. In terms of contemporary spaces – including online spaces like VGT – they can hold nostalgic meaning for an older generation and a sense of community. People in general tend to join groups based on common cultural backgrounds because they usually gravitate to what is comfortable or where they feel a sense of belonging. VGT members may feel discomfort with those perceived to not be part of their historical gay identity or culture. Is it exclusionary? Yes. Is it relevant? Also, yes. For these gay men there is an established relationship with their histories and understanding of one another. VGT provides a space that holds cultural meaning to freely express their historical and continuing gay identities. This can create a *nostalgic afterglow* of space and place, and in this case, the *virtual* space and place of VGT. Much of the historical gay spaces that this older generation remember in Toronto have been destroyed. The VGT website becomes a *proxy* to sustain this afterglow. *Nostalgic afterburns* can also occur if meaningful place seems to be replaced or appropriated for a different meaning or reason. Again, this calls into question the exclusionary aspect of space and place, particularly recalling Toronto gay history infused with mostly white, male, cisgender experiences and meaning.

Changing Demographics of ‘Gay’ Space & ‘De-Gaying’ the Gaybourhood

Another element of change for gay men are the mostly exclusive gay bars of the past. Some older gay men want to have exclusive gay bars again, conjured from nostalgic memories. For many of the oral history narrators and VGT members, gay bars have historically been important safe and welcoming community hubs to feel comfortable openly expressing gay male sexuality. The dynamics and demographics of these former gay bars are changing, including those in TCWV. Younger-oriented ‘gay’ spaces like *Woody’s* and *Crews & Tangos* in TCWV are influenced by the *fluid generation* with a focus on the importance of inclusivity and diversity, including straight people. A shift to more hetero-inclusiveness underscores the earlier self-segregation or ‘exclusiveness’ aspects of gay neighbourhoods that many gay men remember as an important part of their socializing. A commodification of the gay experience and mainstream interest in drag shows sees a “hetrification”⁶⁰⁴ of gay spaces like *Woody’s* and *Crews & Tangos* attracting larger numbers of straight cisgender women. Bob Dirstein, who frequents *Woody’s*, mentions the changes there:

The biggest shift is the number of women, straight women coming, I think, to see drag shows. Thank you RuPaul⁶⁰⁵ [amused laughter]. And the bizarre thing is in some ways, it feels less like a gay bar than it did previously, to be honest. I think if you're a woman and want to go out and have some fun and not be bothered [amused laughter] go to a gay bar, but you should know you're not going to be bothered. What I find odd is when they bring their boyfriends, and one wonders what's this really about? [amused laughter].⁶⁰⁶

Anonymous Interviewee #2 has a long history working and socializing in TCWV gay bars. He sees the changes that have taken place in these gay spaces over the past few years with a

⁶⁰⁴ John Muresianu, “Thinking Citizen Blog – “Hetrification” – Like “Gentrification” but, Well, Worse,” <https://john-muresianu.medium.com/thinking-citizen-blog-hetrification-like-gentrification-but-well-worse-3a44ab6cc44> (accessed 14 Jan 2024).

⁶⁰⁵ RuPaul Andre Charles, known as RuPaul is a U.S. drag queen famous for creating, hosting and judging the reality competition television series, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.

⁶⁰⁶ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

large increase in the number of straight people, particularly women in the bars. He also feels *gay* is being replaced with *queer* with intergenerational differences in understanding:

I don't know if it's a gay bar anymore. And that has nothing to do with race. It has nothing to do with trans. I think it's just, it's just the energy is not the same. I don't think it's a gay bar. I think it's a queer bar. And I do not like that term queer to describe sexuality. I'm a gay man. You know, there's the whole gender thing now and, you know, even straight guys that come into the bar give off a little queer energy, and you don't even know if they're gay or not. So, the term gay bars for most of my friends and I, we don't see it that way anymore. It's not a gay bar. It's a queer bar or a drag bar, which basically attracts a lot of women. I love my women. But when you're talking about almost half of the people within the bar are women, I start seeing a problem. We're not saying we don't like women. We're just saying we want to be with gay men in our own gay community. Gay men need a safe space. Women have a safe space. Women have their own gyms. Women have their safe spaces. Gay men are a repressed group still today, and we need our safe space. A lot of colleges and universities are starting to have safe spaces for minorities, like for gays, for Blacks, for Asians. Why did we stop that with the gay bars? And what upsets me is that, because we were so inclusive and accepting everybody on the LGBTQ, why did the Q take over the bars? Get your own bars, leave the male bars alone? We're still a minority. We still have our own issues in life, and we still need a safe space. That's what I'm trying to get at. When I say things like, "You know, it'd be nice to have a men's only bar" the younger generation gets a little upset about that. And I don't understand why. I'm not saying, hey, every bar should be a men's bar. But you know, one or two nice bars for men where they could just go and be men who identify as men and just want to chat with their own kind. I don't think that's a bad thing. But you can't say that anymore because inclusivity now has to be zero to a hundred. It has to go all the way now.⁶⁰⁷

Anonymous Interviewee #2 also nostalgically reflects on the changes in drag shows at gay bars, particularly now that straight women can participate as "bio queens":⁶⁰⁸

So, bio queens are bio women that dress up in drag. And I believe in old school drag. You want to dress up in drag? Fine. I just think it's an art that should only be performed by men when performing as women. They don't have to be gay. Because that's what the meaning of drag is, male to female impersonation, and of course, drag kings. But once again, we're inclusive. I don't get it. I don't understand it. But I don't like what happened to drag in general. Drag, for me, was the one time when men got together, and it wasn't about how polished and how good and how feminine she looked. It was just a time where we shared our

⁶⁰⁷ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁶⁰⁸ A drag queen who is cis-gendered female and/or assigned female at birth (AFAB). See Dictionary.com, "bio-queen," <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bio-queen> (accessed 24 Apr 2024).

femininity and we just laughed with each other. We never judged the person on stage. I've seen them coming on stage now, whether it's bio queens or drag queens, or trans queens, and they look so nervous because they're so worried about their appearance, and how they're going to be judged. Drag is not about being judged. It's about laughing. It's about laughing and showing our feminine qualities that, as gay men, we share. And nowadays, I see it, and should I blame RuPaul? Maybe I should. She ruined something that was the one thing, because gay men could be harsh in the bar scene with how we looked and stuff, but that was the one thing we all bonded with and just laughed at or laughed with.⁶⁰⁹

Anonymous Interviewee #2 says he recognizes and supports all LGBTQ2+ communities, particularly politically, but suggests a broader range of socially mixed *and* exclusive LGBTQ2+ bars in TCWV. He has also noticed a growing tension within these communities:

The more we include like our alphabet soup, I call it now, the more problems are arising. I'll give you one example. Maybe six months ago, I always call my patrons guys, whether they're girls, guys, non-binary, I just say, "Guys." It's a habit. And so, I was working at the bar, and I look up and I say "Hey, guys" without actually looking, but there were three gentlemen. I don't know what they identify as. And one of them said to me, "I don't identify as a guy." I said apologetically, "Excuse me. When I say guys, I don't mean guys." I said, "I don't want to get into this but what can I get you? I didn't mean guys, what can I get you?" I didn't want to start this conversation. And then the person goes, "You know, I don't understand why we have to have gender." He just threw that at me. There was a trans man sitting maybe five feet from my bar. So, I said to the young person, whatever the person identified as, I said, "Why don't you tell that trans man that there shouldn't be gender after probably not knowing what he has gone through to get his gender? Probably suicidal thoughts. He wants his gender, and you want to erase that from him?" And he looked at me and said, "I never thought about it that way." I said, "That's the problem." And I believe that's the big problem with adding more letters [to the LGBTQ2+ acronym]. We're starting to fight with each other. And that's why I don't see a future in the "community" [gesturing air quotes]. And I say that in quotations because it's no longer a community. LGB was always about sexuality. Now, T ... we have a great history with T. They fought with us alongside us for all those years. We also thought that T, if you were trans you were gay, which now we're seeing it's not the case. So, for me, LGB, and me being G, is sexuality. I believe T, Q, 2S two-spirited, all that other stuff is gender. And I'm not saying we should break from that. But there is a movement happening that people are starting to say, 'Maybe we should break apart but when it comes down to fighting for rights, we get back together.' It's like other minorities. You have Black minorities, Asian minorities, you have Brown minorities. They all have their own identity. But when it comes to fighting against racial minorities, they get together. Maybe we should do that too. Because LGB is

⁶⁰⁹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

sexuality. T on is gender. They are two different things. Yes, they're webbed in together. But they're two different things. And I think the movement is getting more traction for it to separate because we're fighting with each other. Like I said, gay men want to have a men's bar. And adding more letters and being part of the LGBTQ you have to be inclusive, and it's just a big soup. It's just a big soup now. It's strong politically, but I don't think it's strong socially for us anymore.⁶¹⁰

Jan Grygier also sees more divisive identity and gender politics occurring within LGBTQ2+ communities and presents a more radical and conservative nostalgic view about gay masculinity and gay identity:

It's now identity socialism, and identity politics, but in that it's always a marginalized community. We have to fit that in. So, it just keeps divisive, divisive, divisive. And if you don't support that marginalized community and virtue signal, you're a bad person. So, you can see how communism comes in. You have to talk the same talk, walk the same walk. And so, it's seen as a solvent. It dissolves to build a hole and makes everyone divisive, and they're fighting over funding, fighting over space. Fighting over what? There needs to be a quickening of gay men coming together and let's say, "Masculinity is not toxic. The absence of it is." And gay men need to step up and find their masculinity again, instead of worrying about you know, clothes, hair and makeup, pearls, nail polish, high heels, you know, a bun on the head and an ankle bracelet and going [makes a whimpering sound] and then running. I came out when masculinity was what gay men wanted to be. Before, it was a pink triangle people wore. That was the big thing. And then the flag came to be and then we learned that if you traveled in a different city, that's where you could go where it was safe for gay folk or gay businesses. It became the identity flag and then it changed.⁶¹¹

Jan is referring to the popular Rainbow Pride flag in common use since 1979 and the more recently adopted Progressive Pride flag created in 2018. The conflict over these two flags illustrates intergenerational differences in symbolism and personal meanings. Long-term gay male couple, Brent and Bobby, both recently retired, describe their experience of a heated debate as older gay men over intergenerational differences in the significance of these flags. Brent and Bobby recall a visit from their twenty-somethings gay son Elliot and his fiancé Clay before Elliot

⁶¹⁰ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁶¹¹ Interview with Jan Grygier, 4 Aug 2023.

and Clay's same-sex marriage.⁶¹² Brent states:

So, the boys didn't think the original Rainbow Pride flag supported everyone. We had it hanging on our deck and our son's fiancé thought we should have a new flag with the version of Trans and Black/Brown Lives Matter included. He felt that the old flag represented oppression and discrimination. We tried to explain that 30 years ago life was very different. We explained that the old flag gave us strength and acceptance to endure the rejection of the then societal perception of a gay community which we saw existing that our generation had to deal with 30 years ago. That was why it was on our deck.⁶¹³

Bobby picks up the story:

Our son Elliot's fiancé, Clay told us we needed to move on. He became angry and said that "old gay men" are the only ones that value that flag. Basically, we felt he was saying we were old men pining on an old flag and they didn't care what we went through because that was in the past. No discussion needed. He said we needed to move on. We were just old gay men. They didn't understand what we ourselves had to go through all these years in order for them to get married as a gay couple. How special to have gay parents and vice versa. To have that support and acceptance.⁶¹⁴

Brent and Bobby shared the challenges and joys of being gay parents raising children and what it was like when Elliot finally told them he was also gay. Brent notes:

We were the last family members Elliot came out to and that hurt our feelings until we realized it was because he knew that we would accept him unconditionally, and if he was rejected by anyone else he knew we would be there and the easiest to come out to.⁶¹⁵

Bobby returns to the story about the heated debate over Pride flags:

The boys, particularly Clay, still didn't back down and didn't agree with us on our argument about the Rainbow flag. We didn't agree with them either and basically said what they were saying is bullshit because the old flag represents everyone, and he didn't understand the true representation of the Rainbow flag. It became a very big argument even though we said we would fly any new flag that was adapted, but it has many versions which confused us. We tried to explain we were not really informed about the new flag. We kept saying the diversity of the rainbow colours are inclusive. Clay became confrontational and Elliot became angry at us and sided with his fiancé who was the most engaging. Elliot accused

⁶¹² Brent, Bobby, Elliot and Clay are pseudonyms requested by interviewees.

⁶¹³ Interview with Brent and Bobby (pseudonyms), 1 May 2024.

⁶¹⁴ Interview with Brent and Bobby (pseudonyms), 1 May 2024.

⁶¹⁵ Interview with Brent and Bobby (pseudonyms), 1 May 2024.

us of being “disgusting” and “disappointing” and said they were leaving and never coming back. Clay kept saying because of our views, he no longer felt safe in our house, repeating it several times over and over. He said he wanted to leave and stay in a hotel.⁶¹⁶

Brent and Bobby say they were devastated and left in tears as their son and future son-in-law were planning to leave their house but ended up staying. Bobby continues:

Clay was isolating himself in the bedroom and it took a day for him to get back to feeling less angry. Whether he was embarrassed or upset with us, we didn’t know. We went out for lunch and he was still quiet and I got Clay’s attention. He looked up and I mouthed the words “I love you” and he smiled. We never did get an apology but he sincerely loves us and he expresses that. Maybe he was never challenged before like that? We still do not know what flags to display without it seeming like we want to rub it in when they come to visit.⁶¹⁷



Image 67: Original eight-strip Rainbow Pride flag (top left) co-designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978; Six-stripe Rainbow Pride flag (top middle) used since 1979 designed by Gilbert Baker; Diversity Pride flag (top right) unveiled in 2017 by Gilbert Baker (before his death in 2018) adding lavender for diversity above the eight-stripe original Pride flag designed by Baker in 1978; Progress Pride flag (bottom left) adding lavender for diversity above the eight-stripe original Pride flag designed by Baker in 1978; Intersex-inclusive Pride flag (bottom right) redesigned in 2021 by Valentino Vecchiotti. Source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons, 2024.

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to public office in California, asked artist, designer and activist Gilbert Baker to create a symbol of pride for the gay community, first flown in 1978 at the Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco.⁶¹⁸ The original was an eight-colour

⁶¹⁶ Interview with Brent and Bobby (pseudonyms), 1 May 2024.

⁶¹⁷ Interview with Brent and Bobby (pseudonyms), 1 May 2024.

⁶¹⁸ Interview with Gilbert Baker by Michelle Millar Fisher. See Michelle Millar Fisher and Paola Antonelli, “Flashback to 2015: MoMA Acquires the Rainbow Flag,” *MoMA* (2 Jun 2023), <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/909> (accessed 20 May 2024).

design co-created by Baker and his friends, former roommate and tie-dye artist friend Lynn Segerblom and fashion artist and skilled sewer James McNamara.⁶¹⁹ A more recent source has Segerblom claiming, “She came up with the idea.”⁶²⁰ The original eight colours represent not diverse identities but positive attributes “that Baker felt connoted the homosexual community.”⁶²¹ According to Baker, “pink is for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, turquoise for magic, blue for serenity and purple for the spirit.”⁶²² Due to a limited supply of fabric for the pink stripe and a desire to drop the turquoise stripe, the six-stripe Rainbow Pride flag was born in 1979. More recently, a variety of Pride flags have been created to individually represent the diversity within LGBTQ2+ communities – including new seven-stripe and five-stripe ones for gay men.⁶²³ The Progress Pride flag incorporates a chevron of black and brown for people of colour and light blue, pink and white of the Transgender flag. Since 2021, a further redesign includes the purple circle on yellow on the Intersex-inclusive flag.

The bottom line is it appears there is a flag for everyone in the LGBTQ2+ communities. Whether it is a symbolic artifact that continues to represent a positive sense of sustained gay community or one not holding meaning for a younger generation, each has a flag that holds personal symbolism. In an ideal world, Brent and Bobby and their son Elliot and his same-sex husband Clay can feel confident in flying whatever Pride flags bring them personal meaning to

⁶¹⁹ Lynn Segerblom, “The woman behind the Rainbow Flag,” *blade* (2 Mar 2018), <https://www.losangelesblade.com/2018/03/02/woman-behind-rainbow-flag/> (accessed 20 May 2024).

⁶²⁰ Segerblom (2 Mar 2018).

⁶²¹ Nathalie Hauksson-Tresch, “The Rainbow Flag as Signal, Icon, Index and Symbol of Collective and Individual Gay Identity” in Wagner, A. Marusek, S. (eds) *Flags, Color, and the Legal Narrative: Public Memory, Identity, and Critique* (Springer, Cham, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32865-8_25.

⁶²² *ABC News*, “LGBTQ Pride: Gilbert Baker, creator of rainbow flag, shares story of strength and pride,” video 1:19-1:29, (2 Mar 2017), <https://abc7news.com/pride-flag-rainbow-the-colors/1780322/> (accessed 20 May 2024); See also *Gilbert Baker Foundation*, “Flags by Gilbert Baker” (2024), <https://gilbertbaker.com/flags/> (accessed 20 May 2024).

⁶²³ *Wikipedia*, “Pride flag: Sexual Orientation-based flags” (2024), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride_flag (accessed 21 May 2024).

represent their identities, orientations, gender, subcultures or generations. But the world is seldom ideal and tensions over flags continue.

Similar to the ‘flag fight’ and gay symbolism, Anonymous Interviewee #2 talks about differences in meanings with growing homophobia, a feeling that the voices of gay men are going back to being suppressed because of growing divisions. He also points out how he sees many in the gay community feeling a sense of lost gay space:

They have to be very quiet. It's weird how even gays now are being told to be quiet. It's like the queers took over, the trans took over, and it's gotten to the point of where they're shutting us up, shutting us down if we say something like what I'm telling you now. And the other thing with that is they're getting so vocal and pushing it down everybody's throat. My nephew told me that his friends are becoming homophobic because of the pushing down, pushing it down their throats, that they're going through in school, and on TV, and in the social world. He said, “Uncle, I tried to explain that it's not all like that. We try and explain you, how you're not like that.” And they don't see that because it's just pushed down their throats. And that's what's happening within the gay community too. We're being told to shut up, especially as a white gay man. We're like the white straight man in the real world. We're the most privileged, so whatever we say doesn't count, doesn't matter. And if you try and push back, you're a ‘Trump supporter’ or you're not accepting enough, which is not the case. Hey, we all want to live together in harmony. Just because we want our own little space doesn't mean we won't love you. Just give us our little space back. We fought for it and now we lost it.⁶²⁴

Jeremy Vincent takes a moderate view looking to the past to acknowledge the current changes occurring in TCWV. He compares these changes to those he has experienced in his own residential building as a way to speculate how TCWV may evolve as a community:

The time in the ‘70s, gay meant everything. But honestly, there were trans people [and they] were sort of left out in left field, and lesbians were sort of like, off the scales. It was gay men and predominantly gay white men at that time. So, I understand why people want their own identity. I totally get that. And I'm for it, completely. And I like the fact that I can walk down Church Street, and with this person walking by, whether they're LGBTQ is not an issue for me. If I'm interested in somebody, I can sort of spot that out, but if anybody else is there, great. I like that whole atmosphere of ‘we’, meaning we, all of us [anyone], are here. And I have heterosexuals sitting next to me, yeah, whatever. There's a kid,

⁶²⁴ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

yeah, no problem. Even in this building, when I moved in here in 2002 it was 97% gay [residents]. Heterosexual people were not even shown the building by realtors. Then once gay marriage came in that kind of changed. Now we're down to 50% [gay residents] if that much. But we had an ice cream social. I'm on the social committee, surprise enough. And so, we were serving ice cream, and I was the sprinkle man. So, I had all the gay sprinkles, well they were rainbow sprinkles, gay sprinkles, you know, with everybody else. And we have a lot of heterosexual people and kids and stuff now. You never worry about it. It's just like, whatever. And I've never had a problem in this building with being gay. If that did happen, that person would be trounced upon because even though there's a lot of gay people there's also a lot of gay-positive people here, and that is a big thing. So, there's a community. And we're trying to build community by doing all these social events. Even though there's a mix of people, different cultures, different ages, sexual orientation, the whole bit, we are one unit. We live, there are two buildings beside, together. We have four-hundred-and-nine units. We are one community.⁶²⁵

These narratives further demonstrate varying opinions and divisions about changes in TCWV and differing approaches to the 'de-gaying' of the gaybourhood. They also illustrate intergenerational differences and divisions towards gay symbols and spaces remembered by older gays that are perceived differently by a younger generation. With greater social acceptance in places where gaybourhoods have historically developed, like Toronto, it appears the need for segregated, safe spaces has diminished. Younger LGBTQ2+ individuals of the *fluid* generation may not feel the same need for exclusively gay spaces as those of the *binary generation*. They also appear to be more open to sharing these 'gay' spaces with straight clientele who are becoming more regular patrons in these spaces. This has led to the changing demographic of TCWV. But what are some of the factors behind these differences and divisions?

Gay Not Queer – How Did We Get Here?

These diverse nostalgic reflections of perceived gay identity, culture, community and intergenerational LGBTQ2+ divisions in TCWV mirror wider shifts in North America, the United Kingdom and Europe. As much as there was an earlier shift in the *neo-queer generation*

⁶²⁵ Interview with Germey Vincent, 16 Aug 2023.

and now the *fluid generation* away from older *binary* thinking, there is also an emerging conservative shift and divide within all the generations today. This is creating a ripple effect from the *fluid generation* to the *neo-queer* and *binary* generations.

Historian Samuel Huneke in his work *A Queer Theory of the State* uses *queer* as “a convenient shorthand to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and other sexually and gender-nonconforming people...among whom I count myself [as queer].”⁶²⁶ He states there is an increasing number of queer people in democratic countries who are aligning themselves with conservatism in opposition to radical queer movements. He argues recent queer conservatism rose in reaction to the earlier radical queer left-wing progressivism (inherent in Queer Theory) that maintains an anti-state skepticism. State-sanctioned LGBTQ2S+ rights, for example same-sex marriage,⁶²⁷ have now created a tendency for some queers to vote for more right-wing political democracies in response to perceived anti-mainstream views of the queer left. Huneke suggests the source of this tension is within queer studies’ “inability to conceive positively of the state.”⁶²⁸ He explains:

Many of the gay and lesbian liberation movements that started in the 1960s and 1970s had prominent pragmatic subcurrents, with activists who pressed for new legislation, secured funding for queer priorities, and endorsed policy changes that substantively improved the lives of queer people. These were activists, in short, who were willing to work with and within the state.⁶²⁹

Conversely, radical queers are critical of queer conservatives who now directly benefit from state-endorsed legal rights like marriage equality. According to Huneke, there are now prominent queer (i.e. gay and lesbian) conservatives who are “state-leaning,” especially those

⁶²⁶ Samuel Clowes Huneke, *A Queer Theory of the State* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2023), 18.

⁶²⁷ Same-sex marriage is legal in 35 countries. See Human Rights Campaign, *Marriage Equality Around the World* <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world> (accessed 4 Feb 2024).

⁶²⁸ Huneke, *A Queer Theory of the State*, 18.

⁶²⁹ Huneke, *A Queer Theory of the State*, 48.

who represent “valued identities” of educated, white, cisgender gays. These include Andrew Sullivan,⁶³⁰ Peter Thiel,⁶³¹ George Santos⁶³² (United States), Alice Weidel⁶³³ (Germany) and Milo Yiannopoulos⁶³⁴ (United Kingdom/United States).⁶³⁵ I would also include UK conservative political activist Gary Powell.⁶³⁶

With what appears to be a right-wing upsurge in many western nations, a radical right movement is presenting itself as the ‘true’ protectors of LGBTQ+ individuals.⁶³⁷ This ideology is aimed at a broad range of “vulnerable minorities” and is being called “alter-progressivism.” The radical right movement conveys a “Great Replacement” message tailored to mostly white cisgender LGB people “to portray themselves as protectors of some sections of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB; but not commonly T or Q) community.”⁶³⁸ A distinction is made between the “openly homophobic far-right” and the “alter-progressive radical right.”⁶³⁹ This narrative claims

⁶³⁰ *Out*, “Andrew Sullivan” (2024), <https://www.out.com/andrew-sullivan#toggle-gdpr> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³¹ *Advocate*, “Peter Thiel, Gay Republican Billionaire Won’t Donate to 2024 Candidates: Report” (26 Apr 2023), <https://www.advocate.com/politics/peter-thiel-stops-donations-2024> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³² Matt Stieb and Margaret Hartmann, *New York Magazine: Intelligencer*, “Here’s Every Single Lie Told by George Santos” (8 Mar 2024), <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/guide-george-santos-lies.html> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³³ *Foreign Policy*, “Meet the Lesbian Goldman Sachs Economist Who Just Led Germany’s Far Right to Victory” (24 Sep 2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/24/meet-the-lesbian-goldman-sachs-economist-who-just-lead-germanys-far-right-to-victory/> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³⁴ In 2021, Milo Yiannopoulos announced he was no longer gay. See Trudy Ring, *Advocate*, “Milo Yiannopoulos Claims to Be ‘Ex-Gay’, Promotes Conversion Therapy” (10 Mar 2021), <https://www.advocate.com/news/2021/3/10/milo-yiannopoulos-claims-be-ex-gay-promotes-conversion-therapy> (accessed 2 May 2024); See also Trudy Ring, *Advocate*, “Milo Yiannopoulos No Longer With Ye’s Presidential Campaign” (5 Dec 2022) <https://www.advocate.com/politics/2022/12/05/milo-yiannopoulos-no-longer-yes-presidential-campaign> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³⁵ ABC Listen, “Queer vs the state” *The Philosopher’s Zone*, <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/philosopherszone/queer-vs-the-state/103323052>, 24:24-27:19 (2024).

⁶³⁶ Gary Powell, “Let’s keep opposing the homophobic LGBTQ+ lobby for its betrayal of gay people,” *Gary Powell* (31 Dec 2022), <https://garyjamespowell.wordpress.com/2022/12/31/this-new-year-lets-keep-opposing-the-homophobic-lgbt-lobby-for-its-betrayal-of-lesbian-and-gay-people/> (accessed 2 May 2024).

⁶³⁷ Russell David Foster and Xander Kirke, “‘Straighten Up and Fly Right’: Radical Right attempts to appeal to the British LGBTQ+ community,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 277-293 (24 Jan 2022), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1177/13691481211069346> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁶³⁸ Foster and Kirke, (24 Jan 2022), 277.

⁶³⁹ Foster and Kirke, (24 Jan 2022), 286.

the unreasonable *exclusion* of LGB and unfair *inclusion* of oppressed communities such as trans and queer to create a disconnect.⁶⁴⁰

Some interviewees in this oral history project hold similar views within a wide range of perspectives. Each is given a voice to express their personal memories and current views within a nostalgic framework. Some views are more extreme, some not necessarily so in scope. I have attempted to be inclusive to present a range of examples from the *binary* and *neo-queer* generations with which this cohort are identified to examine attitudes towards the *fluid* generation.

The past few years have seen the emergence of these polarizing tendencies within the LGBTQ2+ communities, but it is not strictly around transgender issues. Notice a particular letter missing from an “LGBT+ Conservatives” website. This group out of the U.K. states it is a “national organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans Conservatives”⁶⁴¹ to be given a voice within the Conservative party. Where is the ‘Q’? On social media, gays and lesbians and queers are publicly diverging and disagreeing about being “Gay Not Queer,”⁶⁴² and “Let’s Say Gay”⁶⁴³ instead of queer. A clear example is Huneke’s above ‘short-hand’ use of queer as a substitute for gay without recognizing the implications of those who currently still self-identify as gay but not as queer.

⁶⁴⁰ Foster and Kirke, (24 Jan 2022), 280.

⁶⁴¹ *LGBT+ Conservatives*, “LGBTQ+ Conservatives” (2024), <https://www.lgbtconservatives.org.uk/> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁶⁴² Peter Gajdics, “Gay Not Queer,” *Quillette* (25 Nov 2022), <https://quillette.com/2022/11/25/gay-not-queer/> (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁶⁴³ Pamela Paul, “Let’s Say Gay,” *The New York Times* (23 Oct 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/23/opinion/queer-gay-identity.html?searchResultPosition=14>

Similarly in Canada, LGBTory is a Canadian conservative organization started in 2015 as supporters of the Conservative Party of Canada and provincial Conservative parties.⁶⁴⁴ A 2024 “distribird” website states “lgbtory” is “a network of lgbt canadians [sic] from all walks of life and diverse identities, but who share the fundamental principles of individual liberty, personal responsibility, freedom of expression, reward for hard work, a free-market economy and democratic government.” It goes on to state, “we aim to be a bridge between the lgbt community and conservative political parties in canada [sic], and provide a forum for the sharing of ideas, advance the conservative philosophy, and defend the democratic rights of all minorities.” The website states “lgbtory” headquarters are located in Toronto. I have been unable to find any further current information about the group or been able to contact them directly.⁶⁴⁵

Pamela Paul writes in *The New York Times* that a perceived synonymous shift has occurred in news organizations, previous ‘gay’ organizations and online websites with the substitute use of *queer* for *gay*. She explains, “The word “gay” is increasingly being substituted by “queer” or, more broadly, “L.G.B.T.Q.,” which are about gender as much as – and perhaps more so than – sexual orientation.” Paul goes on to discuss some gay men’s binary focus on masculinity that reflects what many from the *binary generation* remember:

There are gay men, for example, who grew up desperately needing reassurance that they were just as much a boy as any hypermanly heterosexual. They had to push back hard against those who tried to tell them their sexual orientation called their masculinity into question.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, “Conservative LGBT group defends against call for ban from Pride parade” (21 Aug 2015), <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/conservative-lgbt-group-defends-against-call-for-ban-from-pride-parade> (accessed 15 May 2024); See also *Global News*, “LGBTory group encourages healthy discussion on gay-straight alliances” (8 May 2018), <https://globalnews.ca/video/4194976/lgbtory-group-encourages-healthy-discussion-on-gay-straight-alliances> (accessed 15 May 2024).

⁶⁴⁵ *distribird*, “Lgbtory Canada” (2024), <https://www.distribird.com/companies/lgbtory-canada> (accessed 15 May 2024). A link from this website to “lgbtory.ca,” the LGBTory Canada LinkedIn page and the “Contact us” link on the LGBTory Pride Toronto Facebook website are no longer active. A Facebook website is still active but not updated at <https://www.facebook.com/events/both-change-595-church-street-just-north-of-isabella-parade-bloor-stted-rogers-w/lgbtory-pride-toronto/527173870799304/> (accessed 15 May 2024).

⁶⁴⁶ Paul, (23 Oct 2022).

In 2022, humorist writer David Sedaris of the *binary generation*⁶⁴⁷ was 65 when he appeared on CBS News Sunday Morning to satirically make a serious point about gay identity and “practice” to convey his generational experiences:

I’ve been with the same guy for 31 years and on this day I am announcing to the world that I am straight. I haven’t met anyone else. I haven’t fallen in love with a woman. I’m simply done fighting the term queer. What bothers me is not that it used to be a slur. I just don’t see why I have to be rebranded for the fourth time in my life. I started as a homosexual, became gay, then LGBT and now queer. And for what? Why the makeovers? And what will it be next? ...It no longer matters what you are in practice, just how you identify. I’m going with heterosexual because, like the words Jewish or female, it rarely if ever changes. I need a resting place, and this is as good a one as any.⁶⁴⁸

In contrast, Black author and screenwriter, Hari Ziyad of the *fluid generation*⁶⁴⁹ seriously states, “For a while, I thought I was gay...I discovered that if I must have an identification that makes sense to others who need to see me with some sort of stability, it would be ‘queer.’”⁶⁵⁰

These observations of contemporary discord and questions of identity within the LGBTQ2+ community of all generations have implications for the future. What they will be is yet to be known. For now, those interviewed in this research all self-identified as gay except one who later identified as “two-spirits.”⁶⁵¹ Gay is still the term with which most currently self-identify. They may continue to do so before they die and before their memories, life experiences and ‘gay’ identities, replaced or erased with queer, fade away with them. Some may not and

⁶⁴⁷ David Sedaris was born in 1956 and came of age in the timeframe I have associated with the binary generation. See Wikipedia, “David Sedaris” (28 Apr 2024), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Sedaris (accessed 1 May 2024).

⁶⁴⁸ CBS News Sunday Morning, “David Sedaris on coming out, all over again” (16 Oct 2022), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/david-sedaris-on-coming-out-all-over-again/> (accessed 1 May 2024).

⁶⁴⁹ Hari Ziyad was born in 1992 and came of age in the timeframe I have associated with the fluid generation. See Wikipedia, “Hari Ziyad” (25 Feb 2024), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hari_Ziyad (accessed 30 Apr 2024).

⁶⁵⁰ Hari Ziyad, “3 Differences Between the Terms ‘Gay’ and ‘Queer’ – And Why It Matters” (1 Mar 2016), <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/03/difference-between-gay-queer/> (accessed 30 Apr 2026).

⁶⁵¹ Emails from Samuel Lopez on 23 Jan 2024 self-identifying as “two-spirits” after originally self-identifying as a gay man, and 8 Apr 2024 stating, “We don’t have gender pronouns in my language so use any.”

decide to identify as queer. Again, that is for the unknown future.

The importance of self-identification and not defining or labelling others based on our own perceptions is illustrated in John Howard's influential and groundbreaking work *Men Like That*. The work chronicles the lives of men who had sex with other men in the U.S. rural south. Howard presented the stories of men who self-identified as *gay*. More importantly he interviewed "men like that" (used as a southern euphemism to mean gay men) who did not self-identify as gay even though they had sex with other men. In this sense, these men may be called queer as an umbrella term descriptor, but the significance remains in their own agency of self-identification.⁶⁵²

As above examples have shown, the inclusion of *gay* in the LGBTQ2+ acronym appears only worthy of value to some queers in the *fluid* generation when utilizing gay as a placeholder within the collective acronym. By replacing queer as an umbrella and 'short-hand' term for LGBT identities, it destabilizes identities and strips them of their lived experiences and histories. This ignores and denies agency in gay self-identification at best and erasure at worst. It neglects the shared social history of the gay community. But this is also the fundamental goal of queer theory, to destabilize. Not acknowledging those who continue to self-identify as *gay* and *not queer* sends a message that invalidates those still living who still assert they are *gay* and *not queer* as part of a *gay* community. While there are those who still self-identify as non-queer in LGBTQ2+ communities, will they continue to have a choice of self-identity before queer becomes a replacement term for all?

A recurring theme throughout this dissertation has been the concept of a *historical gay identity* for those from the binary generation that remains part of their contemporary self-identity

⁶⁵² John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1999).

still conveyed today. This notion of gay identity is dependent on two specific elements: 1) a *common timeframe of adulthood* and 2) *common places, events, mechanisms and symbols*. As discussed in Chapter One, *places, events, mechanisms and symbols* are also central to the definition of gay nostalgia. Again, these include protests or festivities, socializing, entertainment, music and literature, organizations, celebrities, fashion and style, and athletics.

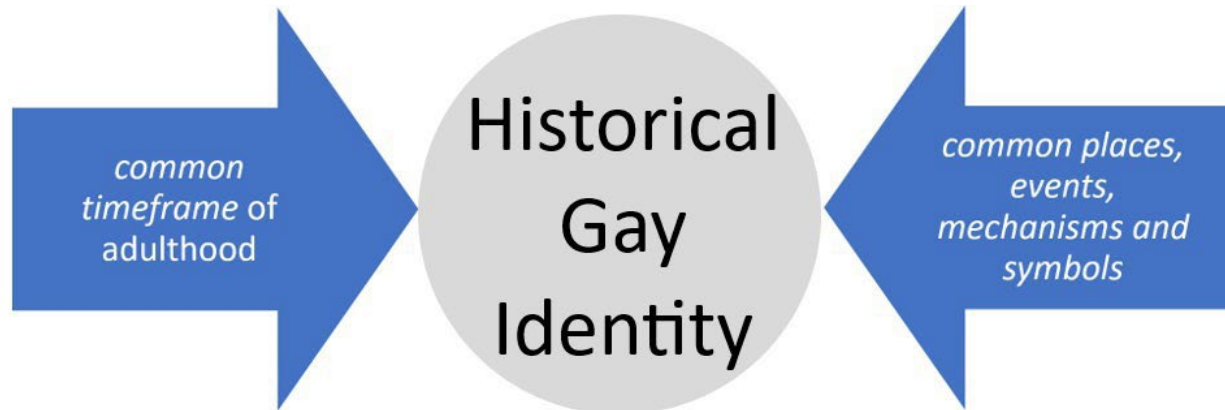


Image 68: Historical Gay Identity. Source: created by the author, J. Gary Myers, 24 May 2024.

These two components shape collective experiences and establish shared meanings to create memories through which *historical gay identity* has developed. For this particular cohort of gay men interviewed, their common timeframe spans roughly the 1970s to 2000. It is the timeframe when most first formed their gay identities as part of a gay community with common *places, events, mechanisms and symbols*. They shared common interests and influences relevant to this time period before these common elements began to fade or had disappeared.

A phenomenon called the “reminiscence bump” indicates life events most recalled are from a time when a person was between the ages of 10 and 30 years.⁶⁵³ These are formative years. They are also significant for when most of this cohort of gay men experienced *coming out of the closet*. It was a time when they began to express their gay sexuality more openly in a gay

⁶⁵³ Khadeeja Munawar, Sarah K. Kuhn and Shamsul Haque, “Understanding the reminiscence bump: A systematic review,” *PLOS ONE*, Vol. 12, No. 12, (11 Dec 2018), Doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0208595](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208595) (accessed 1 May 2024).

community of collective experiences and culture. They experienced gayness in shared *space* (as location) and *place* (as meaning). It is a perceived identity that is still relevant to some older gay men who have grown up with this specific notion of gay as a self-identification they still use today.

The reminiscence bump has also been connected to negative life events aligned with what I describe as *afterburns* when emotional memories reflect negative experiences during formative years. Psychologists suggest “the particular subset of negative emotions associated with bump memories...are disproportionately likely to date from adolescence and young adulthood.”⁶⁵⁴ As significant emotional memories, both *afterglows* and *afterburns* connected to gay experiences contribute to the development of gay identity. This is also why the historical gay identity is maintained through gay nostalgic memories.

I wish to be explicit in conveying this particular gay identity for this project’s cohort. It is intertwined in the nostalgic recollections of places, events, mechanisms and symbols from their gay past that have influenced and painted their life experiences. These components continue to define for most the relevance of their gay identity today while they are still alive and sharing it in collective memories. Some older gay men now feel a sense of shifting and potentially lost identity as *gay* seems to be an old term more readily replaced with the new one *queer*. The historical clinical *homosexual* term was imposed and used to moralize, penalize and pathologize same-sex attraction throughout the later part of the 19th and most of the 20th century. The more recent *gay identity* is self-presumed and happily sustained for many as self-identification

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Reminiscence bumps for highly negative life events,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 153, No. 2, 352-371.

today.⁶⁵⁵ Fears are being expressed by some gay men that preserving the historically embraced *gay* identity will become irrelevant in the scrap heap of history.

For the purposes of this project, I also want to avoid conflating historical gay identity with past and present discrimination, marginalization and radical exclusionary notions of alter-progressivism. *Historical gay identity* is used as a mode of gay nostalgia that reflects self-identity and gay culture with emotions of past space and place in gay Toronto. It is important to separate the salient aspects of individual and communal gay identity from the negative perceptions of the TCWV past. This generation of older gay men are often remembered negatively. They are lumped together with fault in the criticized history of TCWV (see Chapter One, page 47). We must recognize that gay identity and past social circumstances are multifaceted. It is important to avoid generalization that obscures the remembered common and individual joys and challenges that this diverse cohort have expressed in this project.

As this project has shown, this cohort of gay men are individuals with similar *and* different experiences. This requires nuanced understanding as they reflect on the time period of their earlier lives. That being said, the historical context must also be considered in relation to a retrospective approach today. It is important to acknowledge the impact of historical events (both good and bad) on their present-day reflections. This approach helps us understand the contextual and intergenerational differences of these times.

Over time from the *binary* to *neo-queer* to *fluid* generations, this *historical gay identity* has evolved and adapted. For many in this project's cohort of older gay men, certain threads from their gay past remain woven into their gay identity today. Sometimes past gay identity clashes

⁶⁵⁵ Jeffrey Weeks, "'Sins and Diseases': Some Notes on Homosexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *History Workshop*, Spring, 1976, Vol. 1 (Spring, 1976), 211-219; See also Sarah E. McHenry, "Gay Is Good": History of Homosexuality in the *DSM* and Modern Psychiatry," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (8 Sep 2022), 4-5.

with the present. Rather than discarding the gay past, some of this cohort seek to continue integrating it into TCWV today. Some also continue to support the fight for LGBTQ2+ rights everywhere while not wanting to lose their own gay identities in the process.

Gay Subcultures & Historical Contexts

Since the 1970s, gay men were meeting each other, connecting with each other and learning about and experiencing gay Toronto, gay identity and gay culture in a variety of environments. These places were not just in TCWV but in other spaces and places where gay subcultures existed, with some based on socio-economic differences and some on personal tastes, interests or desires. Hugh Brewster recalls gay dinner and cocktail parties that were exclusive to a certain type of gay:

We had our own little circle of ‘A’ gays as they were known ‘cause we entertained and we had our kind of, dare I say, elite gay circle of gay people and we would have kind of glamorous dinner parties. In fact, for Rosedale⁶⁵⁶ type gays that was much preferred to the bars which were traditionally in the deeper dark days of the closet. That was where you met people. There were a lot of gay guys there and it was different from the bar scene and a little nicer and so, I thought, “Oh, okay. Well, that’s how you’ll meet people.”⁶⁵⁷

Richard Chambers remembers different types of parties and places that were popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s to meet other gay men:

I do remember there were house parties, but like sex house parties. Not the dinner party kind. Though there was a little bit of that. There was a guy who was starting the circuit party that eventually became the big circuit parties.⁶⁵⁸ He became quite an entrepreneur in the ‘90s. That was his big thing, well into the 2000s, but in the mid ‘80s he was doing these little parties. He would rent a house. And then it’d be advertised that you can pay five bucks and you go to this house and you check your clothes at the door. And so, it was all kind of like sex. Or there’d be occasional house parties. I was going to dinner parties. I was going to the gay

⁶⁵⁶ Rosedale is an older, upscale and prestigious neighbourhood located north of downtown Toronto known for mansions and wealth.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Hugh Brewster, 19 Jul 2023.

⁶⁵⁸ See Steve Weinstein, “The Unsung History of Circuit Parties, Where Gay Men Seek Sex and Freedom,” *Vice* (21 Jun 2017), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywzjam/gay-circuit-parties-history-lgbtq-mickey-weems-interview> (accessed 22 May 2024).

gym where I was meeting lots of people, more dinner parties, going dancing at the clubs, and it felt very, still a very safe protected community with definite boundaries.⁶⁵⁹

Other subcultures of gay Toronto in the last two decades of the 20th century included race. Like Terrance Saunders's earlier recollection in this chapter of the house parties hosted by Black drag queen Michelle Ross, Patrick Brown points to the importance of networking in the Black gay community through special events in the 1980s and 1990s:

You'd meet people through people. You had house parties. And then there were special events, like say Caribana or during Pride weekend. There were special events that were put on for the Black gay community. And a lot of those were very, really nice because you had a lot of people from the United States, like a lot of Black people visiting from the States who went to them. It was like networking through these special events.⁶⁶⁰

Another gay subculture in Toronto could be found at *Buddies In Bad Times Theatre*. Grant Campbell remembers how "Buddies" presented plays relevant to the lesbian and gay community, including one in 1994 that was memorable to him as a part of Toronto's gay history:

I remember *Buddies in Bad Times* did a play called *Tales of the Parkside* and they re-created the *Parkside Tavern* [gay bar, 530 Yonge Street, 1964-1986]. And I remember sitting there in the audience watching and they had the same chairs that they had. It was a really rickety old beer hall. And the guys were wearing clothes that you wore back then, and sort of these wedge haircuts. I remember it was like I was back there. I was back in that time.⁶⁶¹

Before *RuPaul's Drag Race* became popular in contemporary mainstream television and streaming services, drag performers like interviewee Samuel Lopez as Samantha were (and continue to be) a staple of popular LGBTQ2+ entertainment. As part of gay, trans and queer subcultures, they provided humour, healing and fundraising support during the dark days of Toronto's HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. They also opened up a new world to many as

⁶⁵⁹ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

⁶⁶⁰ Interview with Patrick Brown, 19 Oct 2023.

⁶⁶¹ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

an example of how to push heteronormative boundaries. More recent drag performances have given way “to subvert drag norms through the reintroduction of traditionally masculine features” (drag with moustache and beards) and more extreme make up.⁶⁶² An earlier focus of drag was as comic and artful “female impersonator” to resemble women as closely as possible. Anonymous Interviewee #3 remembers the first time he saw a drag queen and how drag performance can bring back memories of popular songs and gay places:

The Manatee [gay bar/dance club, 1970-1984] is where I actually saw my first drag queen. For me it was amazing. I still live it today in my head, and I was just so like, “What’s this? Is this a real person?” I thought it was a real woman. That was the funniest thing. But then my friend said to me, “No, no, no.” I thought the person was singing actually because he was so good. It was, eventually got the name Michelle Ross performing a very popular song by Welsh singer Shirley Bassey, *This Is My Life*, is the name of the song. Michelle Ross did all this stuff, putting on a wig and eyeliner and I was blown away by this, just blown away.⁶⁶³

Another contributor to the gay community and gay subcultures can be found in print media publications like the Lesbian and Gay Liberation newspaper *The Body Politic* (1971-1987) and its tabloid offshoot *Xtra* magazine. Richard Chambers points to the intergenerational differences with the anticipation of getting a weekly ‘hard’ copy of *Xtra*. He points to its significance to the gay community in TCWV to keep informed as opposed to the online version today:

We were reliant on print media essentially. I mean later there were gay television channels and all that, but that’s more much later. It would be those Camelot years, that heyday for *Xtra* from the early ‘80s to the late ‘90s. And it would only come out, it would come out once a week on Thursday. And so, it was very important to get that paper. It created a talking point for the community. “Did you see the new thing that was advertised in *Xtra*?” And especially since *Xtra* is now online. They’ve evolved into the online platform. It just changes the whole dynamic. When it’s online all the time it hasn’t become like “Thursday’s the big day.”⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Kirsten Riley, “From female impersonation to drag,” *Wellcome Collection* (24 Sep 2019), <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XPDpbxAAAItBfFd8> (accessed 22 May 2024).

⁶⁶³ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

⁶⁶⁴ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

Openly gay characters as positive role models were a rarity in television or movies before the 1980s. Anthony Mohamed recalls the importance of celebrating gay representation on television and coming together in Toronto gay bars *before the Internet*. He also points out intergenerational differences and the earlier challenges of educating oneself about being gay:

Komrads (gay dance club, 1985-1991) hosted “Dynasty Night” after Steven came out⁶⁶⁵ and it was a big deal in those days because they were going to show the first gay kiss on television ever. Isn’t that ridiculous? [amused laughter]. I think young people just don’t understand there were just no gay, lesbian, bi, trans role models for anyone. The only character I knew, prior to Steven actually was Jack Tripper who was pretending to be gay on *Three’s Company* throughout the ‘70s. We had no Ellen [DeGeneres]. We had no Internet. We had none of that. I remember going to the library and looking up ‘H’ in the drawers [library reference index cards] and finding books on homosexuality, and it was all medical texts [amused laughter]. There was nothing.⁶⁶⁶

Grant Campbell returns to the significance of TCWV *itself* as a formative space to learn about gay identity, culture, subcultures and community. He sees recent changes that have now turned the gaybourhood into a space of nostalgic memories that is not so *gay* anymore:

I think if I can haul in Judith Butler [U.S. philosopher and gender studies scholar who influenced queer theory] for a minute here...when I think back on it, I think it's Judith Butler who talks about the performative aspect of [gender] and sexuality, and that you learned to perform your [gender and] sexuality and...the Church-Wellesley area was the place where I learned to perform my sexuality in a fully rounded, social way, not just something I did in the shadows, and I now see the Church-Wellesley area as a monument to that time when I learned...whether it still fills that function, I'm not sure. Today, I'd say the Church-Wellesley area is a place of nostalgia. It's a place where I still tend to go to feel myself as gay in some ways. I feel sad about some of the things that are happening. It doesn't feel like it's much of a neighbourhood anymore as it used to. I have a nostalgic image of a neighbourhood where gay couples could go to *Pusateri's* to buy meat, buy their fresh fruit. They could go to *Dudley's Hardware* for their tools. They could do their groceries, meet their friends, live in the neighbourhood reasonably

⁶⁶⁵ The television series *Dynasty* had character Steven Carrington who is considered one of the first openly-gay characters on television. See Chloe Veltman, “Celebrating The 40th Anniversary of ‘Dynasty,’ A Trailblazer for Queer Representation,” *NPR* (22 Jun 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/22/1009182316/proudly-celebrating-the-40th-anniversary-of-dynasty-in-san-francisco> (accessed 22 May 2024).

⁶⁶⁶ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.


inexpensively, and be in a defined community. And I have a sense that gay is diluting significantly.⁶⁶⁷

Fading Memories Into the Future

As an intergenerational transition is taking place in gay Toronto and TCWV physically, demographically and emotionally, several of this gay cohort have reflected on this transitional period and recognize the changes that have occurred. As the years go by for this group of older gay men, many observe growing older means experiencing the emergence of a younger generation with new ideas, new interests and new locations. Walking through familiar streets along Yonge, St. Joseph, Isabella or Selby bring back memories of gay bars like the *St. Charles*, *Parkside*, *The Quest*, *Katrina's*, *Manatee*, *Komrads*, *Chaps*, *Badlands*, *Boots & Buds* or *Kurbash* now replaced with retail or condo development. They remember once-vibrant hangout spots where they spent countless hours with friends in TCWV: coffee and cruising at *The Steps*; sunning and celebrating in *Cawthra Park* (now *Barbara Hall Park*); dining at *Crispins*, *Toby's*, *Zelda's*, *Gatsby's* or *Vagara* restaurants, brunch at the *Village Rainbow* or martinis at *Byzantium*; retro-night dancing at *Zippers Cellblock* or underwear parties at *The Barn*; going to *Ghetto Fag* with friends; seeing drag shows or best chest/legs contests and gay porn at *Woody's*, and drag shows at *Cruise & Tango* and *El Convento Rico*. They have all given way to different crowds and places that are now only in memories that shaped their lives – now recalled as gay nostalgia. It is not just the physical spaces that have changed. The very essence of these areas has been culturally reshaped by younger gays and queers and catering to straight allies and consumers who see TCWV in a different light of diversity, fluidity, curiosity and socializing.

⁶⁶⁷ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023. The conclusion of this quote became part of the title of this dissertation.

The following are a list of Toronto gay bars/dance clubs, gay spaces, gay-owned, gay-friendly and gay-oriented establishments between 1980 to 2023. Two maps compliment this list. A wider map covers the Yonge-Wellesley and Church-Wellesley areas together, with an inset map of TCWV to illustrate changes in The Village over time. *Note this list is not exhaustive.* This list and maps provide extra information about other spaces from the previous overlapping map in Chapter Two covering 1973 to 1988, particularly in TCWV.

-  **Gay bars/dance clubs *outside* Church-Wellesley area closed permanently by 2010:**
- #1 *St. Charles Tavern* (previously, *St. Charles Restaurant & Dining Lounge* opened in 1950 and known for gay clientele by 1963, closed in 1984) at 488 Yonge Street, and upstairs, *Maygay* dance club (1971-1977); *Club Triangle* (1977-1978); *Charly's Disco* (1978-84) and *Y-Not Bar* (1985-1987). Note: *Circus* (c.1997) dance club upstairs after *St. Charles* closed.
 - #2 *Parkside Tavern* (originally the *Hotel Breadalbane*, opened in 1945 and known for gay clientele by the mid-1960s, closed in 1986) at 530 Yonge Street, and upstairs *The August Club* (1970-1972); *Momma Cooper's* (1972-1973); *Milkbar* (1973-1974); *Quazimoto's* (1974-1976); *Bimbo's* (1976-1977); *Stages* dance club (1978-1984); and *Changes* (1985-1986).
 - #3 *Club Manatee* also known as *The Manatee* (1970-1984) at 11 St. Joseph Street, all-ages unlicensed gay bar/dance club.
 - #4 *Katrina's* (1978-1982) gay dance club (downstairs) at 5 St. Joseph Street; *The Outpost* (1981-c.1985). Upstairs was the alternative *Voodoo Club* (1981-1985). Later became *Colby's* also known as *Club Colby's* (1986-2000); then *Five* dance club (1998-2003).
 - #5 *Carriage House* (1971-1978) disco at 300-306 Jarvis Street switched to gay clientele in 1973.
 - #6 *The Quest* (1971-1985) dance club at 655 Yonge Street; previously *Famous Door* (c1964-1973).
 - #7 *Cornelius* (c.1975-1986) bar/dance club located above the biker bar and hard rock club *Gasworks* (c.1971-1993) at 585 Yonge Street.
 - #8 *David's* (1975-1977) disco at 16 Phipps Street. Later became *Playground* (c.1992-c.1995) then *Joy* (1995-1997).
 - #10 *Dudes* (1977-1982) cruising bar at 10 Breadalbane, later *Crowbar*, (1982-1984) in the back alley behind the *Parkside*.
 - #12 *Buddy's Backroom Bar* (1978-1987) at 370 Church Street. Later became *Bijou* porn bar (1995-2007).
 - #13 *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street. Later *Badlands* was downstairs (1990-1992) denim/cowboy-themed bar/dance club and *Chaps* upstairs.
 - #14 *Boots & Bud's* at The Selby Hotel [Later *Boots/Warehouse* and *Bud's* became *Kurbash*] (1981-2000) gay bar/dance club at Selby Hotel, 592 Sherbourne Street.
 - #15 *Gunsel's* then *Derringers* cowboy-themed gay bar (early 1980s); *Hitch'n'Post* (1984) cowboy-themed gay bar; *Trax & Trax V* (1985-2005) gay piano and show-tunes bar at 529 Yonge Street. Later became *Alibi* nightclub (2005-2008).
 - #16 *August II* (1973-1974) at 1 Isabella Street. Later *Mrs. Nights* lesbian and gay dance club (1976-1977) with *Isis* lesbian and gay dance club upstairs (1977). Later straight/gay mixed dance

Cheetah Club, Domino Klub, and Oz (mid-1970s to mid-1980s). Later *Komrads* gay dance club (1985-1991).

#17 *Soltero's* gay bar/dance club (1987-1998) at back-alley entrance behind 619 Yonge Street, between Isabella and Gloucester Streets.

#18 *Rock & Roll Fag Bar* (1988-1990) weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night held at Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1990); formerly Club 101 gay and lesbian bar (1984-1987) at 99-101 Jarvis Street.

#19 *The Toolbox* (1987-2004) gay leather bar at 508 Eastern Avenue, originated from an earlier gay leather bar *18 East* at 18 Eastern Avenue (1979-1984).

#20 *Club Manhattan* (1990s to early 2000s) weekly Saturday nights dance club for mostly Black gay, bisexual, and men who have sex with men at 19 Balmuto Street.

#24 *Heavens* (c.1988-c.1997) male strippers for predominantly gay male clientele on upstairs floor at Brass Rail strip club until Remington's gay strip club became popular; *Heavens* renamed *Upper Brass* featuring nude female strippers.

#25 *Carrington's Sports Bar* (c.1995-c.2005) at 618 Yonge Street (2nd Floor)

#26 *Sneakers* (c.1995-c.2005) gay cruise bar and rent boys; *Pinocchio* (c.2005-c.2007) gay cruise bar; *Gladman's Den* (c.2007-c.2010) gay cruise bar at 502 Yonge Street.



Older and newer gay bars/dance clubs still in existence by 2010:

#9 *Zipperz Cellblock* (1998-2016) gay piano and dance bar at 72 Carlton Street; previously *Studio II* (1977-1979) lesbian and gay dance club; became straight/gay-friendly nightclub P.M. Toronto (1992-1998); then Buttons (1998).

#11 *The Barn* (1976-2012) bar/dance club at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street); *Jo-Jo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) mixed lesbian and gay bar with *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) gay bar; *The Barn* (c. 1976-1991, upstairs) gay dance club; *Club Ivory* (1985, downstairs) lesbian piano bar; after short attempt with *Club Ivory* returned to *Stables* (1985-1991, downstairs) gay bar. Later became *The Barn Complex* (1991-2012, upstairs & downstairs) gay dance club.

#21 *El Convento Rico* (1992-Present) Latino gay-friendly dance club and drag show bar at 750 College Street.

#22 *Fly* (1999-2014) and *Fly 2.0* (2014-2019) gay dance club at 6 Gloucester Street.

#23 *Remington's Men of Steel* (1993-2018) gay strip club; ended audience gender segregation in 2009 allowing both men and women to watch naked men dance as mixed clientele at all shows, at 379 Yonge Street.



Gay bars/dance clubs in Church-Wellesley (TCWV) neighbourhood 1980-2023:

Gay-owned and gay-friendly restaurants and retail in TCWV 1980-2023:

425

Le Baron Steakhouse (1954-c.1999); Hair of the Dog pub and restaurant (2000-Present) at 425 Church Street.



Tanks gay bar (1980-1981); *Sapho* lesbian bar (1981 arson fire damage); *Together* (1981-1985) mixed lesbian and gay bar; *Private Eyes* (1985) mixed lesbian and gay bar; *Together Again* (1985-c.1986) mixed lesbian and gay bar; *The Bulldog* as mixed lesbian and gay bar (c.1986); *The 457* (c.1986-1997); *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay

leather/denim bar that moved from 459 Church Street next-door. Note: Previous location of *Melody Room* (1964-1966) considered the first lesbian and gay precursor space specifically on Church Street's future LGBTQ2+ Village. Also, publication space of gay male tabloid *TWO* magazine 1964-1966) at 457 Church Street.

459 *Black Eagle* (1994-1997) gay leather/denim bar that moved to 457 Church Street next-door; *The Red Spot* (c.1997-2003) gay bar frequented by Latino clientele; *Papi's* (2003-2009) gay bar frequented by Latino clientele; *Chino Locos Burrito Restaurant* (2009-2014); *Healthy Greek Restaurant* (2014-2016); *Urge XXX Cinema Maze & Booths* (2016); *The Drink* gay bar (2018-Present) at 459 Church Street.

463

Bigliardi's Seafood & Steakhouse (1977-2009); *Flash* gay member's strip and dance club (2011-Present) at 463 Church Street.

463

467

Jingles (c.1980s) piano bar and restaurant; *Woody's* (1989-Present) gay bar with *Sailor* (1994-Present) opened as an adjacent and connected gay bar next door at 467 Church Street.

475

Vagara Bistro (c.1980s to c.1990s) fine dining restaurant; *The Churchmouse: A Firkin Pub* (2002-Present) at 475 Church Street.

477

Queen's Dairy (1977-1993) burger restaurant; *Unicorn Restaurant* (1993-2000) casual dining restaurant; *Village Rainbow Café Restaurant* (2000-2010) casual dining restaurant; *The Garage Restaurant* (2010-Present) casual dining restaurant at 477 Church Street.

481

Simon De Groot Meat Market (1955-1993) butcher shop; *Cumbrae's* (1993-2017) butcher shop; vacant (2017-2020); *Five and Flower Cannabis* (2020); vacant (2020-2022); *Love Shop* (2023-Present) adult novelty & sex toys at 481 Church Street.

483

Amsterdam Coffee and Bake Shop (1974-1984); *This Ain't The Rosedale Library* (1986-2008) independent bookstore; in 2008, 483 Church Street ground floor divided into two with *About Cheese* (2008-2013) cheese-shop at 483A becoming *All the Best Fine Foods* (2013-2016) specialty grocer and *Eyes on Church* (2008-2018) optometrist at 483B [moved to 530 Church Street (2018-Present)]; properties combined again as *Craig's Cookies* (2019-Present) at 483 Church Street.

487

487

Badali's (1983-1998) independent grocery market, *Dale's Mart* convenience store (1999-2001); followed by various gay bars *Blú Lounge* (2002-2004); *Lúb Lounge* (2006); *Statler's* (2007-2010); *Elevate Bar and Lounge* (upper, 2009-2010); *Statler's Bar/Statler's Piano Bar & Cabaret* (2010-2020); *The Well Bar & Restaurant* (2020-Present) at 487 Church Street.

489

P.J. Mellon's (1987-2006) wine restaurant; *Sambuca's On Church* (2006-Present) Italian restaurant at 489 Church Street; *New Release Adult Video* (c.1986

489B

Pegasus (1993-Present) gay sports bar at 489B Church Street (upper level).

- 491** *Pink Triangle Press*, Canadian media organization and longest-publishing LGBTQ+ media group in the world, founded in 1971; published *The Body Politic* (1971-1987); *Xtra* magazine (1984-2014) print newspaper and (2015-Present) digital online at 491 Church Street (upper level). Note: *fab* magazine (1994-2013) was a Canadian gay-scene magazine published by *No Fear Publishing* and assets were purchased by *Pink Triangle Press* in 2008.
- 497** *Pusateri's* (1982-2023) fruit and vegetable grocery market at 497 Church Street. The property is now *Pusateri SR-Express Food Market* with the new business owners keeping the *Pusateri* name for its longstanding familiar association with Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village when the new business opened (2023-Present).
- 499** *Mini-Delights Delicatessen* (1981-1985); *Sweet Stuff Candy Store* (1985-1987); *Bersani & Carlevale Fine Foods Restaurant* (1987-1993); *Byzantium* (1993-2016) restaurant and martini bar; *Glad Day Bookshop* (2016-Present) at 499 Church Street.
- 501** *Chateau-Gai Wines* (1975-1982); *The Flowerman* (1988-1993) florist; *Bar 501* (1993-2007) gay bar; *Priape* (2009-2013) gay adult novelty & sex toys; vacant (2013-2019); *Friendly Stranger* (2019-Present) cannabis shop at 501 Church Street.
- 501A** *Splendeurs Restaurant & Bakery* (1987-1992); *7-24 Movies & More* video rental store with an adult section renting gay porn (1995-2013); *Royal Bank* (2016-Present) at 501A Church Street.
- 504**
- 504** *Gatsby's Restaurant* (c.1975-c.2000); *George's Play* (2002-2012) renamed *Play* in 2010; vacant (2012-Present).
- 506**
- 506** *Rainbow High Vacations* (1992-2015) gay travel agency (upper level); *Veda Indian Restaurant* (c.2000s); *Boutique Bar* (2010-2024) LGBTQ2+ cocktail bar at 506 Church Street.
- 508**
- 510** *Ghetto Fag* (c.1990-c.1994) gay dance club; Two separate bars *Crews* (1994-2004) gay bar and nightclub at 510 Church Street, and *Tango* (1994-2004) lesbian bar and nightclub at 508 Church Street; Joined as *Crews & Tangos* - with an 's' added (2004-Present), briefly closed in 2019 and reopened in 2010 at 508-510 Church Street.
- 511** *Dudley's Hardware* (1936-Present) at 511 Church Street.
- 518** *Harry's Steakhouse* (1966-1989); *Pints* (1989-1997) gay pub and restaurant with large popular patio; *Wilde Oscars* (1997-2004) gay pub and restaurant with large popular patio; *O'Grady's* (2004-Present) pub and restaurant with large popular patio and *The Lodge* (upstairs).
- 519** *519 Church Street Community Centre* (1976-2010) is a charitable, non-profit organization established in 1975 and now run by the City of Toronto as *519 Community Centre* (2010-Present).

| | |
|------------------|---|
| 524 To 538 | <p>524: <i>Super Freshmart</i> (1988-2017) 24-hour independent grocery store at 524 Church Street; divided into three retail units with <i>Super Freshmart</i> (2013-2017), <i>Loaded Pierogi</i> (2018-Present) casual restaurant specializing in pierogis and <i>Pizza Nova</i> (2018-Present) at 524 Church Street; <i>The Body Shop</i> (2015-2020) beauty and cosmetic products, then <i>Grapefruit</i> (2023-Present) men's apparel and retail store at 528 Church Street.</p> <p>530: <i>Brandi Meat & Deli</i> (1988-c.1990); <i>Reither's Fine Foods International</i> (c.1990-2012) specialty meats and international foods at 530 Church Street; divided into two with 532: <i>DauidsTea</i> (2012-2018), then <i>Eyes On Church Optical</i> (2018-Present) at 530 Church Street, and <i>Stag Shop</i> (2012-Present) at 532 Church Street.</p> |
| 524 To 538 | <p>534: <i>Ciao Restaurant</i> (1988-c.1996); <i>Coco Peanut</i> (c.1996-c.2005) Thai food restaurant; <i>Just Thai</i> (c.2005-2017) Thai food restaurant; <i>Si Lom</i> (2017-Present) Thai bistro at 534 Church Street.</p> <p>536: <i>Budning & Warchuk Dental Office</i> (1988-2005); <i>Baskin-Robbins</i> (2005-Present) ice cream parlor at 536 Church Street.</p> <p>538: <i>Papa Peaches Restaurant</i> (1988-1990); <i>Il Pappagallo Restaurant</i> (1990- 1994); <i>Café California</i> (1994-2018) fine dining restaurant; <i>The Cherie Bistro</i> (2018-Present) fine dining restaurant at 538 Church Street.</p> |
| 540 | <p>Apartments/condo units located on third and fourth floors (1988-Present); <i>Spa on Maitland</i> (1990-1997) gay bathhouse on second floor with address originally at south side door location to upper floor at 66 Maitland Street before becoming <i>Steamworks</i> (1997-Present) with new north side entrance and address at 540 Church Street.</p> |
| 542 To 544 | <p>542: <i>Toby's Good Eats</i> (1988-2007) hamburger restaurant; <i>Zelda's</i> drag-queen themed restaurant which moved from original location at 76 Wellesley Street, East (1997-2007) to 542 Church Street (2007-2009), before <i>Zelda's</i> relocated outside Church-Wellesley Village to 692 Yonge Street in 2009; divided into two with <i>Acme Burger</i> (2010-2014) hamburger restaurant; <i>Fresh Burger</i> (2015-2018); <i>Chef Gourmet</i> (2019-2020) Turkish street food restaurant; <i>Pocha 1989</i> (2020-Present) Korean bar & restaurant at 542 Church Street, and...</p> <p>544: <i>Second Cup</i> (2010-Present) coffee shop at 544 Church Street.</p> |
| | <p><i>ChurWell / The Village Centre Building</i> (1988-Present): TD (Toronto Dominion) Bank, Canadian financial institution branch has been located on the southwest corner of Church and Wellesley Streets since 1963 originally in older Edwardian brick building at 550 Church Street until ChurWell Centre (now The Village Centre) five-stories office building with construction completed in 1988 creating a diagonal-corner Church/Wellesley Street entrance; further renovated in 2012 to have entrance facing Wellesley Street, currently 65 Wellesley Street, East at Church Street (1963-Present). Location of <i>ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives</i> (formerly Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives) with research location at 34 Isabella Street.</p> |



The Steps (1984-2004) iconic social spot where many gay men would gather and socialize on southwest corner of Church and Wellesley Streets in front of Canadian coffee shop franchise Second Cup at 548 Church Street.

551

Out On The Street (1991-Present) LGBTQ+ marketed retail clothing, adult toys and merchandise store. Previously *Medonte Art Gallery* (early 1980s); *Festival Travel* (late 1980s-1991) at 551 Church Street.

553

Babylon (1998-2005) restaurant, martini bar & café at 553 Church Street.

556

Devon Restaurant (1964-2004) Chinese restaurant, previously Devon Tea Room (1940-1964), Devon Lunch (1934-1940); became Kaiseki Sakura Japanese resto-bar (2005-2011), Oishii Japanese bar & restaurant (2011-2013), Chou Izakaya Japanese restaurant (2013-2104), Tacoritto Mexicana restaurant (2014-2020), Zeba Berlin Donar (2020-2021), currently Amor Fusion Donar & Kebab (2021-Present) at 556 Church Street.

580
to
582

580: *Our Country Restaurant* (c.1978-c.1988); *Roberts Bar & Restaurant* (c.1988-c.1992); *Dundonald Pub & Parlour* (c.1992-c.1995); *Mango Restaurant* (c.1995-c.2007); *The Vic Restaurant* (c.2007-2013).

582: *The Old House on Church Street Restaurant* (c.1988-c.1995); *Village Bistro* (c.1995-c.1999); *Spiral Restaurant* (c.1999-c.2007); *Alto Restaurant* (c.2007-c.2013);

580-582: *House-Maison Restaurant* (c.2013-c.2015); vacant (c.2015-c.2018); *Storm-Crow Manor Restaurant* (c.2018-Present).

HF

Hassle Free Clinic was originally a street clinic started in 1973 by Rochdale Free Clinic counsellors offering drug crisis counselling and medical treatment. Moved to 556 Church Street (upper) in 1980 offering HIV/AIDS education and prevention counselling and anonymous HIV testing when it became available in 1985. In 2004 the clinic moved to 66 Gerrard Street.

553

Neighbours (1980-1986) gay-owned restaurant; *Windows* (1988-1994) gay-owned restaurant and gay bar; *Josephine Bistro* (1994-1996) gay-owned restaurant; *Slack Alice* (1997-2005) – rebranded *Slack's* (2005-2013) lesbian and women's bar at 562 Church Street.

ACT

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) founded in 1983 by community activists and volunteers in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Formerly at 66 Wellesley Street (1983-1993), longstanding location at 399 Church Street (1993-2015), and at 543 Yonge Street (2015-Present). Also, location of Toronto People with AIDS Foundation (PWA) founded in 1987 and at this location until 2015 before moving to 163 Queen Street East.

Spa
Excess

Spa Excess (1998-Present) gay bathhouse at 105 Carlton Street.

Club
Baths
Oasis

Club Toronto Baths (1973-2010) gay bathhouse; *Oasis Aqualounge*, adult sex club (2010-Present) at 231 Mutual Street.



Early apartment buildings: A) City Park (1957-Present); B) Massey House (1958-Present); C) 50 Alexander - “KY Tower” (1965-Present); D) 100 Wellesley - “Stack a fag” (1971-Present).

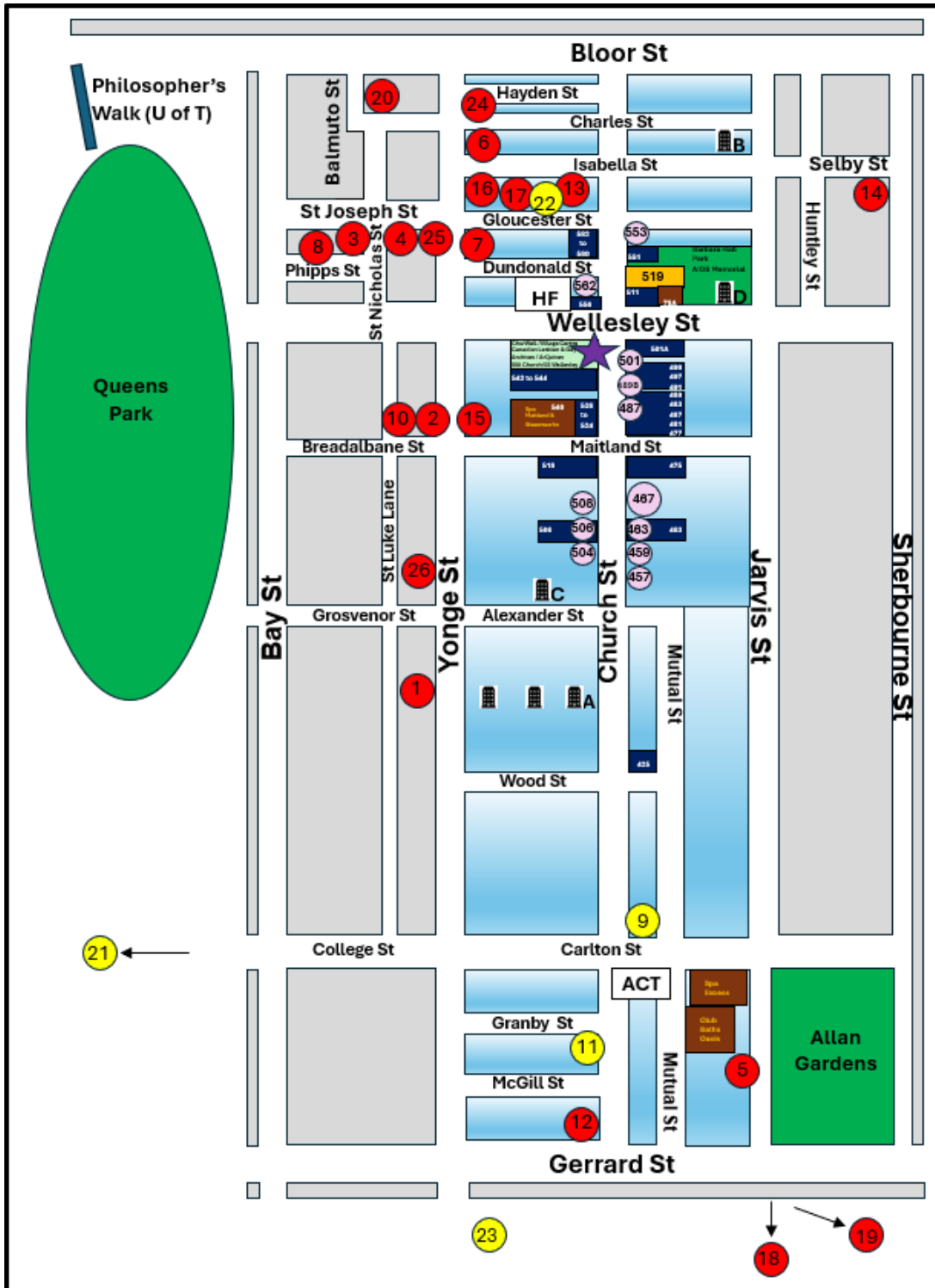


Image 69: Map of downtown Toronto indicating gay bar/dance clubs, gay spaces and gay-owned/gay-friendly establishments between 1980-2023 NOTE: This map is not exhaustive. The blue shaded area represents the current boundaries of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village between the same dates. Source: J. Gary Myers, 7 May 2024.

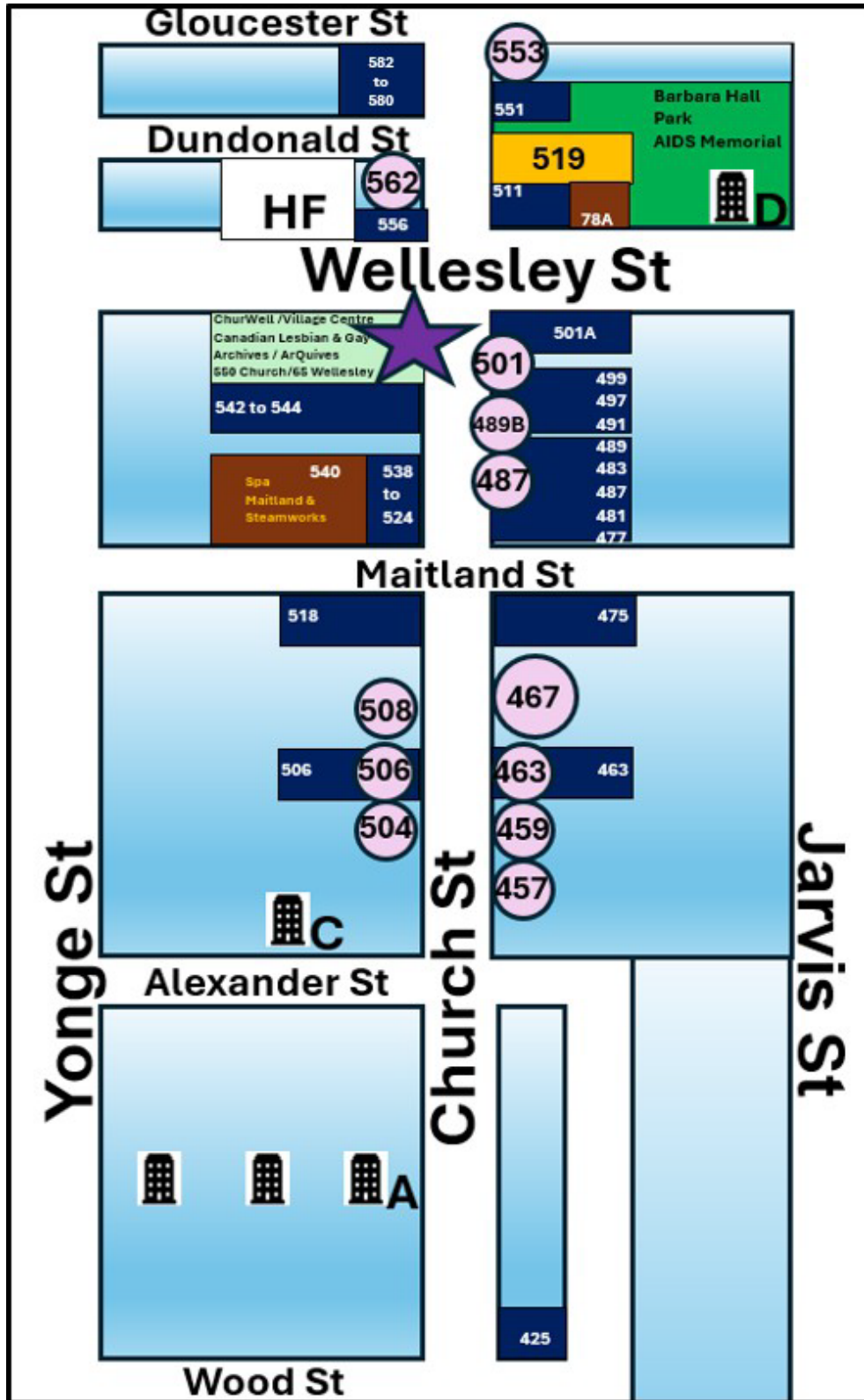


Image 70: Inset Map from Image 69 of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) indicating gay bar/dance clubs, gay spaces and gay-owned/gay-friendly establishments between 1980-2023. NOTE: This map is not exhaustive. The blue shaded area represents the current boundaries of TCWV between the same dates. Source: J. Gary Myers, 7 May 2024.

Advice To Your Younger Gay Self

As this older gay cohort navigates the changing landscapes of gay Toronto and TCWV, we are reminded of the ebb and flow of generations as we walk backwards into the future with our eyes fixed on our past. We are reminded of learning from past mistakes and helping a younger generation avoid similar ones. I speculatively asked these older gay men, “*What advice would you give your younger self in relation to what you know now as a gay man?*” These are their responses:

David Hallman:

Just keep living fully. I have two honorary doctorates and one of them was from Victoria College at U of T in 2014. I titled my commencement address as *Living a Vibrant Life*. That’s my credo living now.

Hugh Brewster:

Because I come from a very religious background, I think there was a lot of internalized homophobia in me. I was sort of judgmental and I wasn't “one of those gays” you know. And obviously, with *Body Politic* I tried to put that behind me and embrace the whole community and all that sort of thing. So, I think the advice I would give to younger gays is that we are a remarkable tribe. You're part of a remarkable subculture. Yes, there's still some homophobia and at the moment with this upsurge of pushback in the US towards trans and book banning and all that nonsense, that's tough for people to bear. But it's such a bigger, wider world than I ever imagined it could be and I could never have imagined it being a million people on the streets with the mayor leading and the Prime Minister and so on in the [Pride] parade. That was beyond imagining. So, to my younger self, “Don’t be limited. The world can change in extraordinary ways, and you can have a very good life, and a very happy life and healthy life.” I would say seek out, get involved with groups, because we're all innately social. And there's even a gay church if you're inclined that way. So, yeah, things are so much better that you can now find yourself and find your niche and find your circle in the gay world which you couldn't back in the day. It's just so much better. I think gay, young people today are very lucky to be part of this world and don't despise it, don't reject it. As I say, “You’re part of a wonderful tribe.” And you can change it and make your own contribution. “We're here, we're queer and we're here to stay” as we used to say. That is amazing. Really, it’s quite amazing.

Larry Laforet:

Don't be afraid. Come out. And love yourself. I mean, I just hated myself for so long. And what a waste, you know. I saw a picture of my, probably, thirteen, fourteen-year-old self and I just look so unhappy and so miserable, and I just

thought, “You poor kid.” Ugh [sympathetic sigh]. And I mean, it wasn't easy growing up in those days and in my family. And there was a distinction between gay men who could pass, and gay men who couldn't. And I couldn't. And I was tormented because of that for a very long time and it was hard.

Bob Dirstein:

Be bolder. There's always sort of a certain hesitancy, to hold back, certainly professionally. You treaded very carefully about who you told [you were gay] and then it's interesting because it reaches a certain point where you just started thinking, “If they don't know there's no point in telling them” [amused laughter]. I think if we were all bolder, I think things could have moved faster. But you know, who wants to be the first to walk down, jump out of the trench. That's the thing.

Patrick Brown:

Don't be afraid to go after what you want. I spent so many of those years right at the line [amused laughter]. I was afraid to cross it. I think I denied myself a lot of experiences and a lot of growth. I would certainly be more risk-taking and adventurous. That would definitely be my advice to my younger self in terms of my gay life.

Terrance “Teach” Saunders:

I think that younger “Teach” arrived with an innocence and a curiosity that was tempered by this thirst for knowledge, and knowledge in many, in multiple ways. A “Teach” that in many ways was on this crusade in a sense, this thought of to do good work, to find out more about himself in a space that was comfortable, but to also be aware of an appreciation for his Afro-Bahamian-Caribbean identity in the ways in which he chose the kind of spaces he worked, and continued to work for a long time, but was always aware of a passion. A friend of mine, there was this wonderful young man I met at university, also a teacher, and I remember I was telling him about something I was doing. And we were in *Chaps*, and I was with another Bahamian friend, and he asked me what am I doing for African Heritage Month? And I was telling him, and he said, “You must be the Harriet Tubman of Education” [amused laughter]. And it's interesting because it's a term that I have embraced. Because yeah, I like that. Yes, the Harriet Tubman of Education, because I think for me, all we know about Harriet Tubman, all the kinds of ways she was ‘the iconic activist.’ The kinds of things that she wanted for her people. Because it captures for me all the assumptions about the intersectionality of being male, being in a body, that you're told is a “sissy,” all the things that are supposed to demean, but also very aware of a gift, of a gift that I think I've tried to share in many different kinds of ways, but at the same time being very true to that young boy that arrived here eager and excited. I think in our community, specifically African-Canadian community, I think one of the things that we need to do better, and to talk about more, and it's problematic, is that we have to remember, “Parents, you are the child's first teacher. You do not abdicate that responsibility for anybody.” It is not my quote, it was shared with me by a deceased educator who I got to know but it's one that I feel we need to really embrace. Because a lot

of what is happening and what happens in our community around all aspects of our lives is because we want the best, but we have to also be prepared, notwithstanding all of the systemic challenges, that you have to be present in your children's lives, and provide them with either the examples from you or the resources and peoples around you, so that you are their first teacher.

Anonymous Interviewee #1:

Just to keep moving forward and not be fearful. Choose life because some people didn't. Some people went off and got married when they felt that was their only choice. Some people got screwed up having to deal with all these pressures of family and everything. There was a concept when I was in school, I was playing with called self-availability. It fits in with self-awareness, self-acceptance. For a gay person, it's like just accepting yourself and letting yourself be. So, as a young person, I would say that be self-available. That's not wrong.

Samuel Lopez:

Document everything. Because through filmmaking, through the history of the colonies, we learned that a lot of knowledge got lost because where we kept records of our knowledge, other than our own brain, got burned. And filmmaking when you make a film, it's there forever, mostly now in digital time. It eventually happened when we created *Samuel and Samantha*, but if I'm thinking of that day, of the day of the little pieces of paper [that Samuel handed out to start *Hola*], I would say document everything, because then we wouldn't have these interviews [amused laughter].

John Montague:

Don't be so afraid. Afraid of everything. Don't be so afraid and admit your mistakes, then move on.

Tony Souza:

I think this begs the question, "Would I do things differently than what I did?" And I would say I wouldn't. I just wished I had come into a community as it is now where there's so much happening, where my identity as a gay man is honoured. That I don't have to cover it up. That I'm proud. This is what pride is. I just think that you need to be a part of the struggle, and you need to believe in yourself and just say, "Okay, nothing is perfect, and we have to work towards it. We've got to work towards community and communities that are connected, that depend upon each other." It's important to find common cause with others. It's important that one of the ways I broke through it all was by being an activist, by making change. And in that, I grew. I mean, it challenged us. It challenged us to learn new skills, learn ways of dealing with stuff, and it also made us less afraid. We've talked about community support, finding support and stuff. And I think of also the individuals in my life who took the time to support me and encouraged me and do all of this organizing, and how I can take it forward, how I play it forward to other people.

Jeremy Vincent:

Everything will work out well because everything has. Enjoy life. Everything will work out.

Grant Campbell:

I would say, loosen your jockstrap a little bit. Let go of your snobbishness. There's a lot of fun to be had. I mean [quick laugh] play safe, absolutely play safe but I think there's a huge amount of "What would the neighbors think?" That comes from my upbringing and my social class and everything. And I think there was a huge amount of vitality and love and excitement going around back in the '80s, which I simply was blind to because I couldn't see past the color of my skin. I couldn't see past my education. I couldn't see past all of the things, all of the little barriers I had around myself that made me feel special and made me feel like something unusual. And I regret that now. But I think I would also say to my younger self, "Don't be ashamed of what you did to survive." The first boyfriend that I had was someone who had a very closed circle of friends, and he was very musical as I was, and he was older, more experienced. We broke up eventually because I just found I couldn't stay in that place. It was safe. It was protected. It was insular. And after a while I had to leave it. But in retrospect, given how vulnerable I was, given how naive I was, I don't think I need to feel ashamed for having initially chosen someone with whom I felt safe. And I can look back on it now and say, "God, what a hoity toity little guy I was. But I survived." And I did what I had to do to survive, and we all do. And I don't think that's something that anyone needs to feel ashamed of. As long as we recognize when the time is right, that, okay, we gotta loosen the straps a bit here.

Dan Benson:

Just relax and enjoy life more [amused laughter]. I think certainly as a gay man, I've worried a lot about being accepted, about where I fit in, about judgment. I think most people do think about these things. I think as a gay man, I've worried more. I remember being offered something and declining it because I would have to come out in a context where I did not want to come out and didn't feel I could. Now, that was back in the early '80s. That's forty odd years ago. It's a different world. So, I don't know whether I lost opportunity or preserved myself, but I know that I've read a lot about that. I think we, a lot of us, you've read or heard of *The Best Little Boy In The World* [a book by Andrew Tobias, published in 1973, about how many gay men were driven to achievement behaviour to be 'the best' so as to avoid rejection by others in dealing with their own internalized sexual stigma in dealing with being a closeted gay man in a homophobic society]. I think a lot of us really, really lived into that. Not because we read the book, but that was one of the survival techniques. You had to be 'the best little boy in the world' so that no one would know, and no one would criticize because you had all this behind you. And I think I put a lot of energy into that.

Leo Mitterni:

Be confident in yourself and there's no need for those insecurities that I had, probably still do [quick laughter]. I was very insecure. When I think about it and look back now I think, "Well, maybe I did do something good" but I always felt insecure. I guess maybe low self-esteem, which was terrible. Because if I was more empowered, I think I would have done more. I don't know. But that's how I feel.

Anonymous Interviewee #2:

When I was younger, I was a lot more serious. I don't know if it was because it was a struggle back then for myself, or because society made me have to be more serious about being gay. I wish I just enjoyed myself more, but maybe I didn't because there was way more homophobia than there is now. What would I tell myself? I would say, "Don't take everything so seriously." When I would see, when I was younger ...I had a boyfriend who was about ten, twelve years older than I was. And we were watching a show, and I don't remember what it was. And it was basically kind of mocking homosexuality. And he was laughing. And I was very upset. And I said, "How could you be laughing at this?" And he said to me, "You know, because it's funny." Just because something is funny doesn't mean they're making fun of the whole gay thing. This was funny. And he goes, "If you listen to it, it's kind of true. And it's funny." And I looked at it the other way. I said, "No, they're making fun of gay people." But they weren't. It was a gay joke. And that's what I think I would tell myself now. "Be happier. Don't take everything so seriously, and not everything that's a joke is insulting."

Bill McMaster:

As a gay man. I think sometimes when I was younger, I was very, too reserved. A couple of my friends, they kept always telling me that "You need to relax more. You need to let go. Just go with the flow" type of thing. And from this perspective, now, looking back on that, I would think, "Yes." I would say to a younger self, "Heed that advice. Get out there and enjoy life more and don't allow others to influence you" and not to let go and really enjoy yourself. And now that I'm older, I tend to do that more than probably I should [amused laughter]. Ease up a little bit. Just enjoy. Don't look at all the don'ts. Be more open and more welcoming of other ideas. Because certainly in looking back on it, like at different stages during my life, I think, for myself as a gay man, and I consider myself fairly liberal, but I think I was pretty conservative in a lot of those stages. I think I'm probably a lot more liberal now than I was.

Lionel Collier:

I would say go for it. But be careful. It's a jungle out there because most young people wind up dead at an early age, especially in the gay community. So, you've got to be really careful who you associate with and how you handle yourself or you won't be around for very long. And I've watched thousands die. Try to be more kind, more accepting and more loving.

Bobby (Pseudonym):

Don't be so timid younger self. You were so in the closet and didn't want to come out because of social ramifications.

Brent (Pseudonym):

Be glad you took a risk and came out. Don't feel guilty you lived a straight life for so long because everything had a purpose and you have beautiful children that view the world differently because of you.

Anthony Mohamed:

Well, I mean, it's cliché, but, that things will get better. That's what I would say. It's more around life in general that you will have opportunities to get a job, to live somewhere nice, to travel, all those kinds of things, and still be out [as a gay man]. That's a powerful message to a young gay man. But because I'm not just gay, I'm also Brown, I'm also an immigrant, I live with a disability now, and I'm old [amused laughter] it's like, there's so many categories to tick off. Anybody listening to this or reading this knows that you, yourself, identify in many different communities. Allyship in different forms. At the time, we didn't really call it intersectional, but it was a sense of intersectional organizing that we needed to support. For example, Black Lives Matter. I can't tell you the amount of gay men who have said disparaging things about the movement not recognizing that, nobody's free unless all of us are free.

Richard Chambers:

In 1981, when I went to U of T, I wanted to know from health services there from a counselor whether I was gay or not, and he said, "Well, why don't you join a group of other students who are exploring that question" and I said hard, "No." I would tell my younger self now, "I could have said yes to that." Now as it turns out, I went to the homo hop and met some nice people and things unfolded in a pretty natural, healthy way. But that also might have been a positive experience that I missed, so that would be one for sure.

Anonymous Interviewee #3:

I have quite a few friends, people who I know and they talk a lot about education. And I believe that for me, I think that is important. This one particular friend, he thinks that he is perhaps a little more effeminate than most, and that, for him, is a negative thing. He thinks that others see that as negative, so he has to make up for it. I suppose it's that old saying, especially in terms of race, they say that Black people, a lot of young people think that they have to work twice as hard. I'm sure you've heard that. That's the saying. So, I would say that's it, education. Make sure that you're solid, and you're good at what it is that you eventually decide to do. Because even if you're not, but then you get found out [about being LGBTQ2s+], the fact that you have education, solid experience, perhaps that will conjure.

Jan Grygier:

The hard part is so many people have died, and I survived. It's like, wow, but having experience after experience after experience, and looking back, I'd made proper decisions back then. The only advice I would say is navigating out of let's say danger or negative experiences, but I was always fighting back and sticking up. I think I would have put my foot down more to my family and been much more let's say, more rigid, with healthier boundaries and stronger and not trying to be invisible. Because in my family issue, I was a twin firstborn, but also, I felt, don't ask for much. Although I did leave, I left when I was young. I was able to live.

Anonymous Interviewee #4:

Don't be so scared. Let yourself have a little fun. It's all fine. Just have faith in yourself." I mean, the reason I was timid and shy and not really trying was because I had no confidence in myself. So, if I could just say that to myself, I'd be like, "You'll be okay. You're smarter than this. You're better than this. Just go out and do it.

Jim Elliott:

I'm very happy in general in my life. I've been single now for thirty years since my last partner died. I wish I'd found somebody else. Never did. And part of the problem is I've never found anybody who matched up to him. I've dated a few people and "You're not Paul." And that's an unfortunate thing. I have his picture by my bed here. So, every morning I look at it. Maybe that's the problem [quick laughter]. But looking back, is there any advice I'd give to myself? I really can't think of anything I'd change. I'd probably... it's nothing to do with being gay, but I wish I'd taken better care of myself. When I was young, I was working out in the gym every day. Going dancing every weekend. When Paul died, I got very depressed, and I went from 185 pounds to 300 pounds in two years. Again, not an unheard-of situation. I wish that I had someone or something that would tell me not to and to be happier with myself during that period.

Tim McCaskell:

If I had come out when I was in high school [quick laughter] ... I might have had a lot more surreptitious sex, and then I might be dead, right? I don't know what advice. I do look back and cannot comprehend the kind of fear and internalized loathing that was simply associated with anything like this [being gay]. I can remember the debates about decriminalization in 1968 [to decriminalize homosexuality in Canada, which occurred in 1969]. On *This Hour Has Seven Days* [CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) news magazine television show (1964-1966)], they had an edgy TV news program on Sunday evenings. Once they had this gay man talking about this stuff, and the guy was backlit, and his voice was distorted. And so, the notion that this was just about the most abject, awful thing in the world was just like, it was suffocating. See on the other hand, I think about that, and I bumped into somebody in a restaurant, this is maybe 30 years ago now, and he said, "You're from Beaverton, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." I

didn't recognize him at all. He was a bit younger, I guess. But we'd been in the same high school. And he said, "Did you ever know (this guy and that guy), that they were lovers all through high school?" And it was like, "No, I didn't know." I couldn't imagine that. But on the other hand, like some people had figured out even at Brock District High School in Beaverton in 1965. How they manage to be in the closet and have a boyfriend throughout high school was something. I always kicked myself because I should have gotten the guy's number and followed up. Because there's a story there, but I was just sort of flabbergasted.

Andre Goh:

I think for me, the most important thing I would have said was, "You're not alone. You're okay. Don't listen to the bullies." And reassure myself because my late teens and early twenties were not memorable years to me. The level of racism, trauma, bullying was exhausting. And not things I want to remember. So, whenever people say, "Oh, did you have fun in high school?" [amused laughter] ...I have no fond memories of high school, which is terrible. And I have no friends from high school as well. Which is interesting. But partly because yeah, I kept blending into the wall. I was terrified. I didn't know when I was gonna get beaten up, or name-called right across the hallway. So, yeah, reassure myself, "Don't worry about the bullies, and don't worry about the racist bigots. Lots of people love you."

Gay Identity Echoes & Dying Cultural Ripples

In the twilight of this gay cohort's life experiences, this older gay generation stands at a crossroads confronting the erosion and seeming death of their *historical gay identity*, culture and spaces. Echoes of their once vibrant gay experiences of shared community, culture and space and the connecting identity fabric that continues to weave through their lives today has begun to fray. The strong waves of their gay youth have become dying cultural ripples sustained with gay nostalgia. As they walk backwards into the future with their eyes fixed on their gay past, the inevitable generational shifts introduce new identities, cultural paradigms and places very different from the formative influences of the *binary* generation. It is hoped this gay nostalgia will provide a reference point for a *fluid* generation to know and connect to past life lessons (good and bad) and not forget or erase gay history but learn about it to keep it alive.

A *fluid* generation is steeped in the influences of queer theory and the *neo-queer* generation and born into a broader inclusion of LGBTQ2+ identities. As queer theory began to socially diffuse in the first decade of the new millennium, particularly over social media, a *fluid* generation grew up with an understanding of the fluidity of sex and gender that we understand today. Some now appear to be redefining and condensing the seemingly ever-growing LGBTQ2+ acronym where *queer* becomes a shorthand for *gay* and other identities under the queer umbrella. This is theorized as a *post-gay* period in which the social, cultural and political experiences and identities of older gays are arguably disregarded by a growing number of younger gays and queers of the *fluid* generation who no longer align themselves with the historical gay identity, culture or space. Gay male spaces once exclusive are now open to everyone, stirring discomfort among some unaccustomed to such inclusivity including online spaces like Vintage Gay Toronto that continue to enforce gay exclusivity.

generations to learn from one another. To walk backwards into the future with our eyes fixed on our past. This includes each of the LGBTQ2+ communities which have much to give one another from each generation. Despite the differences, there are shared experiences and overlapping struggles for human rights, dignity and acceptance.

In some ways, the *fluid* generation navigates a world vastly different from the one the *binary* and *neo-queer* generations knew. In other ways, this younger generation continues to struggle for recognition in a new fight for social acceptance and equality similarly based on previous struggles for sexuality and gender rights. Like the Gay Liberation and Women's movements before them, the recent 'culture wars' sees LGBTQ2+ communities now defending

rights and opposing prejudice, particularly for trans individuals, as *binary* and *neo-queer* lesbians and gays did before.

As an older gay generation grapples with these intergenerational differences, there is a palpable sense of a lost gay community and dying gay identity. Amidst this sense of loss it is also important to acknowledge the inevitability of change while embracing the richness of the gay past in Toronto. I am part of this gay past in Toronto and raised within the *binary* generation. My own experiences of gay community, gay identity and gay culture are mostly aligned with those of the gay cohort I interviewed for this project. I have had the privilege of listening to their stories and now have an opportunity to comment personally. Their narratives resonate with me because of my own connection to gay culture in Toronto's gay spaces and places.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, this work is both an historic account and a personal story. I am well situated to examine the social and cultural mechanisms at work in the construction of historical gay memories. I recognize the tendency to become sentimental and biased with memories of an idealized past. This includes acknowledging my own sentimentality and biases mediated, as a historian, with recognizing the reality of change over time. As such, the final chapter will focus on auto-ethnographic observations about what this older generation of gay men have shared with me throughout these chapters. I aim to augment these sources of gay nostalgia and historical observations by re-examining them through my own reflective lens as a historian. I hope to temper sentimentality by pragmatically anchoring observations without a rose-tinted recasting of Toronto's gay past.

Chapter 6: Auto-Ethnographic Observations About Changes in Gay Toronto

Adaptations of Plato's Cave Allegory

“Would he, rather, believe that the shadows he formerly knew were more real than the objects now being shown to him?”⁶⁶⁸

The enduring allegory of Plato's Cave continues to superbly illustrate the nature of acquiring knowledge and wisdom, the reality of individual and collective perceptions and the idealistic yearnings for a just society. Plato asks us to visualize a group of people who have been confined by chains to the floor of a cave since they were children. Their chains prevent them from looking back, so all they can do is stare forward. When objects pass by the entrance of the cave from behind, the people notice shadows thrown on the wall in front of them. They instinctively trust what they perceive to be true because all they have ever known are shadows. This is their known daily existence and usual routines.

When the chains are removed, their lives are drastically up-ended. For the first time, they are able to turn around and see the light at the entrance of the cave. It is now apparent to them that the images they had previously thought to be real are just shadows of real objects. They begin to recognize the difference between the shadowy images on the cave wall and actual items illuminated by the light at the entrance of the cave. Their whole sense of reality is disrupted. They are confused and concerned about taking for granted their usual experiences and longstanding vision of the world. Several of them find this extremely upsetting and yearn to stay in the cave and return to the comfort and security of their chains and routines.⁶⁶⁹ For others, what

⁶⁶⁸ Plato, *The Allegory of the Cave*, translated by Shawn Eyer (Plumbstone Books, 2016) https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/seyer/files/plato_republic_514b-518d_allegory-of-the-cave.pdf (accessed 5 Jun 2024).

⁶⁶⁹ Philosophy scholar Sean McAleer states: “An important point to grasp is that the liberated philosopher [one seeking knowledge who leaves the cave] is not on a mission of liberation [of those who choose to stay in the cave], at least not complete liberation, since in Plato's view not everyone is capable of making it out of the cave...as ‘the majority cannot be philosophic’ [enlightened] (6.494a).” See Sean McAleer, *Plato's Republic: An Introduction* (Cambridge, Openbook Publishers, 2020), 220.

they see behind them is exciting as well as frightening. Even though it is still strange and new, it is also exhilarating.

For this project, I utilize this ever-interpreted and adaptable allegory in three ways. I imagine three distinct ‘caves’ relating them to my own gay experiences at distinct parts of my life and those of the cohort of gay men I interviewed. First, the allegory can help us understand the significance of early oppressive compulsory heterosexuality and pervasive homophobic societal attitudes into the 1970s and 1980s. I see this adaptation as the *homophobia closet cave*. It can illustrate being in the shadowy closet of gay sexuality surrounded by heterosexual norms and discovering the self-identifying light of gay liberation.

Next, the allegory can demonstrate shifting intergenerational identities and cultural differences from the 1990s into the 2000s. It includes the emergence of the *neo-queer generation* and the influences of queer theory that challenged the heteronormative thinking of the previous *binary generation*. I see this adaptation as the *gay binary cave*. It can represent how gays of the *binary* generation living inside the cave began learning about things outside the cave with a generational shift and the rise of *neo-queer* thinking. These shifts in the *neo-queer generation* influenced those inside the cave and subsequently the *fluid generation* outside the cave by the new millennium.

Finally, the metaphor can be adapted to represent the temporal elements of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village of the *past* and *present*. I see this as the *post-gay village cave* that can symbolize The Village today. Shadows on the back of the cave wall represent idealistic desires to maintain a perceived and nostalgic TCWV gaybourhood, gay community and gay identity of the past. Despite the reality of neighbourhood redevelopment and demographic change, some gay men continue to overly focus on the shadows of the past thrown on the wall. When straights and

queers from the outside begin to come into the cave, they perceive that gay spaces and gay identity can stay the same because all they have ever known are the shadows of a more-exclusive and *binary* gay past.

The Homophobia Closet Cave

The *homophobia closet cave* is a straight and secretive space with a gay closet. I remember, along with those I interviewed, living a double life shrouded in secrecy. We lived in legitimate fear in the highly homophobic atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s. Our gay relationships were formed in secret for fear of being disowned by family, fired from jobs or kicked out of homes or apartments. The allegory can represent the experience of ‘coming out of the closet’ and embracing the reality of a discovered gay identity and gay community.

Like most of the gay cohort interviewed for this project, I am part of the *binary generation* who remember our formative years of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. We were influenced by lingering notions and expectations of compulsory heterosexuality. We were chained in our ‘homophobia closet cave’ of expected *straight identity*. We saw shadows of what we thought were men with women conforming to gender roles and expected dress. They were holding hands, kissing, dancing and having only one type of ‘healthy and normal’ sexuality and way of living. We automatically trusted what we perceived to be true as our *straight identity* while grappling with that identity.

Some of us sensed an unease about this identity, feeling different from others in the cave but we dared not say so. When our chains were removed, we turned around to see not only men with women but *men with men*, and *women with women*. We saw some as non-conforming and others as conforming to gender roles and dress. They were interacting beyond a binary environment, holding hands, kissing, dancing and having various types of sexualities and ways

of living. In the cave, our lives were drastically upended. Our sense of reality was disrupted.

Several cave dwellers found this extremely upsetting and yearned to return to their ‘homophobia closet cave’ to shackle themselves again with their routines. The only difference between these cave dwellers and those who chose to leave the cave was some form of moralistic judgements and criticisms of the behaviour of those outside the cave. Those who decided to leave the cave were especially perplexed, angered and saddened by those who wanted to force them to stay in the cave. Along with those who decided to go back into the cave and put on their chains again, there were others who returned to the cave but refused to be re-chained and tried to educate those still chained. A portion stayed in the comfort of the cave for the familiarity of binary influences that shaped their lives. They remained unchained but did not judge. A number embarked outside the cave into a new and exciting space of self-discovery and identity in a world of diverse possibilities and experiences, leaving the shadows behind.

The Gay Binary Cave

The *gay binary cave* is a space of gay identity and community for those in the *binary generation*. It represents the sum of their collective history. In this example, they cannot leave the *gay binary cave* as they cannot change or ‘leave’ the reality of being born at a specific time and into a specific generation. Within the cave are those with an openness to or discomfort with intergenerational differences and ways of self-identifying over time.⁶⁷⁰ Outside the cave are the *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations in full view of everyone in the *gay binary cave*. Those in the cave only see shadows. When the chains are removed as new generations emerge, lives are also upended. For the first time, gays from the *binary generation* are able to turn around and see that there are many gender expressions, sexual orientations, communities and identities outside and

⁶⁷⁰ Again, a reminder that I use intergenerational categories of *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* applied only to those who self-identify within the LGBTQ2S+ communities and not as an overall for various general public generations.

within their generational cave. Their whole sense of reality is disrupted. They are confused and concerned about taking for granted their usual experiences and longstanding *binary* vision of the world. What they see outside influences what happens inside. Some wish to return to the comfort and security of strict *binary* routines, ignoring or criticizing the differences of those outside the cave. Some are open to generational changes, accepting and respecting the differences while continuing on with binary routines. Others fully embrace what they see outside and feel secretly inside the cave but dare not say so. Some begin to identify with non-binary thinking and behaviour as they live inside the gay binary generation cave.

Cisgender gay men, like me, remember being in circles of gay friends in the 1980s who dismissed non-binary ideas like bisexuality as not being a ‘real sexual orientation.’ We considered them ‘sitting on the fence’ and not deciding whether they were straight or gay in our binary world. When we saw more ‘androgynous looking’ individuals, we felt the need to label them in either a male or female gender category, seeking out prominent signs and features to confirm our categorization. We were chained in our generation’s strict binary thinking. We saw shadows of what we thought were only men/women and straight/gay.

When the *neo-queer* generation reclaimed ‘queer’ and queer theory developed outside and inside the cave, it also influenced others in the cave to adopt these views. A realistic timeframe for this period in the metaphorical cave is the 1990s. Some remembered the hurtful sting of being teased and called ‘queer’ by some inside the cave because of their own insecurities before coming out of the closet themselves. Certain gays were re-traumatized by the pain of the past when the word ‘queer’ was a weapon. At the entrance of the cave, those adopting this new identity participated in *neo-queer* protests or took part in gender and sexuality studies and formed new identity communities. Many inside the cave needed time to adjust and learn. Many

had developed their gay male self-identity over many years in the cave. Such changes challenged remnants of their continuing self-expression. Some more readily adopted a non-binary self-expression of sexuality and gender.

As time went on, some in the *fluid generation* outside the cave more frequently used non-binary pronouns (They/them/theirs, Ze/hir/hirs, Xe/xem/xirs, Ver/vir/vis, Te/tem/ter, Ey/em/eir).⁶⁷¹ A realistic timeframe for this period in the metaphorical cave is after 2015. When those from the *fluid generation* asked everyone inside and outside the cave to acknowledge any of these varied pronouns, it was another challenge for some inside the cave. The term *queer* was also starting to be used inside and outside the cave to replace *gay*. This caused concerns about ignoring or erasing a *historical gay identity* and gay community that had developed for some in the cave.

Tensions began to mount. Some inside the cave threatened to seal and close off the cave entrance to those outside. A few made this a greater possibility by chaining themselves again with *binary* anti-queer thinking and were drawn once more to the shadows on the wall. Fears were also emerging about the cave being blocked off from the generations outside the cave. A number of the unchained in the cave tried to teach the chained to understand their discomfort, working towards an intergenerational resolution between those inside the cave and outside the cave.

The Post-Gay Village Cave

The *post-gay village cave* represents Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village today. In this adaptation the chains on the cave floor and the shadows on the back of the wall symbolize the past. The chains represent how gay men confined themselves to the neighbourhood, living and

⁶⁷¹ Caroline Forsey, "Gender Neutral Pronouns: What They Are & How to Use Them," *Hubspot* (6 Jul 2023), <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/gender-neutral-pronouns> (accessed 27 Jun 2024).

socializing there as part of their daily existence and usual routines with a perceived sense of safety. As they stare forward at the back of the cave wall, the shadows grow with abundant memories of the many years creating more *gay male cisgender* culture and community in Toronto and The Village.

When the chains are removed, their lives are drastically up-ended. Their whole sense of reality is disrupted. They turn around and it is the present in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. It is now apparent to them that changes have been taking place in TCWV. They see the reality of neighbourhood redevelopment. Most of the gay spaces they remember have disappeared. All remember the cave before that pivotal moment of being able to look back from the wall and shadows. They nostalgically remember the cave as part of their generational experience and history.

In the cave, they see an aging gay demographic now mixed with younger gays and queers of all genders who are part of the *fluid generation*. This younger generation freely comes and goes in The Village of the present. Many in the *fluid* generation no longer align themselves with *gay* identity, *gay* culture, and the *gay* village. A younger queer generation sees little need to sustain them in the same way as the past. Straights from outside the cave begin to come into the cave more frequently. Former, more-exclusive gay spaces are now open to everyone. There are whispers about the 'hetrification' of the cave. Some even wonder if the cave is a gay place anymore. Some of them find this extremely upsetting as they yearn for gay spaces to stay the same because all they have ever known are the shadows of a more exclusive gay past.

A few go so far as to chain themselves once more and only stare at the back of the cave wall, insistent on having exclusive gay male spaces again. These are cisgender gay men, like some VGT members, along with LGB conservatives. They were influenced by the alter-

progressive radical right who exclude or rejected the so-called ideologies of the T and Q communities. Some stare both at the back of the cave wall and at the entrance. They still miss the energy of gay male exclusivity but are open to and understand the political importance of LGBTQ2+ communities coming together in the fight for rights and strength in diversity. Others recognize that change is inevitable, even in the TCWV cave. They understand that going back to such exclusive gay cisgender male spaces of the past is practically impossible given the dominant societal influences and changing attitudes that have been established with the younger *fluid generation*.

The Passage of Time

“Times have changed, and it’s true that the new generation just doesn’t seem to need or want the same spaces that were so vital for our needs back then.”⁶⁷²

Each of these cave examples represents the nuanced experiences within a perceived gay community over time from the *binary* to the *neo-queer* to the *fluid* generation. In general, they present experiential examples to which those of us from the *binary generation* can relate over the course of our lives. We remember coming out of the closet in the *homophobia closet cave*. We experienced the effects of intergenerational shifts and emerging new identities as younger generations came into adulthood outside our generation’s *gay binary cave*. We recognize today the reality of change over time in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley *post-gay village cave*. These have generally occurred sequentially at moments of getting older in our lives. Many of us came out of the closet around our twenties, experienced the first influences of a younger generation around our forties, and saw changes in TCWV around our sixties. Each cave recalls challenges, influences and comforts that shaped and continue to shape our lives while we of the *binary*

⁶⁷² Ron Brown in response to a post by Colin Johnson, “Drag bar Crews & Tangos might be turned into a condo,” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, 3 Mar 2020.

generation continue to live. But within each cave there are distinct and nuanced attitudes and approaches that those of us from the *binary generation* also define for ourselves.

Throughout this period, represented by the three caves, many of us became immersed in gay culture and gay community. We self-identified and continue to self-identify as gay. Some were not so immersed in gay culture or community but still self-identified as gay. Some recognized their distinct differences within the gay community while still feeling connected to it and gay culture but not necessarily with gay identity. Each of these examples points to the complexity of trying to succinctly define gay community and gay identity beyond a more general framework. It is within this more general framework that this project defines the slippery notions of ‘gay community’ and ‘gay identity,’ using them as heuristic but still influential and self-referential concepts.

Remnants or traces of gay culture and our ongoing historical gay identity in Toronto continue to influence me and many of the cohort of gay men I interviewed. Gay nostalgia helps us see how these remnants of culture and identity continue to provide importance in our lives today. By sharing these memories of our gay past in Toronto we hope they will not be forgotten by subsequent generations. Many also recognize this time as an important transitional period of gay Toronto and TCWV. These changes are occurring as newer notions of sexuality, gender, identity, culture, community and rights challenge older paradigms along with physical and societal changes in the built and social environments.

Culture and identity carry the stories, traditions, values and experiences of each generation forming a lineage that connects us to our histories. The histories of each generation continuously unfold as change and death are inevitable. Those of us from the *binary generation* have a temporal advantage in our ability to look back over many years of experience to see the

differences between the fading images of gay identity and our cultural past and the changed environs of queer culture and identity today. The *fluid generation* has not yet experienced decades of major changes. What new generational shifts will occur with the passage of time is yet to be known.

It is my hope that this auto-ethnographic section will display similar landscapes of memory and personal narratives by the gay cohort presented in this work. I wish to guide the reader through an exploration of how these memories intertwine with my own sense of self, gay identity and experiences of gay Toronto. I also seek to compare their perceived salience and authenticity with my own. People tend to have biased memories that put their younger selves in a positive light. It is my intention to explore the interplay between these shared experiences and gay nostalgic memories. I hope to present these memories with a balanced perspective.

I am also conscious of how current perspectives might colour these past experiences of gay Toronto and TCWV. I hope to reinforce that there are multiple, nuanced viewpoints about this gay history and acknowledge the subjective nature of memory. In this light, I explore a few prominent topics and key themes from this project's narratives that resonate with my own. My intention is to focus on the meanings conveyed by these diverse and common gay experiences with what I remember. I also draw from these narratives to help identify bias in my own memory. I begin with a little of my own personal gay history.

Coming Out of Gary The Fairy's Closet

*"I was so far in the closet I was in Narnia."*⁶⁷³

Although I was born in Toronto in 1964, my parents moved our family to the small southwestern Ontario city of Woodstock in 1966. Not to be confused with Woodstock,

⁶⁷³ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

New York famous for the 1969 hippie festival,⁶⁷⁴ Woodstock, Ontario was once the dairy capital of Canada. We moved to the lesser hippie-populated Woodstock where my paternal grandmother lived, and relatives had nearby dairy farms. I grew up in this conservative city⁶⁷⁵ where both political and social views always seemed staunchly traditional to me. Citizens appeared to be judged by the assumed *binary roles* of husbands with wives, and boyfriends with girlfriends, not gay lovers with same-sex intimate partners.

In Chapter Two, Dan Benson describes the common and expected marital gender roles found in his family growing up in the 1960s. My father, too, was a working dad “like everyone else’s dad” and my mother was also a stay-at-home mom “because that’s what they did back in the ‘60s.”⁶⁷⁶ I remember this continuing into the 1980s and beyond despite the women’s liberation movement fighting for gender equality and fighting patriarchal structures. My mother remained a stay-at-home wife and mother her entire life because that is what she believed was her gender and family role. At the same time, the gay liberation movement was fighting to liberate us from oppressive systems sustained in our compulsory heterosexual upbringing. Both movements sought to challenge and change deeply ingrained social norms and structures. The women’s liberation movement fought against patriarchy. The gay liberation movement challenged compulsory heterosexuality. But not everyone was ready to do so.

Within this deeply ingrained homophobic period there were gays who clearly stood out and did not want to be seen as different from the norm. As Larry Laforet mentioned in Chapter

⁶⁷⁴ I consider the counter-culture movements of the beatniks in the 1950s and hippies in the 1960s and 1970s as a parallel proto-queer generation simultaneous with the earlier binary generation. This proto-queer generation was influential on the neo-queer generation in the 1980s and 1990s and a topic for another history project.

⁶⁷⁵ Historically, the political riding of Oxford that includes Woodstock has had conservative-leaning MPS for most of the past 70 years. See John Paul Tasker, “Conservatives claim Liberal campaign in Oxford byelection was ‘racist,’ *CBC News* (21 Jun 2023), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/liberal-byelection-oxford-racist-conservatives-say-1.6884133> (accessed 19 Jul 2024).

⁶⁷⁶ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

Five, there was a distinction between gay men who could pass and gay men who could not. Sometimes I could pass. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it did not work. I used techniques like lowering my voice to sound more masculine and adopted a ‘straight-acting’ and ‘straight-looking’ manner and dress to survive my time in Woodstock. As I reflect back on it today, what it did was reinforce a stereotype that there is a specific way for people to act and dress. It also reveals my internalized homophobia at the time experienced as shame and guilt for having same-sex attraction. I had my first gay sexual experience when I was fourteen with a sixteen-year-old boy on a Boy Scout camping trip. I also had a few ‘drunk and forget’ encounters with other guys in high school. It took years to overcome the shame and guilt experienced after the thrill and pleasure.

In my final year of high school, I was working as a part-time salesperson at an after-school job in a department store. I was in the stationary department and a fellow student named Patrick⁶⁷⁷ was in housewares. We would chat when the store wasn’t busy and got to know each other a little more. I sensed he knew the pain of being teased and bullied like me growing up in Woodstock for displaying anything that seemingly appeared different from expected ‘manly’ behaviour in our binary world. I sensed he thought the same about me. We never talked about it.

I was always kind to Patrick but guarded at work. The closet was closed very firmly. We both suspected the other might be gay but never confirmed or had opportunities to connect beyond the workplace. He also knew I had a girlfriend throughout high school named Sharon⁶⁷⁸ who would drop by the store occasionally. One day, Patrick asked if I wanted to go to a party with him in the nearby city of London, Ontario. He suggested I might want to go to the party

⁶⁷⁷ Patrick is a pseudonym to protect his identity.

⁶⁷⁸ Sharon and I remain in contact, and she consented to the use of her real name. Contact with Sharon was by Facebook Messenger video and text on 14 Aug 2024.

without Sharon as it might not be her type of crowd. He said there would be gay people there, and would I be okay with that, covertly alluding to my closeted sexuality. Of course, I was curious, and it piqued my interest. London was the closest ‘big city’ to Woodstock. Toronto still seemed way too big and scary for a small-town boy like me. London seemed like an opportunity for me to meet other gay people in a more comfortable environment. My agreeing to go also slightly opened up my gay closet, partially confirming Patrick’s suspicions about my being gay.

It was a mixed crowd of about 40 to 50 young men and women. It was also my first time seeing very effeminate and openly gay young men close to my own age. Patrick and I stuck close together sending off what may have seemed like a gay couple vibe. When one of the gay queens asked Patrick and me how long we had been a couple, we both made it clear that we were just friends, and I stated that I was not gay. To add to the denial, I panicked when I saw my girlfriend’s friend, Kathy⁶⁷⁹ at the party. She saw me too and asked what I was doing at the party without Sharon. When she found out I had come to the party with Patrick, she was suspicious and beginning to put things together. Kathy asked me directly, “Are you gay?” I said, “I don’t know,” secretly knowing the truth but afraid and wanting to spare hurting Sharon. I decided to be brave, emboldened by those openly gay around me at the party, and perhaps a few too many cocktails. “I think I might be,” I blurted out. Kathy replied, “Well if you don’t tell Sharon, I will.” I felt betrayed on two counts. I was betraying Sharon by not telling her or would be betrayed if I didn’t tell her. This led to a series of events that changed my life completely.

As suggested by Seidman in Chapter One, for those of us coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s, the closet still casts a massive shadow. After the new millennium, the closet was no longer the defining feature of gay identity. For those of us from the *binary generation*, the closet

⁶⁷⁹ Kathy is a pseudonym to protect her identity.

was not just a metaphor or part of gay sexuality but also a necessary refuge – especially in smaller, conservative places like Woodstock. The fear of being outed was ever-present and the consequences were severe. Like so many of the older gay men I interviewed, we remember the constant vigilance, the need to monitor every word and action.

I had no feelings of being bisexual as interviewee Dan Benson had questioned himself in Chapter Two, but I also had a girlfriend. Selfishly, Sharon was my subterfuge. The closet was a safe space but also a prison. It isolated us from our true selves and from each other. That is why the act of coming out of the closet as *gay* was a life-altering event. The very act of self-identifying as *gay* had a tremendous impact on our lives, both positively and negatively. Staying in the closet continued to provide security and safety for me. As interviewee Bob Dirstein so imaginatively proclaimed in Chapter Two, “I was so far in the closet I was in Narnia.”⁶⁸⁰ That could apply to many of us at that time. Coming out as gay was a major and consequential step.

When I returned to Woodstock, my Catholic guilt enveloped me while my fears of being outed as gay to my girlfriend Sharon were even stronger. Despite my guilt and fears, I did find the courage to break off the relationship with her. I felt I needed to be honest with her and told her I thought I might be gay. She was devastated. We had been dating since grade nine and we were in our graduating year.⁶⁸¹ That summer of 1982, now starting to identify as gay, I continued to explore my gay sexuality. I didn’t expect to get caught ‘in the act’ by my parents. My parents were busy outside our house, and I was not expecting them back home for several hours.

Another teen, a neighbour my age was over, and we had been talking and giving clues about being gay before taking the step to explore each other’s bodies in the shower *in my*

⁶⁸⁰ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

⁶⁸¹ Sharon and I have remained in contact. She shared with me that she did not let our experience make her bitter. She says she learned so much about accepting others no matter the difference or sexuality. Contact with Sharon by Facebook Messenger text, 28 Apr 2018.

parents' house! To this day, I continue to question the folly of my youth to make this decision. When my parents arrived unexpectedly, we quickly dressed in a panic with my neighbour leaving sheepishly, hair dripping wet and being seen by my parents. Of course, it didn't help with my own hair dripping wet and my looking guilty. My mother asked me if the neighbour boy was in our shower and, if so, *why*. It was my turn to look sheepish. Although I neither confirmed nor denied what had happened, I knew they suspected I was gay, no matter how much I had tried to hide it. I would not officially come out to my parents until my mid-twenties, on my own terms. Many parents picked up on the signs that were confirmed when their child came out of the closet. I am sure my parents knew I was different growing up as much as I felt it. My gay shower incident was a massive clue that had harsh consequences.

My father flew into a rage, as he was frequently prone to do. He threw me against my bedroom wall and called me a "little faggot." I ran towards the front door to try to escape from him and, on the way, inadvertently tripped over an ottoman in our living room. I fell to the floor and had the wind knocked out of me momentarily. My father was on top of me shaking me and again calling me a "little faggot" and a "little faker." My mother intervened to try and pull him off me, and I had the chance to escape. My father physically assaulted me for the last time. I ran out the door not stopping to grab my shoes. It was early August, a week from my 18th birthday and the year I graduated high school. I heard my father yell, "Don't bother coming back!" I left not knowing where to go with the little money I had from my part-time summer job. All I knew was that I had to get out of Woodstock as I instinctively knew I had to get out of the closet of 'Narnia.' The place I thought I could do both was where other gays I had met were out of the closet – London, Ontario.

My First Gay Bar & A Life-Long Friendship

*“A back-alley entrance, dark, dumpy, and completely exhilarating!”*⁶⁸²

Several interviewees for this project describe how gay bars and clubs offered a semblance of safety and gay community regardless of their dingy spaces. Narratives describe how places like *St. Charles* and *Parkside* had back entrances off an alleyway with no windows to the outside world. This was the same for the first gay bars I went to in London, Ontario, *Upstairs Downstairs* and *HALO Club* (Homophile Association of London, Ontario). *Upstairs Downstairs* was a cruising lounge with a downstairs bar and dance floor (the downstairs was later converted to a retail magazine store by the late 1980s, and the upstairs gay bar was renamed *Bannisters*). One could enter *Upstairs Downstairs* from the front entrance off Dundas Street (London’s main street) or from the back-alley entrance. I chose the back entrance the first few times I went as I was only beginning to open my gay closet door. *HALO* was located in an industrial building with darkened windows, secluded on Colborne Street. I remember the interior as dark black and drab with cheap disco balls, lights and a crowded dance floor, but a place where being lesbian and gay was welcomed and celebrated.

The note on the *HALO* poster in Image 69 says, “The windows on the main floor at *HALO* are covered over. People who do not know us, fear us. Sometimes they want to do us harm. Our goal is to put glass in all our windows at *HALO*.” That goal was not accomplished when I was going to *HALO* in the early 1980s. Nor in gay spaces in Toronto during the same time.

⁶⁸² Roderick Conte in response to a post by Greg Pledge, “Does anyone remember the bar “Saltaros” [sic]?” Vintage Gay Toronto Facebook Website, May 31, 2020.

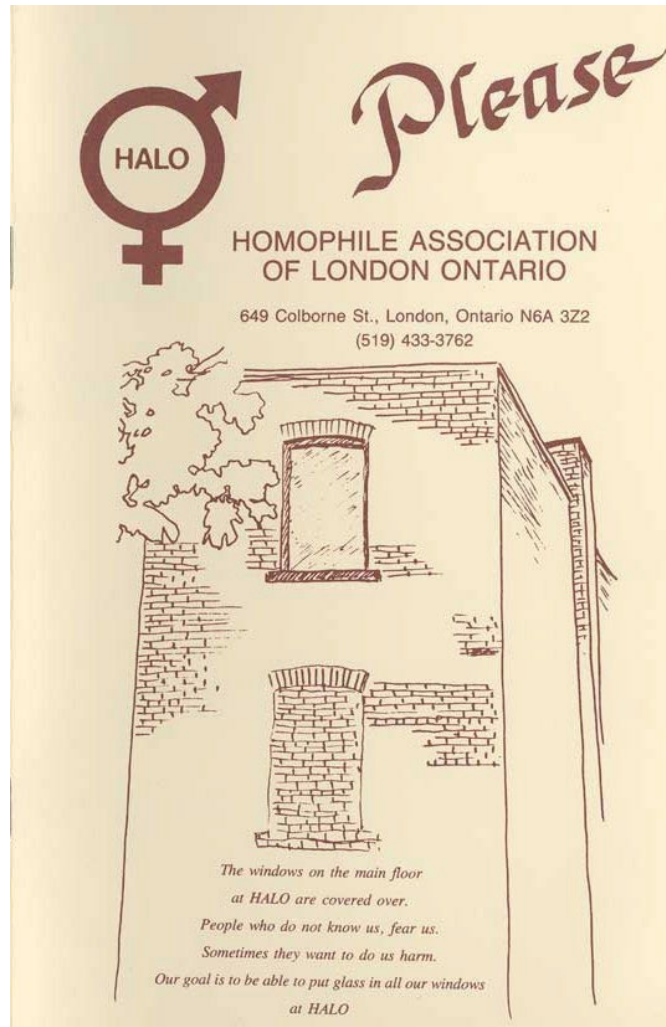


Image 71: HALO Club advertising poster, c.1975. Source: HALO Fonds, Archival Reference Services and Outreach, by Students of the MLIS program at UWO (now Western University), <https://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/microsites/HALO/building.htm> (accessed 29 Jul 2024).

As interviewees Dan Benson and Geremy Vincent described in Chapter Two, entrances to places like *The Quest* or *Carriage House* in Toronto were highly visible off the busy streets of Yonge or Jarvis. This made closeted gay men self-conscious about who was seeing them enter from the outside. The entrance to London's gay bar *Upstairs Downstairs* was also highly visible from the main street. Like *The Quest*, a one-door entrance provided privacy but also heightened the fear of being seen entering or leaving. When I finally became more comfortable using the front entrance, as Dan and Geremy also mentioned, I also would do a quick look around, ensuring no familiar or hostile-looking faces were in sight before slipping inside as quickly as

possible. Despite the anxiety and risks, as VGT member Roderick Conte described his first experience going into a gay bar by the back-alley entrance, the memory of this moment was also exhilarating and also remains “significantly special”⁶⁸³ to me.

The night I went to my first gay bar *Upstairs Downstairs*, through the back-alley entrance, was also the night I met a life-long friend, ‘Skyy’ Aaron Willie.⁶⁸⁴ I convey this story about my meeting him because Aaron was also the person who helped me experience my first gay bar in Toronto and other experiences of gay life in TCWV. Meanwhile, back in London, Ontario, we were both 18 years old, under the legal drinking age but we both surreptitiously managed to get in and order at the bar. Like me from the ‘small-town dairy capital’ of Woodstock, Aaron was from another ‘small-town dairy capital’ of Sussex, New Brunswick.

I was both terrified and excited walking into my first gay bar, buying a beer and planting myself firmly against a wall. Aaron was fatefully doing the same beside me. We easily connected in casual conversation having small-town things in common to talk about. As the evening went on, we went our own ways, distracted by other men and opportunities, thinking little of the casual conversation with a stranger in a gay bar.

The next day, when I saw him again, this time at church, I found out we had something else in common. We were ‘good Catholic boys’ who went to regular Sunday mass. We recognized each other and smiled coming out of the church and ‘coming out’ to each other about being gay and Catholic. Going out for post-church Sunday brunch with more conversation led to an over 40-year life-long friendship that continues today.

As described at the beginning of Chapter One, we went to the *St. Charles* in 1983. The

⁶⁸³ Roderick Conte, May 31, 2020.

⁶⁸⁴ Contact with ‘Skyy’ Aaron Willie by Facebook Messenger text, 5 Aug 2024, to receive informed consent about using his full name and identifying photos.

St. Charles was in its last four-years of existence. I remember the big horseshoe bar on the main floor where people sat around the outside being served by the bartenders on the inside of the horseshoe. There were tables all around the walls. It probably had not changed much since interviewee David Hallman went for the first time in the early 1970s. I also remember it was run-down and ‘quite seedy’ (perhaps even more so by then) as interviewee Hugh Brewster describes in Chapter Two.

I recall Aaron and I walking in with what seemed like all eyes on us. As interviewee Samuel Lopez described in Chapter Three, I remember also feeling like young “fresh meat” on display walking into a gay bar as ‘chicken’ for the ‘chicken hawks’ to prey on.⁶⁸⁵ We walked past the scattering of tables around the room at the *St. Charles* of what I perceived as mostly older guys in their thirties or forties. I recall patrons could either stand or sit and move around the bar freely with their alcohol at that time. There was no ‘Frank the waiter’ yelling at us to sit down to drink as in the earlier days remembered by interviewee Hugh Brewster.

Aaron and I also discovered *The Manatee* on St. Joseph Street, along with *The Quest* and *Stages* on Yonge Street. I remember entering an exciting new gay world of energy, flashing lights and thumping to the beat sounds reverberating around us as we danced. It made the *HALO Club* look like amateur hour. I experienced the magic of *The Manatee* and marvelled at finding so many young gay men our own age. Aaron loved it. I always preferred older guys, which I was fortunate enough to also meet at *The Manatee*. They were probably in their 30s or 40s, which seemed old to me at the time!

Aaron and I were invited by some of them to join their group the following night to see a drag show upstairs at *The Quest*. I had seen my first drag show at the *HALO Club* in London,

⁶⁸⁵ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

but never before so professionally performed as that night at *The Quest*. After the show, we went dancing at *Stages* above the *Parkside*. I remember sitting on the oblong box-like steps around the dance floor and dancing the Saturday night away. These are all distant and faded memories for me of arriving in the big city of Toronto with my best friend in the last year of our teens. We were trying to cram in as many gay bars as we could over a weekend in 1983.



Image 72 (top): ‘Skyy’ Aaron Willie (left) and author J. Gary Myers (right), 1985. Source: Author J. Gary Myers

Image 73 (bottom): ‘Skyy’ Aaron Willie (left), David Phipps (middle), and author J. Gary Myers (right), 2024. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

When we returned to visit Toronto in 1985, the gay bars on St. Joseph Street had closed (see map, Image 52, Chapter Three). St. Joseph Street would not return to anything gay until

Club Colby's opened the following year. The old gay scene on Yonge Street was on its last legs. New bars had moved east onto Isabella Street, with *Trax* gay leather/denim bar being the only 'new' bar on Yonge, but like the *St. Charles* and *Parkside* it still catered to an older crowd of gay men. Most of the younger gay scene that year was around the popular *Komrads* gay dance club and *Chaps* gay bar. I was excited to mix with the crowds of gay men hanging outside, swelling in numbers on Isabella Street as the end of the night unfolded.

Other gay spaces were as far as Sherbourne Street with *Boots & Bud's* gay bar/dance club at Selby Hotel. Dancing at *Boots* in the basement of the Selby did not have that "Studio 54-vibe" that Brian Hardy wrote about in his diary referring to *Stages*, or Terrance Saunders referring to *Charly's Disco*. It did have an expansive dance floor with a great sound system and a DJ playing amazing dance music to keep us dancing until closing time. It also had a hopping outdoor summer patio that conjures fun memories of a crowd of gay men, getting drunk or high in a packed space in the bright sunshine or hot summer nights.

I remember 1985 as a year for Toronto's shifting gay scene. It was an in-between time. When I visited in 1982, there were thriving gay bars on St. Joseph and Yonge streets. Visiting again in that interim year of 1985, I remember gay bars remained on the periphery of the Church-Wellesley area. When I moved to Toronto in 1987, there were very few gay spaces within the Church-Wellesley area. Only a scant number of new gay bars, restaurants and gay-friendly spaces had started to emerge in the gaybourhood. That included the growing popularity of *The Steps* at Church and Wellesley after the Second Cup opened in 1984. Toronto's gay culture was still predominantly a gay bar culture with the majority of gay bars still outside what we know of today as Toronto's *Church-Wellesley Village*. *The Barn* was the longstanding bar/dance club further down Church Street, but I remember TCWV was not yet readily known or

heard of as the central area for visitors to experience gay Toronto in 1985. That was beginning to change when I returned to Toronto to move there in 1987. Many were still calling the Church-Wellesley area ‘the gay ghetto’ – slowly emerging in the 1980s from a mostly run-down residential and low-rent commercial neighbourhood. Like many I interviewed, I also remember it as a good ‘cruising’ area for gay sex.

Cruising Along

“This guy was cruising the hell out of me and I was cruising him.”⁶⁸⁶

Cruising for sex before the age of digital hook-up/dating technology was a significant aspect of gay culture as interviewees have indicated. Men cruising for sex with other men was nothing new in 1980s Toronto as historian Steven Maynard recounts about the turn of the 20th century.⁶⁸⁷ It was also popular in other parts of the world from the ancient Romans through the Middle Ages as Alex Espinoza points out in his work on the history of cruising.⁶⁸⁸ In the 19th and 20th centuries, societies, including Toronto, suppressed open expressions of same-sex desire, particularly among men. Heterosexual morality was enforced with criminal entrapment and arrests. As Maynard points out, there have been men cruising other men in Toronto parks and alleys since the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As a local newspaper reported, there were “cruising pansies” at Toronto hotels in the 1960s.⁶⁸⁹

Some gay men interviewed in this project mentioned that they have been part of a cruising culture in gay bars and a variety of other public spaces in Toronto since the 1970s. As pointed out by interviewee Leo Mitterni and VGT members Brian Hardy and R. Thomas Hynes,

⁶⁸⁶ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #3, 27 Sep 2023.

⁶⁸⁷ Steven Maynard, “Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890-1930,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Oct 1994).

⁶⁸⁸ Alex Espinoza, *Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime* (Los Angeles, The Unnamed Press, 2019).

⁶⁸⁹ *TAB*, “King Edward Hotel Declares War on Letros Queers!” (2 Dec 1961), 3.

this also includes surprisingly “straight gay” restaurants like *Bemelmans*.⁶⁹⁰ I never went to *Bemelmans*, but I did go to other public spaces. This shows that not all gay men were looking for sex in the same ‘popular’ places or in the same ways. The places I sought out were more anonymous. These included parks (Cawthra, Queens, Allen Gardens, David Balfour), public washrooms (Eaton Centre, Scotia Bank Plaza), porno movie theatres (Cinema 2000 on Yonge) and on Toronto streets. All were conveniently located near the ‘gay ghetto’ where many gay men lived – including me.

The low-rent costs of apartments in the neighbourhood of Church-Wellesley provided an ideal area for me to find affordable housing as a twenty-something gay man in the 1980s. It was the same for many other gay men since the post-war period. As interviewees Jim Elliott and Bill McMaster show in Chapter Two, as gay men, we never thought of living anywhere else. Like them, I have lived in or near The Village for almost 40 years. This is not to say that all gay men prefer to live in TCWV, as several of the gay men I interviewed can attest. However, the one advantage of living in the neighbourhood before the advent of hook-up apps was its good and convenient cruising reputation for gay sex.

My first Toronto apartment was a bachelor unit in a Victorian house converted into apartments on Huntley Street. I was also fortunate to have my friend Aaron living in the same apartment building. A vacant apartment had become available, and I was pleased to have my friend so close, one floor below. The apartments were across from the original studios of the Canadian Christian daily television talk show *100 Huntley Street*. I always found it amusing to consider the juxtaposition of mostly gay men living around the location of this evangelical

⁶⁹⁰ See Chapter Two, pages 117-119.

religious broadcasting station.⁶⁹¹ I found simply walking down the residential streets of Huntley to Isabella, then towards Yonge Street would garner many occasions to satisfy my own desires of hooking up for sex with another man. Either at the convenience of my place or his place in the neighbourhood. Of course, if I went the other way down Huntley Street to Selby Street, I could also go out dancing and potentially hook up at the gay bars *Boots & Bud's* at the Selby Hotel. It was conveniently located around the corner, steps from my backyard.

There were times when the comfort level of bringing someone back to your place or going to theirs did not feel right or if one was looking for a 'quicky.' In these cases, there were public parks, back alleys or washrooms to cruise. As Alex Espinoza describes in his book *Cruising*, it sometimes requires "patience and perseverance,"⁶⁹² rather than happening right away. Like Espinoza's personal experience, cruising also taught me how to "cultivate a sense of confidence."⁶⁹³ There was always the risk of entrapment, arrest or exposure. Many like me and those I interviewed were occasionally willing to seek out such opportunities. We developed our own detective skills to discern legitimate interest. We learned to read people. Cruising is the art of reading people.

It was also about expressing gay sexuality as power and protest in more spatially limited places in less socially visible and acceptable times. The cruising skill was the type of look exchanged between men that lingered just a bit longer than expected. This was balanced with a hyper-awareness of surroundings. There were also gestures to indicate interest. In the cases of public washrooms, I remember toe-tapping between the cubicles, reaching under the partition, or

⁶⁹¹ It eventually became the expanded headquarters of the media conglomerate Rogers Communications by the 2000s.

⁶⁹² Espinoza, 11.

⁶⁹³ Espinoza, 12.

the insertion of fingers through a ‘glory hole’⁶⁹⁴ in the wall. This was a signal of interest before inserting something else.

As interviewee Lionel Collier mentions, Allen Gardens was a popular cruising park and a huge gay pickup zone. There were plenty of opportunities to ‘cruise the hell out of each other.’ In 1992, I moved to an apartment building conveniently located across the street from Allen Gardens. Bushes in the public park on the west side of the glass conservatory were ideal places to conceal male-to-male intimacy. There were also other opportunities for cruising in the neighbourhood in Cawthra Park or venturing out further to Queens Park for a change of scenery. I would sit on a bench and wait for another man to sit beside me after the knowing look of cruising.

I also discovered the spot in David Balfour Park that Bob Dirstein recounts in Chapter Two as popular both day and night. The sometimes-challenging hike through the bushy and narrow tree-lined trails into open landing areas along the way were sometimes filled with at least a dozen men. Some were on their knees. Some were leaning on trees. Used tissues and condoms were scattered on the ground. They had made the journey for the same reason that I had, in the daytime and at night. Like Bob, I also recall nights in particular when it was so busy you had to ‘take a number.’

Although Anonymous Interviewee #3 would disagree with my assumption about ‘the lost art of cruising,’ I find since the arrival of dating/hook-up apps like *Grindr* or *Scruff*, gay men no longer seem to look at each other the same way. This seems to be the case for me at least when I looked at other men after these apps arrived around 2010. The ease of using a phone app to connect with another person for sex or relationship appears to have significantly shifted the eyes

⁶⁹⁴ “A hole made through a wall or partition to enable people to perform sex acts anonymously.” Merriam Webster, “glory hole” (2024), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glory%20hole> (accessed 7 Jun 2024).

down to device scrolling rather than regularly shifting the eyes up *and* down to cruise another body intimately.

There was also cruising at the YMCA. Like VGT member Brian Hardy and interviewee David Hallman, I also remember cruising at the YMCA in Toronto. It was not at the Toronto Central YMCA on College Street, which no longer exists, but at the later Metro Central YMCA, a few blocks away on Grosvenor Street. In the 1990s, the ‘new’ Y, like the ‘old’ Y, remained a hotbed of gay cruising in the communal showers and saunas. There were no rental rooms like at the old Y, which made David think it was like a bathhouse walking the hallway circuit to cruise for gay sex. At the new Y there was plenty of action to be found in the showers and saunas. Like Brian, I, too, learned a lot about being gay at the YMCA. Again, cruising was about the type of look exchanged between men that facilitated these encounters along with the discretion and hyper-awareness of surroundings to avoid being caught in public. There was much eye and other body contact among gay men at the YMCA for those cruising. It is no wonder *The Body Politic* called it the “Young Men’s *Cruising* Association” (my emphasis).⁶⁹⁵

Clandestine practices of cruising in public spaces were how some gay men like me sought discreet ways to connect with others to satisfy their desires and potentially express their solidarity and affection. Cruising for me was a way to navigate around societal norms and express my sexual yearnings for other men. It was an expression of my gay identity as part of a gay cruising subculture. I remember being in the closet, so I respected those who saw cruising as an opportunity to remain closeted and anonymous with an outlet for secret sexual desires.

I categorize cruising as a *gay subculture* as not all gay men were (or are) into cruising for sex. Gay men, like all people, have diverse experiences and desires. Some went out cruising for

⁶⁹⁵ Michael Lynch, “Young (and old and middle-aged too) Men’s Cruising Association,” *The Body Politic* (August 1979), 39.

sex while some did not. Similarly, today, some use the convenience of *Grindr* while some do not. Not all gay men prioritize casual sexual encounters or have the same libidos. Sadly, regardless of seeking out ways to satisfy these desires, just being suspected of being gay or in proximity to gay spaces could lead to violent consequences.

Gay-Bashing

“Gay-bashing was rampant back then. It was all over the place. There were no safe spaces.”⁶⁹⁶
“My brother and I were bashed several times.”⁶⁹⁷

Like some of the gay men I interviewed, we grew up in smaller communities before moving to Toronto as young adults to find the gay social scene that existed there. We seemed reassured that there was strength and safety in gay numbers and neighbourhoods. Also, like them, I learned early on that being gay could invoke teasing as “Gary the fairy” or “queer” along with the danger of gay-bashing. It was a time when being openly gay was not just frowned upon, moralized and pathologized, it was a risk to one’s safety and livelihood. As we saw in Chapter Two, even the big metropolis of Toronto was a conservative city into the 1980s. For heterosexual allies like Toronto’s former mayor John Sewell, the mention of supporting homosexuals in the late 1970s could spark outrage from a large number of homophobic and influential citizens, like politicians and the police. Some of this outrage was manifested with not only threats but also physical violence.

Name-calling, bullying and hostility against gays and lesbians were occurring across Canada in small towns and big cities like Toronto. Interviewees Anthony Mohamed, Andre Goh, Samuel Lopez, Larry Laforet and John Montague relayed in interviews disturbing personal experiences of gay-bashing in Toronto. During my interview with John Montague, he shared

⁶⁹⁶ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

⁶⁹⁷ Interview with Samuel Lopez, 26 Sep 2023.

with me a narrative he wrote and presented about his experience of being gay-bashed in Toronto in 1977. He titled it “Night Terror.” The work describes his experience walking home one October evening from the *St. Charles* to his apartment building in “the beginning of a ‘gay village,’ a community where many gay people lived.”⁶⁹⁸ John tells his story:

Just a few short blocks and I would be home. Suddenly, as I walked by an apartment building, I was jumped from behind and pulled down onto the lawn. The smell of freshly cut grass filled my nostrils and its dampness felt cool against my skin. Those were the only pleasant sensations. Two young men were pummeling my ribs with their boots and yelling, “You fucking faggot.” Pain shot through my body. I curled into a ball to protect myself but that just exposed other parts of my body. “Help! Help! I screamed. Their boots cracked my ribs, back, and legs as I gasped for breath. They kicked and shouted and spat.”⁶⁹⁹

As the title suggests, John conveys the experience of monthly nightmares when he would wake up screaming. He says he grew afraid of going to sleep with obsessive anxiety leading to drinking heavily or taking sleeping pills. The work goes on to describe a second experience of being robbed that John describes as a catalyst for finally ending his night terrors: “I had a strong sense of peace. It was weird. I had experienced a second assault, but this time I was not hurt...I had longed for freedom from disturbing dreams and screaming. A few months later, I realized my night terror had stopped...I knew that despite the unknown future, I could survive.”⁷⁰⁰

Unlike the violent gay-bashing experiences told by interviewees, I was fortunate to only experience verbal assault for being gay (apart from the physical assault from my father). Never inside TCWV. Always outside The Village. Assault remains a real possibility *at any time* provoked by homophobia and prejudice. Four examples illustrate this. Each time, my husband David and I were walking outside but near the neighbourhood of TCWV during the day holding

⁶⁹⁸ John Montague, “Night Terror” (2018), 1. Publicly read on 21 Oct 2018 at “So True” a reading event series featuring life stories. A copy of this work was provided during the interview with John Montague, 19 Sep 2023.

⁶⁹⁹ Montague, “Night Terror” (2018), 1.

⁷⁰⁰ Montague, “Night Terror” (2018), 5.

hands. In the first incident in the late 1990s, we were approached by three young men on Jarvis Street. We thought them to be in their twenties. They threatened us with physical violence, crowding around us, calling us “faggots.” We stood up to them, particularly David protecting me like a mother buffalo. Fortunately, they moved on. Similarly, there were three other incidents, two in the 2010s near Yonge and College streets, and more recently in 2023 near Church and Queen streets. In each case, a man in his twenties seemingly felt threatened by our public display of affection and yelled “fucking faggots” to us. All because two men in love were holding hands in public.

Anchoring The Village

*“Oh, don’t go there because that’s where the homos go.”⁷⁰¹
“They could do their groceries, meet their friends, live in the neighbourhood reasonably inexpensively and be a defined community.”⁷⁰²*

Bathhouses and gay bars remain a vital part of gay culture in Toronto and TCWV, but perhaps not to the extent that they did during the last part of the 20th century for the *binary* generation of gay men. Both provided (and still provide) the immediacy of physical interaction, socialization and relative safety. As this work has shown, a growing number of younger gays and queers no longer exclusively align themselves with these establishments as necessary spaces of safety, community, sexual exploration or identity formation. A *fluid* generation is able to seek out other accepting queer spaces throughout Toronto and other urban areas that were not readily available or as accepting for the *binary* generation. Cruising in other spaces outside bathhouses and bars had their risks, including the possibility of gay-bashing. Cruising can now be done on *Grindr* to hook up for casual sex and possibly to meet at a bathhouse, bar or other arranged

⁷⁰¹ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

⁷⁰² Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

location. This does not mean that using *Grindr* or other hook-up/dating apps is also not without risks.⁷⁰³

Bathhouses, in particular, played a significant role in helping gay men like interviewee Tony Souza discover and affirm his gay sexual identity, as he described in Chapter Two.⁷⁰⁴ Even after the bathhouse raids by Toronto Police and subsequent protests in 1981, Toronto bathhouses endured. Even during the HIV/AIDS crisis, and into the mid-1990s, still, Toronto bathhouses endured. I was among the many gay men in the 1980s and 1990s who continued to go to Toronto bathhouses. Our gay generation had learned to practice ‘safer-sex’ by using a condom for both anal and oral sex. This was something new for many gay men, me included. Oral sex was considered lower risk, but the perceptions of safety led to different choices made for personal protection. Several of the gay cohort interviewed reflect on how they managed to survive the HIV/AIDS crisis – me included – while so many friends and intimate partners did not.

As interviewee Leo Mitterni reminded me in our interview, we were often actually educated at bathhouses about how to mitigate the risks by safer-sex educators like Leo from the *Hassle Free Clinic*.⁷⁰⁵ I remember bathhouses offering safer-sex brochures, free condoms and on-site counselling. Gay men continued to go to bathhouses as part of a gay subculture. I was part of this gay subculture. Again, bathhouses endured. Some longer than others. I went to *Club Toronto*⁷⁰⁶ as it was more convenient to where I lived, but it was older, smaller and dingier. It had the usual steam room, sauna, and whirlpool, with an extra bonus of an outdoor pool in warmer

⁷⁰³ Watts, Rachel, “Police investigating attacks on two men who used data app *Grindr* in Sherbrooke, Que,” *CBC* (8 Aug 2024), <https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.7288960>.

⁷⁰⁴ See pages 70-71.

⁷⁰⁵ Interview with Leo Mitterni, 29 Aug 2023.

⁷⁰⁶ Gay bathhouse (1973-2010) at 231 Mutual Street; site of Pussy Palace police raid at Club Toronto Baths (14 September 2000) on the second anniversary celebration of the first-ever, open-to-the-public bathhouse for women and transgender people of all sexual identities; became Oasis Aqualounge, “a sexually progressive social club for adults 19+” (2010-Present).

weather. I preferred going to *Romans II*.⁷⁰⁷ It was a more expansive bathhouse on an upper floor with many corridors, more rooms and more men to cruise. It closed in 1989 before the sparkling new *Spa on Maitland* (now *Steamworks*)⁷⁰⁸ moved into the heart of TCWV in 1990.

Gay bars continue to serve the needs of gay culture and now queer culture(s) in Toronto and TCWV, but perhaps not to the extent that they did during the last part of the 20th century for the *binary* generation of gay men. Younger gays and queers of the *fluid* generation no longer see the need to sustain lesbian or gay spaces as the only places they can go to be themselves. Gay bars have also become more inclusive of a much wider and more frequent range of patrons that include queers and straights. This arguably has transformed them from *gay* bars to *queer* bars or *tourist* bars. For gay men like me from the *binary* generation, gay bars were not just places to drink, party and hook-up for sex. They were social spaces to form connections, friendships, romantic relationships and a sense of solidarity with both the broader gay community and the local gay communities. Sometimes, it was also the first place for the significant act of coming out as gay. As Anthony Mohamed reminds us in Chapter Three, they were also places of activism and fundraising. *Chaps* and *Woody's* were two gay bars especially known for this.

After *Chaps* closed in 1990, *Woody's* became a primary bar for gay activism and fundraising during the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis, right in the middle of TCWV. When *Woody's* opened on Church Street in 1989, it cultivated a new sense of gay community and purpose in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood as a *village* rather than a *ghetto*. As interviewee Larry Laforet recalls, I also remember the many fundraising activities for HIV/AIDS that took

⁷⁰⁷ Bathhouse (1964-1989) at 742 Bay Street; originally opened in 1964, becoming known for more gay clientele by the 1970s; the building was renovated after a fire in 1977 and reopened as The Romans II.

⁷⁰⁸ Gay bathhouse at 66 Maitland Street (1990-1997) became Steamworks with new entrance and address 540 Church Street at other end of the building (1997-Present).

place throughout the week.⁷⁰⁹ These events would raise needed funds by having patrons throw any cash or loose coins into buckets at the bar. I remember feeling part of a trusting gay community and a cause that went far beyond *Woody's* but sparked by its new presence in the heart of The Village.

Woody's appeared to bring openness and energy to the area with its big, wide windows providing a bright, clear view of patrons inside with customers looking out onto Church Street. It became a popular place for me and many other gay men to go for a drink any night of the week. I remember several days and nights joining friends there while sitting at one of *Woody's* front window tables looking out and being seen. This was also something new for us as gay men in full view from the street at a gay bar.

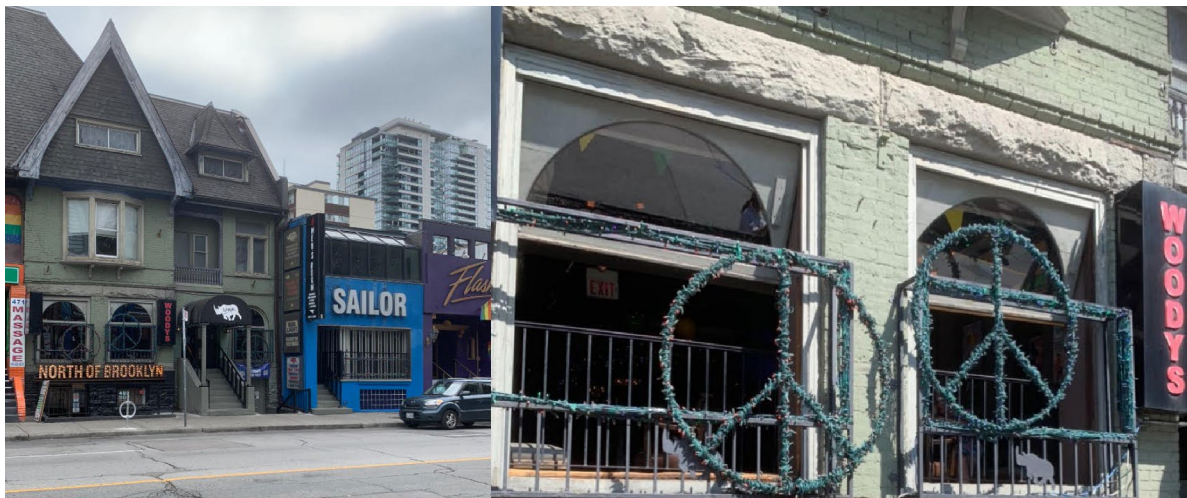


Image 74 (left): Woody's (1989-Present) and Sailor (1994-Present) gay bars at 467 Church Street, 2024. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

Image 75 (right): Woody's open windows at 467 Church Street, 2024. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

I was probably one of the gay men that Anonymous Interviewee #3 referred to in Chapter Three as one of the 'very precious' members of 'The Pink Pretty Sweater Club' at *Woody's*. I

⁷⁰⁹ See Chapter Five, page 261.

remember my hair had to be ‘in the right place’ with my ‘preppy’⁷¹⁰ sweater fashion style. My wardrobe also reflected a popular range of ‘gay’ aesthetics found in The Village in the 1990s. Everything from wearing Polo cologne and Polo shirts with collars up to white and gay-message t-shirts,⁷¹¹ jeans, short-shorts, knee-high socks and a plaid urban ‘lumberjack’ look. The arrival of *Woody’s* seems to coalesce with other spaces on Church Street to encourage a livelier flow of gay ‘traffic’ along the street, creating a stronger sense of a cohesive gay village.

The 519 Church Street Community Centre and *The Steps* were part of the coalescence with *Woody’s* that cultivated a new sense of community in a *gay village* – again, no longer a *gay ghetto*. *The 519* had been a previous anchor in the gaybourhood since 1976 as an important part of creating community for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans living and meeting in the Church Wellesley area. *The Steps* existed since 1984 in front of a Second Cup coffee shop at Church and Wellesley. It did not become the popular and famous hangout cruise spot until the later ‘80s, with continued retail gentrification and gay intensification. *Woody’s* became the gay bar ‘to see and be seen’ on Church Street. But *Woody’s* was a drinking bar, not a dance bar. *The Barn* was the dance bar in the neighbourhood and the other part of coalescence with *Woody’s*. One could walk a few blocks up and a few blocks over to *Boots* at *The Selby Hotel* to go dancing, but it was still outside the convenience of everything on Church Street. *The Barn*, like *The 519*, also opened in 1976 and was the ‘book-end’ on Church Street near Gerrard Street with *The 519* at the other end of the new village. The boundaries of the gaybourhood in the 1990s extended along Church

⁷¹⁰ “Preppy” in the 1980s and 1990s represent a distinct fashion choice that conveyed a sense of belonging to an elite social class characterized by a specific style of dress. See Lisa Birnbach, *The Official Preppy Handbook* (New York, Workman, 1980).

⁷¹¹ Message t-shirts like “No One Knows I’m Gay,” “2QT2BSTR8” or “That’s Dr. Faggot To You” were popular and sold at *Out On The Street* retail clothing store on Church Street (1991-Present).

Street from Gloucester Street above Wellesley in the north to Gerrard Street in the south.⁷¹²

Woody's became the anchor in The Village between these boundaries at the heart of TCWV.

The final coalescence, also at the heart of TCWV, was the new bathhouse *Spa on Maitland* next door to *Toby's* restaurant and across from *Vagara* restaurant. Anchoring a bathhouse at Church and Wellesley further reinforced gay *space* (as location) and gay *place* (as meaning). TCWV became the ideal gay location for me and other gay men like interviewees Grant Campbell, Richard Chambers and Jeremy Vincent. We remember the new gay and gay-friendly commercial spaces opening up in The Village by 1990. There were places to live, eat, shop, socialize, dance, have casual sex, and be politically active and proud now all on one street in one convenient neighbourhood.

One could start the day with a Second Cup coffee at *The Steps*, congregating and cruising with others from the gaybourhood. One could go shopping at existing stores like *Pusateri's* fruit and grocery store or *Dudley's Hardware* and the other new shops opening as part of area retail gentrification and urban planning policies.⁷¹³ In the evening one could eat at *Toby's* restaurant for a burger meal or something more upscale at *Vagara* restaurant, then go for a few drinks with friends at *Woody's*. One could then head down a few blocks to *The Barn* to go dancing until the

⁷¹² The current boundaries of TCWV that is designated by the City of Toronto as a map of the Church-Wellesley Business Improvement Area is along Church Street between Gloucester Street to the north and Wood Street to the south <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/9032-Church-Wellesley-Village-BIA.pdf> (accessed 29 Jul 2023).

⁷¹³ The mid-to-late 1980s saw more affordable retail gentrification in the area by gay men and lesbians as gentrifiers while preserving buildings in inner-city neighbourhoods as part of Toronto urban city planning. This differs from the more recent condo development gentrification and higher cost of retail space in the area. See Gorman-Murray, Andrew and Catherine J. Nash, "Recovering the Gay Village: A Comparative Historical Geography of Urban Change and Planning in Toronto and Sydney," in Bitterman, Alex, Hess, Daniel Baldwin (eds), *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods* (Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2021). For a map of recent condo development and retail pricing see CBRE, "500 Church: Prime Retail Space for Lease in Church-Wellesley Village" (2024), https://images.loopnet.ca/d2/FVtSQiNHR0pok_I9y1IsROQhhAbaGUwmXayYQ1ehOOk/document.pdf (accessed 29 Jul 2024).

last call for alcohol, before heading back up Church Street to cruise on *The Steps* or go to *Spa on Maitland*.

I acknowledge that my memories of TCWV are not without criticism based on my own personal white, cisgender experiences in The Village. Racialized interviewees in this project indicate they were (and still are) active in TCWV while emphasizing that it was a mostly white and gay male village. As this work has shown, certain Toronto gay spaces were more welcoming than others. Interviewees Terrance Saunders, Patrick Brown, Andre Goh, Samuel Lopez and Anthony Mohamed mentioned their experiences of racism and/or marginalization within Toronto's gay community and TCWV. Obviously, I never experienced racism as a white gay man but I did witness the exclusion of women in The Village. I also personally experienced a type of marginalization in a gay subculture in TCWV. As the next two sections show, there is an earlier history of excluding women before The Village became a vibrant commercial gaybourhood which continued into the 1990s. There is also a history of exclusivity and inclusivity in a specific gay subculture that I personally experienced based on expectations of 'a certain type of gay man.'

Men Only

“The management went out of its way to discourage female patrons.”⁷¹⁴

In 1981, lesbian activist Chris Bearchell wrote in *The Body Politic* about the tensions between “radical feminists” and “bar dykes” in the development of “lesbian separatism.” This separatism called for a movement free of gay men (and all men) in lesbian circles.⁷¹⁵ This separatism was a reaction to the patriarchal attitudes that generally dominated much of the public sphere including in homosocial spaces like gay and lesbian bars in Toronto. Bearchell points out

⁷¹⁴ Chris Bearchell, Bar-Hoping,” *The Body Politic* (Oct 1981), 25.

⁷¹⁵ Chris Bearchell, “Bar-Hoping,” *The Body Politic* (Oct 1981), 25.

some gay women did not want this type of separatism. The early history of Toronto's distinct and separate lesbian and bar cultures evolved from liquor license gender regulations.⁷¹⁶ Along with a lesbian feminist call for keeping separate spaces, the movement appeared to sustain *men-only* and *women-only* establishments throughout the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s.

As much as openly-gay business owner Janko Naglic attempted to create mixed lesbian and gay spaces in emerging gay-owned TCWV establishments, women-owned and operated lesbian bars and dance clubs were found outside TCWV. These included *Chez Moi* (1984-1989) and *The Rose Café* (1991-1999) previously *Purple Onion* (1984-1991). It was not until 1997 that a women-owned and operated lesbian bar, *Slack Alice* (1997-2005), rebranded *Slack's* (2005-2013), became fully established in The Village. TCWV establishments in the 1990s were still influenced by the *binary* generation's lingering and divergent thinking about gay bars *exclusively for men* and lesbian bars *exclusively for women*.

As Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray also point out about Toronto in "Lesbians in the City," gay men took "economic territorial control" of TCWV.⁷¹⁷ Having gay male-owned and run TCWV establishments favouring gay male clientele with male-centric décor and events often appeared to discourage female patrons. This was not always the case in Toronto as Naglic's attempts have shown, but it certainly was more separate than in other places. Interviewees Jim Elliott and Patrick Brown point out that there were more mixed gay and lesbian spaces in other North American cities. I recall that in London, Ontario we were more mixed together as lesbians and gay men in bars, especially at the *HALO* club. Coming to Toronto for me was a different experience where I distinctly noticed a type of gay-male-initiated 'lesbian

⁷¹⁶ See Chapter Two, pages 75-78.

⁷¹⁷ Catherine Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray, "Lesbians in the City: Mobilities and Relational Geographies," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2015), 174-176.

separatism' still continued into the 1990s. Although I remember more gay men and fewer women in the TCWV spaces, women were there, but not always made to feel welcome in spaces dominated by men.

In the 1990s, I frequented such places as *The Barn*, *Woody's*, *Boot's* and *Black Eagle*. I also went to these spaces with David, my then husband-to-be. We remember being occasionally joined by some of our female friends at both *The Barn* and *Woody's*. I recall one time at *The Barn* we felt the need to forewarn them about the graphic gay male porn that was being played on TV video screens on the third floor. *Woody's* also showed soft-core gay male porn on screens throughout the bar. We also went to the male-centric "Best Chest," "Best Ass" and "Best Legs" contests at *Woody's* and remember their "Woody's Man of the Month" award.⁷¹⁸ However, *The Barn* and particularly *Black Eagle* were places where women could be restricted, particularly at underwear parties.

By the mid-1990s, Sunday afternoon underwear parties at *The Barn* and *Black Eagle* were popular. As Anonymous Interviewee #2 remembers in Chapter Three, "you'd be surprised on a Sunday how many men would go there and get in their underwear, and it was like a Saturday night. It was unbelievable. You'd have hundreds of men just dancing on a Sunday afternoon and you wouldn't even realize that it was an afternoon."⁷¹⁹ David and I, along with our friends, went almost every Sunday to *The Barn* for the underwear parties. We joined gay men in boxers and briefs dancing from late afternoon to early evening on the crowded dance floor. "We were a bunch of men having a good time"⁷²⁰ without women. I admit there was an amazing energy, a sexual vibe experienced in an all-male environment. For me, and as expressed by

⁷¹⁸ See *Xtra*, "Woody's Most Memorable Moments" (1 Oct 2014), <https://xtramagazine.com/power/woodys-most-memorable-moments-64028> (accessed 29 Jul 2024).

⁷¹⁹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

⁷²⁰ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

Anonymous Interviewee #2 in Chapter Five, for some men desiring one another in one space does not feel the same with women present. That is not to say I also don't recognize how all-gay male spaces can perpetuate a type of patriarchal power and a hierarchy of gender by excluding women. At that time, some of my circles of friends were starting to think about this, influenced by our female friends.

We tried to have our gay friend Stephen's sister, Diana, join us at an underwear party. Diana had been dancing with us at *The Barn* many fun nights before. We told her about the Sunday afternoon underwear parties, and she wanted to go. Diana said she would dance in her underwear along with 'the boys.' We were stopped at *The Barn* door by a bouncer the Sunday afternoon that Diana was going to join us. He stated that the underwear party was a "men-only" event.

In the 1990s, the Ontario Human Rights Code was, in effect, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in "services, goods and facilities."⁷²¹ This meant that denying entry to Diana, a woman, based on her gender would generally be considered discriminatory under the Code. An exemption found within the Code would allow places to operate as a private "recreational club"⁷²² with a specific membership. Places like *Flash*, a gay strip club on Church Street, established as a "Gay Members Club" in 2011, would be able to use this same exemption for gay men required to pay a membership fee to enter, legally excluding women.⁷²³

⁷²¹ Ontario Government, Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19, "Part 1: Freedom From Discrimination," <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19/v8#:~:text=Every%20person%20has%20a%20right,H>. (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

⁷²² Ontario Government, Ontario Human Rights Code, Section 20 (3), "Recreational clubs." <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19/v8#:~:text=Every%20person%20has%20a%20right,H>. (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

⁷²³ By 2023, *Flash* had transitioned from being exclusively a gay members' club to a more inclusive venue open to all. *Flash* still maintains a men-only space called *Cock Bar* with male strippers and play areas. Trans men are allowed in *Cock Bar* provided their government-issued ID shows "M" for male.



Image 76: Flash gay member's strip and dance club at 463 Church Street (2011-Present), 2024. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

In the 1990s, *The Barn* did not evoke the Code to restrict attendance at underwear parties to membership. They may have had an argument under the Code's section *Restriction of facilities by sex* "where the use of the services or facilities is restricted to persons of the same sex on the ground of public decency."⁷²⁴ Whatever the case, Diana was restricted from joining us for the underwear parties at *The Barn*. She continued to join us dancing occasionally on Friday or Saturday nights until *The Barn* closed for good in 2012. As we will see in the next section, my husband David and I also recall and experienced another part of exclusionary history in TCWV.

⁷²⁴ Ontario Government, Ontario Human Rights Code, Section 20 (1), "Restriction of facilities by sex." <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19/v8#:~:text=Every%20person%20has%20a%20right,H>. (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

Gay Leather Sub-Culture

*“I would go to Black Eagle because I was very much into kink.”*⁷²⁵

Black Eagle gay leather bar is another example of historical exclusionary space in TCWV not solely based on gender but on a gay male subculture. *Black Eagle* in Toronto was one of the many *Eagle* leather bars opening up across North America in the 1970s and 1980s based on the first gay *Eagle* bar in New York City launched in 1970. When *Black Eagle* Toronto opened in 1994,⁷²⁶ like other *Eagle* bars, a leather/denim dress code, and *men-only* space were strictly enforced as part of a gay male subculture of leather-man identity. For example, some *Eagle* bars enforced strict dress codes that would require patrons to wear a piece of leather gear, like a harness or vest. Others would prohibit people from entering if they had on cologne or perfume. Man-scent was allowed and encouraged, even at *Black Eagle* Toronto. And not everyone who got past the door, according to some *Eagle* patrons, felt accepted once they were inside - especially if they didn't fit the traditional masculine, white aesthetic. But over the years, due to both societal changes and business realities, *Eagle* bars have modified restrictions.⁷²⁷

Interviewee David Hallman spoke about going to *Black Eagle* as part of his “kink” and gay leather subculture. David spoke of belonging to Toronto’s gay leather scene and the significance of leather sex as part of his gay identity and BDSM community. Unlike that David, my husband David and I are not leather men, nor do we participate in the sexual proclivities of this scene, nor do we oppose them.

⁷²⁵ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

⁷²⁶ *Black Eagle* was originally located at 459 Church Street (1994-1997) and moved to 457 Church Street (1997-Present).

⁷²⁷ Mikelle Street, “How ‘The Eagle’ Became One of the Most Recognized Gay Bar Names,” *NBC News* (24 Oct 2017), <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/how-eagle-became-one-most-recognized-gay-bar-names-n813336> (accessed 13 Jul 2024).



Image 77: *Black Eagle* Toronto gay leather/denim bar, originally located at 459 Church Street (1994-1997), moved to 457 Church Street (1997-Present), 2024. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

In 1997, David and I wanted to check out *Black Eagle* out of curiosity for a Sunday afternoon underwear party to see how different it was from our usual underwear party attendance at *The Barn*. We were told by a few people who danced with us at *The Barn*, but also went to *Black Eagle*, that a big, burly leather-wearing bouncer would prohibit us from entering *Black Eagle* if we were not wearing leather clothing and leather boots or denim and the ‘right-type’ of running shoes (black and ‘masculine-looking’).

They also told us we could not enter if we looked like ‘vanilla gays’ not into leather sex, or if we were women or trans (especially if we were women or trans). The bouncer would ask if we knew what kind of bar *Black Eagle* was that we wanted to enter. It was all about power and conforming to who or who could not enter; it was about entrance into a world only made visible

by affiliation or assimilation. So, we wore leather jackets over white t-shirts and jeans and leather boots, trying to fit the part to get in – and we were successful.

I remember walking in, my eyes needing to adjust to the dark floors and walls as I walked towards the incandescent light of the main-floor bar with the glowing glass of beer fridges stocked with various brands, the smell of stale alcohol, leather and man-sweat filling my nostrils. The wall-mounted TVs provided sights of erotic groping and groaning from the various hardcore porn videos that made those at *The Barn* look tame. There were videos of leather-clad or naked men sucking, fucking, licking, or fisting other men, accompanied by the thumping sound of dance music. I remember when we went in, my heart felt like it was pounding almost as loud as the music. My stomach was nervous. David and I attempted performativity like some imagined and stereotyped leather men.

We still enjoy going to *Black Eagle* today for their rooftop patio and dancing. In the past, dancing was not something one would do at *Black Eagle*, but it is now one of the few dance floors in The Village. The dance floor at the back of the main floor was previously used for a pool table and surrounding bar stools and was converted with 2010 renovations. Today, there is still a big, burly leather-wearing bouncer who is more welcoming to anyone interested in entering and wearing whatever they want. This includes women, trans or gender variant persons. *Black Eagle* Toronto is now “open to all but *men only* [in the] dark playroom upstairs.”⁷²⁸

One is more likely to see one of the TV video monitors silently showing the CP24 local news channel with headlines streaming across the screen than constant hard-core porn. I still see leather-clad men at the bar or standing along the crowded walls on the right, drinking beer,

⁷²⁸ Kikipedia, “Black Eagle,” <https://kikipaedia.com/bar/black-eagle-toronto> (accessed 9 April 2021). Kikipedia is a location-based web app that helps the LGBTQ2S+ communities find local bars, events, and safe spaces. For more information about Kikipedia see <https://kikipaedia.com/about>.

having conversations, laughing at jokes, staring, or glancing casually to look at anyone coming in, looking for sex or friendship. More often, I see guys wearing cotton designer t-shirts with coloured shorts or pants, leaning against the wall, staring down at the glow of their smartphones looking for hook-ups on *Grindr* or texting their friends. In the 1990s, *Black Eagle* was still a place where you had to be ‘a certain type of gay man’ to get in. Not so much anymore. Since that time, David and I have been to several leather party dance events. It may not be our ‘kink’ but we could still dress the part and now see the *Black Eagle* and the Toronto gay leather subculture as a welcoming community.

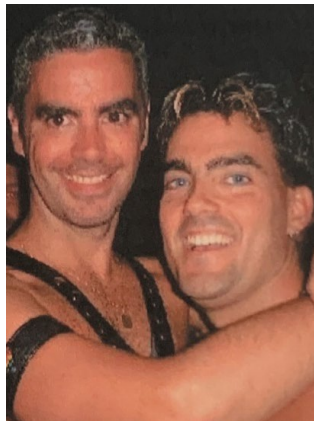


Image 78: Photo of David Phipps (left) and author J. Gary Myers (right) in 1999 wearing leather harness and arm bands. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

The ‘Heyday’ & The Steps

*“That heyday of The Village”⁷²⁹
“It would be those Camelot years, that heyday.”⁷³⁰*

As Anonymous Interviewee #4 and interviewee Richard Chambers both describe the 1990s in TCWV, I would also consider the 1990s the ‘heyday’ or ‘golden age’ of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. I also recognize that this is a subjective experiential statement from a white, cisgender, 60-year-old gay man who was in my 20s and 30s at that time. I realize the need

⁷²⁹ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #4, 3 Oct 2023.

⁷³⁰ Interview with Richard Chambers, 9 Aug 2023.

to consider how experiences in gay Toronto and The Village are different for each of the older gay men I interviewed and others who self-identify as gay. It is important not to assume that experiences in a population as a whole mirror those in its subpopulations or subcultures. As this project has shown, there are common memories and experiences. There are also different viewpoints and challenges within this gay cohort.

As interviewee Grant Campbell conveyed, I also see TCWV in the 1990s as a formative space where I developed more of my gay identity, explored gay culture and found a gay community. Grant's words fully resonate with my own experience: "The Church-Wellesley area was the place where I learned to perform my sexuality in a fully rounded, social way, not just something I did in the shadows, and I now see the Church-Wellesley area as a monument to that time when I learned."⁷³¹ Within the TCWV neighbourhood as 'monument' was another lost monument important to me and others from this cohort's generation in the performance of our sexuality and gay community: *The Steps*.

By the 1990s, I was regularly spending time socializing over coffee with gay friends or hanging out and cruising on *The Steps* at the Second Cup at Church and Wellesley. I was a flight attendant with weekdays off. I remember the vibrance of TCWV and watching it all from *The Steps* frequently over the decade, both day and night. *The Steps* seemed to be filled with gay men, particularly white gay men at all hours. I remember going there in the mornings for a cup of coffee to start the day. I was there in the afternoons just hanging out. I went in the evenings before going to the bars. I was there after 1 a.m. with the last call for alcohol at the bars. *The Steps* was the place to see if anyone was interested in hanging out with friends after the bar or hooking up for sex if I did not meet someone at the bar.

⁷³¹ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

Image 48 in Chapter Three⁷³² aligns with how I remember the steps throughout the 1990s. I do not recall seeing very many women or racialized individuals on *The Steps*, or in TCWV shops, restaurants or bars. Like *Woody's*, *The Steps* at Second Cup was the spot for what I remember as white male visibility in TCWV. However, interviewee Anthony Mohamed recalls *The Steps* as a place with “a real mixed crowd...Women were there, trans people were there, sex workers.”⁷³³ Anthony remembers seeing this mixed group. I do not. That doesn't mean they were not there.

A video titled, “3 AM On The Church Street Steps In 1994” shows a very early Tuesday morning at *The Steps*. It presents a mostly white crowd of seemingly gay men with a couple of individuals who could be gay, lesbian, trans, a singer who performs in drag or a sex worker. A self-identified Malaysian and possibly trans female on camera states, “I had to do a show at *Stables* tonight,” (the gay bar on the ground floor of *The Barn*), presumably a drag show. The person sings to show their impressive vocal talent, possibly indicating they were singing live and not lip-syncing. A kiss is shared with a presumed gay companion with intimate hugging. The companion states, “He's got a great voice. He's a performer.” The person replies, “I'm a professional.” The companion says, “That's her.” The video maker, named Gary, asks, “You're out every single night, aren't you?” The companion replies, “She's a fixture.”⁷³⁴

Perhaps I was at *The Steps* at times when these individuals were not or they were there, and I may have been unaware of my own *unconscious* or *social invisibility bias*.⁷³⁵ Sociologist Benno Herzog in his work on the social suffering of excluded or marginalized groups, defines

⁷³² See Chapter Three, page 178.

⁷³³ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

⁷³⁴ LIFEinMOLLYWOOD, “3 AM On The Church Street Steps In 1994” YouTube (5 Sep 2014), 3:25-7:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBL4pWIJ8kc> (accessed 22 Jul 2024).

⁷³⁵ Asana, “19 unconscious biases to overcome and help promote inclusivity” (4 Jan 2024), <https://asana.com/resources/unconscious-bias-examples> (accessed 22 Jul 2024).

this as “the socially created capacity ‘to look through’ the other even when physically present.”⁷³⁶ I don’t recall being there too often at 3 a.m. I was there many times shortly before that time after the bars closed around 2 a.m. In my gay TCWV environment, over-represented with white, gay men, I now surmise I was conditioned to see white gay men around me as a default, while consciously or unconsciously not seeing or ignoring lesbians, racialized or trans individuals that may have been around me in TCWV in the 1990s. There was one person in TCWV that I definitely did see and did not ignore. That was Mr. Monday Night.

Mr. Monday Night

“We were totally into each other.”⁷³⁷

Over half the men I interviewed have been in long-term relationships with gay male partners. Some for over 30 years. Some less, with the lives of some partners tragically cut short by the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. Other interviewees recognize that being single is a valid and desired option as well. A few shared their heartfelt and lingering pain of loss along with the joyful memories of the places they shared that no longer exist. Along with his connection to the kink community, interviewee David Hallman poignantly shared the story of his 33-year loving relationship with his partner Bill Compton, who died in 2009.⁷³⁸ David is an example of how gay men can present different facets of gay experiences in subcultures and relationships that form a nuanced understanding of gay identities within a broader understanding of gay identity.

Common memories of dancing at *The Manatee* or *GCDC* dances or going out to restaurants like *Vagara* or *Toby’s*, being members of gay organizations, playing on gay sports

⁷³⁶ Benno Herzog, “Invisibilization and Silencing as an Ethical and Sociological Challenge,” *Social Epistemology*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2018), 17.

⁷³⁷ Interview with David Hallman, 18 Jul 2023.

⁷³⁸ See Chapter Two, page 108.

teams, or hanging out on *The Steps* create broad elements of gay identity in Toronto. These form physical locations as *space* and the cultural meaning of *place* in gay Toronto.⁷³⁹ Individual experiences in similar gay spaces of common memory provide the nuanced elements of gay identity and gay cultural meaning. For me and many of the gay men I interviewed, such experiences can include chance meetings in gay spaces that led to enduring friendships and loving gay relationships.

I met my then-to-be-husband, David Phipps, on a Monday night in 1995. I was a junior flight attendant with little seniority and was always seemingly scheduled to work flying on weekends. As a single gay man, weeknights often became my time to go out on the 'gay-town.' I decided to go to *The Barn*. A man named Jerry was there at the third-floor bar. I had 'tricked'⁷⁴⁰ with him the week before. We started up a conversation. A man walked up to us leaving the sex-maze across the room. *The Barn* had created this space for customers to discreetly cruise for potential sex partners and for men to have spontaneous and anonymous sexual encounters. The first words I heard from him were "Hey Jerry, who's this cute little fuck?" I replied with mock indignation, "Excuse me? Who the hell are *you*?" Ten minutes later, after plenty of flirting between the two of us, David said to me, "When are we going to stop talking about sex and go home and do it?" To the point and ready for action, I agreed that the moment was right. We did not get much sleep that night. 30 years later we are still together and still deeply in love. I remember that first night when David was standing naked looking out the window as a new day dawned. I looked up from the bed and said, "Wow!" And that is how I met my future husband.

⁷³⁹ See Chapter One, page 44-46.

⁷⁴⁰ A word gay men commonly used for having casual sex in the 1980s and 1990s, not as used by sex workers to describe a paying client.

Nostalgic memories of *The Barn* and its physical location continue to hold meaning as an enduring *afterglow* and *afterburn* in my memory. Walking past the existing building today of what used to be *The Barn* links *space* (as location) and *place* (as meaning). *The Barn* shaped my gay identity as part of its earlier connection to gay culture in Toronto. Memories of meeting my husband David there, along with the many fond memories of dancing and underwear parties, is a nostalgic *afterglow* of feeling *safe, comfortable* or *welcomed*. Remembering it as a place of exclusion of our friend Diana is a nostalgic *afterburn*.⁷⁴¹ Both were experienced in gay nostalgia.

Same-Sex Marriage

Same-sex marriage was not legal in 1995 when my husband David and I met at *The Barn*. As part of the *binary* generation of gay men I interviewed, we remember the time before same-sex marriage became legal in Canada. Like other gay couples in the 1990s, David and I had a commitment ceremony. It took place in 1998. Since we could not be legally married, we publicly acknowledged our love and commitment to each other in a formal ceremony witnessed by our family and friends. We also remember the push in the 1990s for making same-sex marriage legal in Canada and the opposition towards it.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the issue of gay marriage rights divided the general public, including lesbian and gay individuals. We see something similar with contemporary, unresolved conflicts and political polarization about *trans rights*. We also see this in the criticism of using *queer* to replace *gay*, which ignores those still self-identifying as *gay* rather than *queer*. With same-sex marriage, there were those opposed for religious, moral and personal reasons. There were *intergenerational* differences between the *binary* and *neo-queer* generations. There were also *intragenerational* differences within the *binary* generation itself. Older gay

⁷⁴¹ See Chapter Two, pages 62-67 and Chapter Four, page 144.

liberationists, along with younger *neo-queers*, were opposed to *social minority rights gays* seeking equal rights with same-sex marriage. They viewed same-sex marriage as following heteronormative expectations.

When same-sex marriage was made legal in Ontario in 2003, David and I debated about the benefits of getting legally married. Unlike the criticisms of *binary gay liberationists* and *neo-queers*, our decision was based on the social minority rights that had been denied us as citizens. Having already had a full commitment ceremony celebration – for all intents and purposes, a marriage – we were legally married on a smaller scale in our living room. It was witnessed by two friends (along with our black cat, Dufferin) and officiated by gay activist and pastor, Rev. Brent Hawkes. Hawkes played a pivotal role in the legalization of same-sex marriage in Ontario. He had performed a loophole marriage ceremony of two same-sex couples in 2001 based on publishing legal banns for three weeks. This was considered a legal marriage without requiring government permission.



Image 79 (left): Commitment Ceremony photo of J. Gary Myers and David Phipps, 1998.

Image 80 (right): 25th Anniversary photo of Commitment Ceremony of J. Gary Myers and David Phipps, 2023. Source: Author, J. Gary Myers.



Image 81: Dufferin the black cat, 1998. Source: Author, J. Gary Myers

Community or Communities?

*“We had life and there was a community.”*⁷⁴²

*“There was a real feeling of community that we don’t have anymore.”*⁷⁴³

*“We’ve got to work towards community and communities that are connected.”*⁷⁴⁴

By the 1990s, Toronto was a diverse place filled with individuals of different backgrounds, cultures and perspectives still predominantly living in distinct neighbourhoods across the city. In my eyes, TCWV was still predominantly a gay, white male enclave. As mentioned, I was one of those gay, white men who congregated in the same places in TCWV with other gay, mostly white men, creating what to me seemed a homogeneous environment. This phenomenon may have inadvertently led to a cycle of exclusion, particularly for women, who were not encouraged to enter these spaces, leading to sustaining social establishments of their own. Many of this project’s gay cohort expressed how they gravitated towards familiarity and comfort within their own circles within gay Toronto and TCWV. This was often reflected in the choices they made about where they lived and the places where they socialized. They felt a sense of broader community within different gay sub-communities in Toronto.

During Pride events in TCWV, larger and diverse intergroup gathering create an LGBTQ2+ *community* as a single whole. Pride parades create moments of overarching solidarity. When individuals from each of the distinct LGBTQ2+ *communities* of the same background cluster together, it also creates a sense of community and belonging within each of these distinct groups. There is a perceived *comfort in similarity*. The problem is that this comfort in similarity can unintentionally create an environment that feels exclusive to those from diverse backgrounds, cultures and identities.

⁷⁴² Interview with Jan Grygier, 4 Aug 2023.

⁷⁴³ Interview with Jim Elliott, 2 Aug 2023.

⁷⁴⁴ Interview with Tony Souza, 7 Sep 2023.

Individuals who appear ‘different’ may feel out of place or unwelcome, leading to their reluctance or refusal to be part of these spaces. This further reinforces the homogeneity of the group. It can perpetuate a cycle of wider group exclusion with smaller group inclusion only gathering at bars or establishments in their own circles or going to other spaces. Interviewees Andre Goh and Patrick Brown sought other spaces and establishments outside TCWV as they sometimes felt they did not fit the stereotyped ‘gay appearance’ in The Village.⁷⁴⁵ This appears to be one of the reasons many lesbians, trans and other racialized LGBTQ2+ individuals were not seen as often in TCWV in the 1990s.

Interviewee Anthony Mohamed noted in Chapter Five that he saw Toronto’s LGBTQS+ collective group as “one community with multiple identities.”⁷⁴⁶ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, new players emerged in sexuality, gender and race identity politics in lesbian and gay Toronto. Groups like *LOOT* (Lesbian Organization of Toronto), *Dewson Street Collective*, *Zami* and its successor *AYA*, along with *Khush* and *Hola* were established.⁷⁴⁷ Queer theory began to change perceptions about the intersections of gender, sexuality and race along with the influences of socio-economic status. The common element of ‘one community’ was our fight for human rights collectively while acknowledging these intersections within and among different communities. This led to the use of the LGBTQ2+ identity acronym emerging in the 1990s beyond the previous lesbian/gay social minority rights binary. There were also efforts to empower racialized voices within the broader LGBTQ2+ *community* and experiences within distinct LGBTQ2+ sectors or *sub-communities*. Despite efforts of empowerment and

⁷⁴⁵ See Chapter Three, page 198.

⁷⁴⁶ Interview with Anthony Mohamed, 6 Sep 2023.

⁷⁴⁷ See Chapter Three, “Organizing Identities” and Chapter Five, “Seeing or Not Seeing?” See also *Rise Up: A Digital Archive of Lesbian Feminism*, “Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT), <https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/activism/organizations/lesbian-organization-of-toronto-loot/> (accessed 29 Jul 2024).

acknowledgement, gender-based and race-based discrimination continued to affect many LGBTQ2+ individuals, including women and people of colour in TCWV into the 2000s.

A 2012 study of race relations and racism in Toronto's LGBTQ+ communities found discriminatory practices that reflected the wider Canadian culture. Racialized participants in the 2012 study ranged in age from 25 to 56 years old.⁷⁴⁸ These participants can be considered representative of those from the *binary* and *neo-queer* generations with emerging influences on the *fluid* generation. Each participant self-identified as gay and/or queer. They discussed how systemic inequalities created economic and sexual barriers that continued to reinforce predominantly white, gay male socializing and consumerism practices in Toronto's Church Wellesley Village. One study participant stated and questioned: "The White LGBTQ community in Toronto is not a community of hope, love, and acceptance. Why are there no Black-operated businesses in the community?"⁷⁴⁹

Another participant spoke about not going to gay bars in the Village because of a sexual currency and white, gay capital perspective: "There is a premium placed on the Anglocentric standards of beauty within the gay community...certain individuals and groups receive advantageous treatment because of their perceived conformity to White Euro-American ideals. Some people are marginalized because they belong to a visible racial minority group and, thus, are deemed to fall outside of the set standards. As a result, these individuals and groups experience diminished sexual currency and gay capital."⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁸ Sulaimon Giwa, and Cameron Greensmith, "Race Relations and Racism in the LGBTQ Community of Toronto," *Journal of Homosexuality*, No. 59 (2012), 149-185. Note: the ethnoracial groups of participants were East Asian, South Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and Black ranging in ages of 25 to 56.

⁷⁴⁹ Giwa and Greensmith, 164.

⁷⁵⁰ Giwa and Greensmith, 164.

Within the past decade since that study was published, I have seen a growing number of racialized individuals in TCWV, but still more white individuals in bars and restaurants than BIPOC.⁷⁵¹ This corresponds with what interviewee Terrance “Teach” Saunders points out in Chapter Five about continuing to see limited numbers of Black men in The Village today: “There’s very little African-Canadian presence, I am usually there with my friends who are all Black men and when it does exist, it’s very rare to see Black men with Black men [amused laughter] ... So, nothing has essentially changed. Nothing has essentially changed.”⁷⁵² Nothing may have changed in Terrance’s view of seeing an increase in the number of Black men frequenting TCWV today, but there have been physical and other demographic changes since the beginning of the 21st century.

The New Millennium & A Post-Gay Village

By the early 2000s, I began to notice fewer gay men and more street youth hanging out at *The Steps*. Street youth would frequently ask me for spare cash when I walked by. Perhaps other gay men, like me, did not feel as comfortable at *The Steps* seeing a shifting demographic there in a space that held significant social and community meaning for many of us. This is similar to what is happening today in TCWV at *Barbara Hall Park* with open-drug use, violence and unhoused individuals.⁷⁵³ I recently walked in the park and saw a very different place than the one I remember sitting in on certain days and cruising in on certain nights in the 1990s. I saw several individuals throughout the park along the walkway openly injecting or smoking from a drug pipe as I walked to the AIDS Memorial in the park. I recognize the challenges related to stigmatizing these individuals and the broader implications for those struggling with addiction. This is our

⁷⁵¹ BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, People of Colour.

⁷⁵² Interview with Terrance Saunders, 15 Oct 2023.

⁷⁵³ *The Bridge*, “Church-Wellesley residents decry growing violence,” Volume 4, Issue 7 (Aug 2023), 3.

reality today. With gay nostalgia, I remembered the park, like *The Steps* as it was before.

According to Patrick Long, writing about *The Steps*, it was “because the business association of the neighbouring Yonge Street commercial strip hired private security to patrol its streets. Some homeless youth and street kids migrated from Yonge Street to nearby Church Street as a result. Some people saw these youth as ‘undesirable.’ Some older gays felt threatened by incidents of aggressive panhandling and insults. The upwardly mobile gay clientele began to move on when they found the relocated street culture incompatible with their own.”⁷⁵⁴ I recognize the reality of such changes that are the result of broader civil and societal choices.

According to a report in *Xtra*, *The Steps* were removed by the building owner “to discourage loitering.”⁷⁵⁵ *The Steps* were mostly removed in 2004. They had spanned most of the length of the building along Church Street from Wellesley Street with only two small sections and an accessibility ramp now remaining. I agree with many of the interviewees in this project that *The Steps* created a sense of gay community. *The Steps* was an important part of my TCWV history. As interviewee Andre Goh states, “*The Steps* should have been immortalized, because then generations would learn about it and utilize it. No more *Steps*. Nothing now. It’s just a hideous space.”⁷⁵⁶ Again, I experience gay nostalgia when I think about my time at *The Steps*.

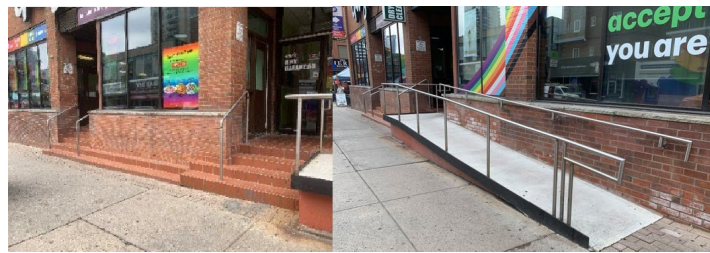
Whether the removal of *The Steps* was because of loitering street youth, a need for accessibility accommodation, or just businesses were tired of crowds of people loitering there (including those from LGBTQ2+ communities), other social, economic and demographic changes unfolding in TCWV also contributed to this decision. The disappearance of *The Steps* is

⁷⁵⁴ Patrick Long, “Church and Wellesley,” *LocalWiki*, https://localwiki.org/toronto/Church_and_Wellesley (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

⁷⁵⁵ Robert Salerno, “Second Cup to return to Church St” (11 Sep 2011), <https://xtramagazine.com/culture/second-cup-to-return-to-church-st-6345> (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

⁷⁵⁶ Interview with Andre Goh, 25 Aug 2023.

a further *afterglow* and *afterburn* for me.



Images 82 (top): *The Steps* in 1992. Source: Photo by Andrew Stawicki/Toronto Star via Getty Images.

Images 83 & 84 (bottom): *The Steps* in 2024. Photo on the left shows what remains of the original steps. Photo on the right is wider view showing accessibility ramp. Source: Author J. Gary Myers.

The removal of *The Steps* was part of the beginning of a commercial and intergenerational transitional period in TCWV. The area began to appear more mainstream, along with rising rental rates forcing many gay-owned and gay-friendly businesses to close or relocate. Outdoor patio culture already at restaurants like *Village Rainbow* and *Pints* (then *Wilde Oscars*, now *O'Grady's*) continued to emerge in TCWV. Commercial and more individual gathering spots at restaurants replaced the gay communal space and feel of *The Steps*.

The very popular *Zelda's* restaurant was owned by a drag queen named Zelda. It had been in The Village for thirteen years, four on Wellesley Street and nine on Church Street at the former *Toby's* location. *Zelda's* relocated to a less expensive space on Yonge Street – outside TCWV. Eventually, old-guard gay spaces like *Priape*, *Bar 501*, *Byzantium* and *Statlers* were gone and replaced. Dance clubs like *The Barn*, *Zippers Cellblock* and *Fly* were in the process of

being transformed by new condo development. Most of the gay spaces that interviewees and I remember have disappeared. (See Appendix 1 for a list of LGBTQ2+ places, people events and organizations in Toronto from the 1970s to 2024).

A 2009 article in the *Toronto Star* supports the argument of this research project about younger *neo-queer* and *fluid* individuals who no longer align themselves to TCWV or *gay* and *lesbian identity* as those from the *binary* generation. A 20-year-old interviewed for the article was asked to describe herself and stated, “I prefer no identification, but the easiest way is to say pansexual and trans. Honestly, on Church, there isn’t a whole lot to do.” The article also describes a 21-year-old who self-identified as queer as “a less frequent visitor to the area than when she was first coming out” and “who is now comfortable hanging out in other neighbourhoods.” The article states, “The notion of supporting gay-owned businesses now seems almost quaint.”⁷⁵⁷

Fifteen years have passed since that article was written. The ‘quaintness’ of supporting gay-owned businesses for a gay community in TCWV has evolved into businesses *open to all*. This includes lesbians, bisexuals, trans, queer and straight customers. In my experience, there now appears to be a greater variety of non-gay-owned restaurants and shops with more non-gay business owners and non-LGBTQ2+ patrons. Unlike previous days in TCWV, a new *post-gay* culture in TCWV no longer necessitates the existence of specific gay geographical spaces. This includes no longer needing to always frequent those spaces by younger gays and queers. We have seen long-standing gay bars like *Woody’s* specifically transform into bars for everyone. As this work has shown, this is difficult for some older gay men who remember more exclusive gay

⁷⁵⁷ Denise Balkissoon, “Exodus sees Church St. losing its gay village identity” (13 Oct 2009), https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/exodus-sees-church-st-losing-its-gay-village-identity/article_7bc723ac-d386-5a7b-bb75-8c78305e06e2.html (accessed 23 Jul 2024).

spaces like *Woody's*.

Condo development in the area sees a greater number of straight residents as more gays and lesbians have integrated into “mainstream” neighbourhoods and heterogeneous social contexts.⁷⁵⁸ As condo development continues on the boundaries and properties of former gay establishments in The Village, TCWV continues to transform. Intergenerational identity differences between the *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations challenge the *historical gay identity* that was and continues to be seen by some as inherently stable and fixed. Even if gay identity is not seen as an essential identity by a *fluid* generation, it remains for some, like me, how I choose to self-identify.



Images 85 (left) and 86 (right): Church-Wellesley Village, BIA blank street signage, 2004. Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 219, Series 2311, File 1776, Item 61; Church-Wellesley Village branded street signage, 2024. Source: City of Toronto Transportation Services Division – Signs and Markings.

Gay was the primary identity of TCWV as ‘The Gay Village.’ TCWV has become a space of multiple communities with different identities and subcultures. These changes have made TCWV a *post-gay* village and gay bars and establishments, *post-gay* spaces. I do not see this as a good or bad thing. This is the reality of social change in an urban neighbourhood from one generation to the next. This is history unfolding as change over time. For some like interviewees Bob Dirstein and Anonymous Interviewee #2, who describe *Woody's*: “it feels less like a gay bar than it did previously,”⁷⁵⁹ and “I don't think it's a gay bar. I think it's a queer bar”

⁷⁵⁸ Ghaziani (2011), 99-125.

⁷⁵⁹ Interview with Bob Dirstein, 26 Jul 2023.

respectively.

Each of the gay men I interviewed recognized and spoke to the changes that have occurred, and which are represented in this chapter. Inevitably, there is a sense of loss: a lost gay community and gay identity that they remember. For some, it feels like gay is being replaced with a queer overlay often adopted by the *fluid generation*. Using *queer* to describe or replace gay identity can misrepresent our self-identification, our remembered gay culture and our gay experiences. A recent joke provided by Apple's Siri on my iPhone said: "There are 10 kinds of people in this world; those who understand binary and those who don't." Those of us from the *binary generation* still understand it and its continuing influence on our lives.

Most of us accept the new direction the *fluid generation* is taking us today in a similarly challenging society as lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans have done in the past. Each generation has different sets of beliefs and identities. Gays from the *binary generation* formed our identities before the *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations. This was a starting point for many, including me. Identity is a process, not a fixed thing, but underlying traces of our identity formation linger. Our gay identities formed in varying degrees as we defined and redefined our gay selves over time. For myself and largely the gay men I interviewed, we continue to self-identify as gay, not queer. As the Queer Nation Manifesto points out, "queer, unlike gay, doesn't mean male."⁷⁶⁰ Queer in this sense is not applied as an identity. Trans historian Susan Stryker clarifies, "queer, after all, means diversity."⁷⁶¹

It is only in this case that I can see myself as queer as an umbrella term to describe belonging to the diversity of the overall LGBTQ2+ community. When spoken to other gay men,

⁷⁶⁰ QZAP – Zine Archive, "The Queer Nation Manifesto" (2014), 12, https://archive.qzap.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/184 (accessed 8 Mar 2024).

⁷⁶¹ Susan Stryker, "Queer Nation," *glbtq* (2015), http://www.glbtqarchive.com/ssh/queer_nation_S.pdf (accessed 5 Apr 2024).

lesbians, bisexuals, trans, non-binary or other identifying or non-identifying queers, it is a way of suggesting we politically close ranks when fighting for rights and temporarily forget our individual differences and identities because we face a more insidious common cause.

Otherwise, I, along with other men who self-identify as gay, have a lingering connection to our gay identity formation, now as an *historical gay identity* still in use at least until this *binary generation* is dead and gone. We hope our *gay* history and *historical gay identity* will be remembered as *gay* and not *queer* and not erased.

Where Do “I” End?

I started this work with the question, “Where Do “I” Begin?” I described my first memories of being gay, teased, bullied and traumatically rejected by my own family for being different. For being ‘Gary the fairy’ and knowing the trauma of being called ‘faggot’ and ‘queer’ as hurtful slurs. I survived and thrived over time. I am now proud of being ‘Gary the fairy’ and self-identifying as *gay*.

I mentioned discussions with several self-identified gay male friends in Toronto about our supposed gay cultural history and the changes we have seen since the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. We were experiencing gay nostalgia. These reminiscences led me to this research project to explore the unique nostalgic perspectives of this generation of gay men in Toronto. Growing up with similar generational influences, I wanted to compare their stories of gay Toronto and Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village with what I remember about these spaces since the 1980s. I wanted to learn more about the history and development of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village and how gay Toronto has changed over the past 50 years. Exploring the oral histories of this gay cohort of men resonates with my own gay identity, memories, experiences and connection to gay culture in Toronto’s *gay spaces* (as location) and *places* (as meaning), past and present. It has

been a privilege to have interviewed this cohort of older gay men for this project and I am honoured to share their stories about some of Toronto's gay history.

I decided to view these stories through the lens of intergenerational transitions. I sought to present how shifts have occurred among three loosely successive and *overlapping* generational groups. I call these groups the *binary* generation, the *neo-queer* generation and the *fluid* generation. I include myself in the *binary* generation as those of us born into and influenced by an ideologically binary masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, gay/lesbian world into the 1970s and 1980s. The *neo-queer* generation emerged influenced by Queer Nation and queer theory during the later 1980s and into the early millennium. They reclaimed the old derogatory 'queer' as a new inclusive identity that challenged heteronormativity and conforming to sexuality and gender stereotypes. The *fluid* generation came of age influenced by a broader inclusion of LGBTQ2+ identities. They grew up with an understanding of the fluidity of sex and gender accepted by many but still questioned today.

Remnants of the *binary* generation's gay culture and gay community are remembered through *gay nostalgia* as many of the places and faces of our gay past are disappearing. It is important to recognize that every life and community is in a perpetual state of change. As I have said before, history is about change over time. Life inherently moves forward from one generation to the next. As individuals, we continually experience, learn, develop and often continue to live lives that will never be accepted by everyone. That's just life. We hopefully learn to find common understanding to live in peace. History is filled with wars that speak otherwise. We remember mistakes of the past and hopefully learn from them. Sometimes the past may be forgotten or ignored and sadly erased. Sometimes individuals try to change the past by overlaying contemporary language, meaning and values onto the past, known as *presentism*, to

suit the social sensitivities, morality and whims of the present. This is to our detriment, especially with the known past.

The past shaped and continues to shape our collective and individual identity. For those of us from the *binary* generation, the experiences of extreme homophobia and ‘coming out’ explicitly as *gay* in that often hostile and restrictive social environment have left an indelible and enduring influence on our identity. Using *queer* to describe us, those of us who still want to self-identify as *gay* and not *queer*, ignores the significant meaning of *gay* to many of us as part of our gay culture and gay identity.

Identity is also a dynamic construct that changes over time while retaining core elements which provide continuity and stability in our personalities. We have learned from the *fluid* generation that how we wish to self-identify is a personal decision to be respected. How one wishes to self-identify can change. Some who previously self-identified as gay, now self-identify as queer. My husband David and I both self-identify as gay, but in political situations, such as the SexGen York Committee or rights rallies, we become part of the queer community.⁷⁶² Finding a balance between personal expression and shared realities of the society we live in is also important. This work has shown in Chapter Five the tensions that have arisen with gay being increasingly substituted by queer.⁷⁶³ It has shown that these experiences are not the same for everyone and need to be balanced with everyone’s individual experiences and contexts.

The three metaphorical adaptations of Plato’s cave at the beginning of this Chapter helps us recognize the importance of finding this balance in any generation. What happens when we become too rigidly focused and not open to change? What happens when we are too rigidly

⁷⁶² Personal conversations with David Phipps, 10 Aug 2024. SexGen Committee at York University is the “university-wide committee responsible for advising and advocating around issues and concerns of sexual and gender diversity,” <https://rights.info.yorku.ca/sexgen-york-committee/> (accessed 10 Aug 2024).

⁷⁶³ See Chapter Five, pages 304-310.

focused on our own cave walls? The caves show what happens when we erroneously suggest ‘*this is the only way*’ or ‘*everything must stay the same.*’ This will never be the case. Each of the three caves was a slice of time in the lives of the *binary generation*. It can hopefully be remembered or sadly will be forgotten, depending on how our gay history is preserved by younger generations. I confess to still being partially chained while ‘looking back and facing forward’⁷⁶⁴ with my desire to not have gay identity replaced and erased by queer. Respecting our gay history and decisions for self-expression and identity needs to be balanced with the push for *neo-queer* and *fluid* understandings during this period of change, or else it will be replaced and erased.

The tension between preserving and erasing the gay history of TCWV and the inevitable changes that occur in any location is a complex issue that extends far beyond the realm of TCWV. This debate touches on fundamental questions about how each generation remember, identifies, interprets and learns from the past and previous generations. It is also about how each generation wants to shape the future. This includes the practical elements of deterioration, urban intensification, gentrification and heritage – whether to sustain, repair or tear down the built environment and/or preserve its history.

I cannot predict the future of TCWV. I can only present how some of it unfolded in the past up to the present and contribute to preserving a slice of its *gay* history. The future of TCWV is yet to be seen. I hope that these stories of our *gay* Toronto history will be remembered. Personally, I intend to donate my oral history interviews and dissertation to the ArQuives, Canada’s LGBTQ2+ Archives. In my capacity as a volunteer with Heritage Toronto, I plan to develop a walking tour of TCWV and Toronto’s gay history using some of these stories to

⁷⁶⁴ See Chapter Five, pages 254-255.

illustrate this history. This will turn my dissertation, which includes community engagement at the beginning, into public history at the end.

Throughout this work, I have presented the significance of unique segments of gay identity, gay culture and subcultures, gay community and sub-communities. Oral histories of this older cohort of gay men and VGT members have provided nuanced elements in the context of intergenerational changes from the *binary* to *neo-queer* to *fluid* generations. Some of the interviewees in this project have expressed an idealism that involves yearning to go back to the predominantly gay male exclusiveness of TCWV's past. They wish for a return to The Village being less socially mainstream. They seek that sense of a unique and more collective gay community not lost in the ever-growing alphabet acronym of 2SLGBTQQA+++ . They do not want a community they have known to be replaced or lost within the *queer* identification umbrella or 'hettrification' of the gaybourhood.

This is part of an intergenerational shift as an older group reflects on the past in the same places where a younger group is creating new experiences, new identities and new memories of their own. This is also part of a social shift as an in-group becomes an out-group. Gay men, especially older gay white cisgender men are not the in-group anymore. We live in a different world than we did in the past. We have gained our rights. It's time to focus with solidarity on those who still struggle with similar issues that we did fifty years ago, who also have a long history of fighting for the rights to express themselves as we did. We must also remember that rights established can also be taken away. Do we want to forget or ignore the past and sadly erase it by perpetuating fears about being different once again? This also applies to gay seniors having to go back in the closet as they age into long-term care. As mentioned by Anonymous Interviewee #3 in Chapter Four, "It's sort of like you're in the closet, then you're out of the

closet, then you're back in the closet when you're supposed to be living your best life." This is corroborated by independent research published in *The Canadian Journal on Aging*.⁷⁶⁵

By preserving different accounts of Toronto's gay history, we can learn valuable lessons. Gay men of this generation managed to form community and sub-communities during this nostalgic time period. They provide insight into historical gay spaces and gay experiences in Toronto. Their stories reflect a time of self-discovery, fighting for rights and courageous struggles during the HIV/AIDS crisis. They reflect their joyful gatherings and celebrations of gay culture and identity in the development of gay Toronto and TCWV.

Narratives also provide insight into those parts of its history that are uncomfortable or shameful. This project has described homophobia, racism, bullying, violence, transphobia, lesbian and gay separatism and exclusionary spaces. In addition to binary ideas about sexuality and gender, the nostalgia of gay men of this generation reflects the inequitable social values of their time, including sexism and racism. This project has presented the criticism that sees TCWV as historically and culturally enjoyed by mostly gay, middle-class, cisgender, white men commodifying and inhabiting TCWV.

As racialized interviewees point out, Black, Latino and Asian men who were part of Toronto's gay community and went to Toronto's gay bars experienced subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism. They sometimes sat in mixed or separate social groups to form their own gay sub-communities or sought out other places outside TCWV. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, racialized gay men formed an important part of Toronto's gay community and sub-communities, including in TCWV. Their voices for this project have been a valuable and essential part of this

⁷⁶⁵ Kimberley Wilson, Katherine Kortes-Miller and Arne Stinchcome, "Staying Out of the Closet: LGBT Older Adults, Hopes and Fears in Considering End of Life," *Canadian Journal on Aging*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (2018), 22-31, doi:10.1017/S0714980817000514.

overall work. I hope that these varied gay nostalgic and reflective narratives will provide context for current social, political and cultural dynamics that continue to be aligned with contemporary challenges in the fight for human rights within and beyond TCWV.

This project has also described self-acceptance, activism and memories of youthfulness in *space* (as location) and *place* (as meaning) in gay Toronto. Gay nostalgia reveals the *afterglows* and *afterburns* of past gay culture and gay identity in Toronto and TCWV. By acknowledging and remembering the experiences of these narrators we can ensure their stories of gay Toronto and TCWV are not forgotten. They have provided additional context and multiple perspectives on historical events, individuals and locations that have shaped the history of gay Toronto during the last decades of the 20th century.

In conclusion, the shift in TCWV to a more diverse and inclusive village reflects intergenerational differences and broader narratives of urban evolution and social change. This shift has also taken place in other historically gay neighbourhoods in North America, the U.K. and Australia.⁷⁶⁶ As *queer* and *fluid* are more inclusive and encompassing terms used by younger generations today, it mirrors TCWV's own journey towards greater diversity and fluidity in a geographic space since the new millennium. Gays and queers no longer require the neighbourhood as a necessary socio-cultural hub, seeking out other spaces throughout urban areas. Straight people, particularly straight women, enjoy the neighbourhood as an alternative social spot or tourist area. Like other iconic gay enclaves experiencing new gentrification, condo development and demographic change, TCWV has also become a *post-gay* village.

As one of my gay male friends suggested at the beginning of this work, there is a feeling of not feeling 'special' anymore. We remember the hard-fought fight to decriminalize

⁷⁶⁶ See Chapter One, pages 54-57.

homosexuality, to de-pathologize same-sex love and desire, to have sexual orientation included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and to allow same-sex couples to adopt children and be legally married. As interviewee Dan Benson so succinctly put it for lesbians and gays, “We’ve got our cake and are able to eat it.”⁷⁶⁷ For older gay men in Toronto who remember TCWV as a predominantly gay male-exclusive space, we had our time, now we want to eat more cake! Going back to a ‘special’ time of more gay male exclusiveness in TCWV’s past, with more gay men visibly seen throughout the gaybourhood, cannot be realized. It is an unattainable utopian vision, an unrealistic gay nostalgic longing. It is an outdated male homo-centric form that rejects contemporary social diversity and urban change because of potential personal discomfort and legitimate loss.

Gay bars in TCWV remain a challenge with this issue. Anonymous Interviewee #2 suggests “We want to be with gay men in our own gay community. Gay men need a safe space. When I say things like, “You know, it’d be nice to have a men’s only bar” the younger generation gets a little upset about that. And I don’t understand why.”⁷⁶⁸ The intergenerational transitions occurring between older gays and younger queers – along with changes in the neighbourhood’s built and demographic environments, have initiated a new phase of TCWV. The few ‘gay’ bars that continue to exist in the village may sustain a semblance of the past with more exclusive gay male spaces, but for how long? Will internal desires for homo-centric and homo-social environments at gay bars continue to resist external social influences? Excluding women or members of LGBTQ2+ communities undermines the inclusivity and diversity that gay bars today are supposedly meant to foster.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview with Dan Benson, 31 Jul 2023.

⁷⁶⁸ Interview with Anonymous Interviewee #2, 31 Aug 2023.

What about the desires expressed by interviewees who remember the sexual vibes and chemistry of *all-male gay environments* and want to sustain those spaces in TCWV? Is it possible to have *men-only* bars again? Will they all have to be by gay membership like *Flash*? Do we continue to prohibit women in *men-only* spaces like the playroom at *Black Eagle*? Do we exclude trans men who self-identify as gay as Vintage Gay Toronto did? How do we regulate spaces as *gay men only* if they are once again challenged as exclusionary? The TCWV that the *binary generation* knew is a different place. Going back to an exclusive “safe space” for gay men seems unlikely. Feeling ‘special’ isn’t about gay men anymore.

Not feeling ‘special’ is also a fear of change. People tend to prefer what is predictable and what they can control in their environments. Some want things to stay the same. Change disrupts routines, makes us uncomfortable and can create a sense of loss, which can lead to resistance. When faced with such fear of change, some protest to keep built environments, neighbourhoods and traditions alive – to keep culture and identity alive. I admit to my own fear of change if it means erasing my gay identity. As this project has shown, gay culture and a *historical gay identity* have provided this gay cohort (including me) with a sense of belonging and continuity to our gay past in Toronto. Gay nostalgia provides the memories of our gay history to pass on to the next generations to preserve these memories. This is the balance between preserving gay culture and gay identity while embracing the present and the future. I hope this project contributes to this balance of preserving and embracing.

The changing dynamics of the old ‘gaybourhood’ are giving way to a new generation redefining identity and community within and beyond the neighbourhood. For me and many of the gay cohort I interviewed, the ‘heyday’ of gay community in Toronto’s Church Wellesley Village is long gone. I walk through TCWV and go to bars and restaurants previously known as

‘gay’ (i.e. mostly men) and see faces and places that have changed. With gay nostalgia, I remember what was before, now gone or transformed. This is not a judgement, just an observation of change and more diversity. I agree with Grant Campbell, as this work is titled: “I have a sense that gay is diluting significantly.”⁷⁶⁹

Realistically, not feeling ‘special’ anymore is just what happens. Change always happens over time as new causes are developed, new learnings educate, new opinions are created, and new groups begin to feel ‘special.’ Each generation replaces another as the new always replaces the old, but every generation hopes that the time they were ‘special’ will not be forgotten. The fear of being forgotten is deeply rooted in our human nature and reflects our desire for connection, community and significance. We seek to leave a lasting impact on the world and seek validation of our identities and existence. When we are gone, along with the last of our generation, the memory of our existence is always in the hands of the next generation to decide what to do with it.

⁷⁶⁹ Interview with Grant Campbell, 31 Jul 2023.

Conclusion

This work presented how understandings and experiences of being gay in Toronto have changed significantly since the 1970s. This includes Toronto's shifting gay socio-cultural geography by the 1990s. It also includes more recent changes in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village (TCWV) built and demographic environments over the past two decades. This project showed how the social, cultural, and political experiences of an older generation of gay men differ from younger gays and queers. Many from the younger generation no longer align themselves to *gay* identity, *gay* culture, or *gay* villages and see little need to sustain them.

A *post-gay* period has emerged in TCWV with a recognition of greater fluidity in sexual and gendered identities. Shifts in the built and demographic environments contributing to this *post-gay* period reflect the reality of city planning and change over time in urban neighbourhoods. They are also the result and reality of intergenerational transitions. I have developed a taxonomy to categorize what I have observed about these changes among three loosely successive and overlapping groups: the *binary* generation, *neo-queer* generation and *fluid* generation.

The *binary* generation of gays and lesbians was born into an ideologically binary world and held older ubiquitous perceptions of sex and gender through a binary lens of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, straight/gay or gay/lesbian. They were part of or directly influenced by the Gay Liberation Movement and The Women's Movement between the 1970s and mid-1980s. Differences in thinking about gender and sexuality emerged from the *neo-queer* generation in the late 1980s and 1990s. Fueled by activism, *neo-queers* reclaimed *queer* from an older derogatory slur to form a new socio-political identity opposed to heteronormativity. The new use of *queer* was developed in queer theory (previously lesbian and gay studies) and continued with the *fluid*

generation born into a broader inclusion and expanse of LGBTQ2+ identities in the new millennium.

As queer theory began to socially diffuse by approximately 2005, especially through social media, a *fluid* generation grew up with an understanding of the fluidity of sex and gender accepted but still questioned today. A *fluid* generation of younger gays and queers sought out queer and other non-exclusive LGBTQ2+ spaces throughout urban areas beyond gay villages. Also, within gaybourhoods today, like TCWV, a younger and more accepting ‘straight’ generation now sees ‘gay’ villages as an alternative social spot or tourist area. There is a perceived ‘de-gaying’ of these neighbourhood spaces with an influx of heterosexual presence, referred to as the ‘hetrification’ of gay spaces.

As an older gay generation grapples with these intergenerational differences, there is a palpable sense of a lost gay community and dying gay identity as expressed by many of the older gay cohort interviewed for this project. Throughout these intergenerational transitions, many from the *binary* generation (most of this project’s interviewees) continue to self-identify as gay. Identity is a dynamic construct that changes over time while retaining core elements which provide continuity and stability in our personalities. Identity is connected to an imagined *culture* or *community* influenced by shared events, mechanisms or symbols in a shared timeframe. These can include protests or festivities, socializing, entertainment, music and literature, organizations, celebrities, fashion and style, and athletics. Imagined *gay culture* or *gay community* can create personal meaning and subjectivity as *gay identity* from each of these examples.

Significant emotional memories of gay experiences, both positive and negative, have contributed to the development of gay identity. These gay histories create a specific *historical gay identity* within the *binary* generation that may not signify the current understanding of *gay*

within the contemporary LGBTQ2+ acronym used by the *fluid* generation. Gay, along with other letters of the growing sexuality and gender acronym is more frequently being replaced with queer as a ‘short-hand’ catch-all substitute. Queer may be used as an umbrella term to denote a political and sometimes radical approach that challenges societal norms and expectations around gender and sexuality. This does not always recognize the nuanced implications for those who currently continue to self-identify as *gay* and not as *queer*. Replacing queer as a substitute term for LGBT identities destabilizes and potentially erases identities and risks stripping people of their lived experiences, histories and self-determination of identity. As mentioned, most of the interviewees of this project self-identify as gay and not queer when referring to their past and present selves while sharing their histories.

When these histories are recalled in the stories of their gay past, they are conjured as *gay nostalgia*: the intersections of *gay culture*, *gay identity*, and *memory* – all instilled with emotions, both positive and negative. Particular to gay nostalgia are recalled emotional experiences based on feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*. These are often associated with space (as physical location) and place (as meaning), along with individuals, events and materials. Within these contexts, when one conjures memories of feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*, positive memories are recalled as nostalgic *afterglows*. When one remembers experiences with mixed or negative emotions of not feeling *safe*, *comfortable* or *welcomed*, these memories are recalled as nostalgic *afterburns*.

This work also presented a step-by-step process of how a community engagement workshop can enhance oral history research. This oral history project is unique in that the outputs of historical research are not usually taken up and used by non-academic organizations and individuals outside of the heritage sector. Historians are also not overly known for engaging in

community-based knowledge mobilization to inform the research process before the research begins. A facilitated community engagement workshop with participant feedback and an online survey prioritized three research themes as an integral part of this oral history research project and interview questions: 1) Different Perspectives on the Future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village; 2) Evolution of Safety from Bars to Community Organizations & Spaces, and the Historical Relationship Between LGBTQ+ Communities and Toronto Police; and 3) Contemporary LGBTQ+ Senior Needs. They are important as they articulated the interests of a range of TCWV community organizations and affiliates about what they value and wanted to see explored in this oral history research project.

The benefits of a community engagement workshop for an oral history project, or any research project are multiple: It can inform questions being asked in oral history interviews; it provides opportunities to connect with individuals from relevant community sector groups for potential uptake and use within their organizations; it can inform future research projects; and most Canadian Tri-Council funding agencies now require a knowledge mobilization strategy as part of research grant applications. Incorporating a community engagement workshop can fulfill this criterion.

This oral history research project is also important as it reminds us of the significance of intergenerational transitions. The *binary generation* misses opportunities to connect our intergenerational histories if we continue to shackle ourselves, staring at the shadows of the past without acknowledging the queer changes of the present. The *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations miss opportunities to connect by being immersed only in the present without acknowledging the gay lessons of the past. These experiences and a perceived *gay identity* and *gay culture* linger on in the lives of older gays today. We sever the lineage of our histories if we ignore the teachings

and experiences of the previous generation's known cultures and self-identities.

Equally concerning is the act of conflating diverse generational experiences into a singular narrative that supposedly applies to all, thereby unjustly subjecting an entire generation to moralistic scrutiny and ridicule from either older or younger generations. This conflation can lead to erasure, revisions or inaccuracies of history. Intergenerational dialogue with the transmission of memories and understandings is essential to keep these histories of gay Toronto and TCWV from being revised, forgotten or misunderstood. Fostering open and respectful communication across the *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations can create a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of LGBTQ2+ histories.

This work contributes to a contemporary understanding of gay men from the *binary* generation living near the end of this generation's existence. I add my voice as part of this older gay generation to reflect on the past and present to understand how our perspectives intersect with evolving notions of sexuality and gender in younger generations. All oral history interview transcripts and most audio recordings (excluding those interviewees who wished to remain anonymous to protect their identities), along with a copy of this dissertation, will be donated to the ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives. This is to ensure that our *historical gay identity* still used today, along with our memories of gay Toronto and TCWV, will hopefully not be forgotten by subsequent generations during a potential period of replacement or erasure with the 'shorthand' identity of queer.

Although this is the conclusion of this dissertation, there is still work to be done. I see potential for future papers, conferences or public presentations, heritage walking tours, a potential book publication or podcasts describing the process and sharing these stories. I also hope this work encourages future use of community engagement workshops as part of oral

history research. Research theme #1 from the community engagement workshop about the future of TCWV may become particularly important. Perhaps, 10 to 20 years from now, future researchers may look back on this work to see how TCWV has changed over time. Perhaps they will examine how these *narrative predictions* can contribute to a comparative analysis of *the reality of those future changes*. Will condo development reshape TCWV to make it unrecognizable within the next decade? Will a gay community disappear from the area completely? Will bar culture in TCWV be dead? Will another community become associated with the neighbourhood?

This work also highlights the importance of future research that provides additional LGBTQ2+ narratives about this time period and further perspectives on the history of TCWV. A limitation of this work is my intentional focus on a cohort of older gay men without including lesbians, bisexuals, trans and queer individuals from across the *binary*, *neo-queer* and *fluid* generations. I focused solely on this particular cohort of *gay men* to explore specific *hindsight perspectives*. The original scope was to provide an important *reflective opportunity* for gay men themselves to personally address the criticized history of TCWV as predominantly a gay, middle-class, white, male, cisgender space. It is with this in mind that future research can hopefully draw from this current project to broaden, address and respond to these reflective narratives by including the voices of trans, lesbian, bisexual, and further racialized gay and queer histories as a follow-up to this project.

This work contributes to the understanding of intergenerational differences within the LGBTQ2+ community and the diminishment of the gay village in Toronto's Church-Wellesley neighbourhood. Using knowledge mobilization and community engagement facilitates the dissemination of my research findings. It enhances community input and awareness and

encourages the broader use of this oral history project. It is hoped that this work will also contribute to sustaining a historical gay identity and acknowledgement of its continued use by those who seek to replace gay with queer.

Language and histories around identity and culture can be complex. Meanings can vary significantly between individuals and generations. This is why it is important to recognize when a collective identity and culture holds extensive meaning within a particular generation. Obtaining, as accurately as possible, how and why a collective group of individuals self-identified at a particular time is also important – particularly within known and living history. Each generation is a product of the time they grew up, reflecting the prevalent attitudes of each of their eras. The history of each generation is ongoing as successive cohorts add their chapters to the constant narrative. As living identities and memories from one generation are passed on to the next, we hope they are not altered, ignored or erased.

As this work and interviewee Dan Benson suggest, *gay is diluting significantly*. It may continue until the faces and traces of us older self-identifying *gay* men disappear and are replaced with the next ‘older’ generation. Ultimately perhaps, *queer* will eventually replace *gay* and TCWV will become *officially* known as *The Queer Village*. I’m okay with that, as long as its *gay* history and *gay* identity are not forgotten. If it is – looking back with gay nostalgia – ‘Gary the Fairy’ will think it’s a little queer.

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Appendix A: A List of LGBTQ2+ Places, People, Events & Organizations in Toronto (1970s to 2024)

NOTE: In compiling the historical dates presented within this work, every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and reliability. *This is not an exhaustive list* but indicates many of the topics and places discussed within the process of this oral history research project. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent challenges in historical research, including the inevitable discrepancies and uncertainties that arise when piecing together the past. As such, some dates provided should imply a ‘circa’ statement indicating that while efforts may have been made to verify the accuracy of the information, some degree of approximation may exist. For some dates where it was impossible to find accuracy I have included (c.1980s) as an example. It is my hope that by acknowledging this uncertainty, readers will approach these historical sources with a nuanced understanding recognizing the complexities involved in comparing discrepancies in sources to which I have assigned a date as accurately as possible.

Italicized listings refer to LGBTQ2+ connections, but more specifically to gay connections based on the oral histories of this project. Again, this list is not exhaustive.

18 East [gay leather/denim bar (1981-1984) at 18 Eastern Avenue; owners purchased the Simcoe Hotel at 508 Eastern Avenue to become *The Toolbox* gay leather/denim bar (1987-2004)].

52 Division [Toronto police station (1978-Present) at 255 Dundas Street West where protests took place against Toronto police bathhouse raids in 1981].

77 Wellesley Street East / 501 Church Street [four-storey Gothic Revival style apartment building on southeast corner Church-Wellesley completed in 1926 with an internal courtyard off Church Street infilled for commercial use after renovations in the early 1980s:

77(A) Wellesley Street East (street level business): *Freshii* fast-casual restaurant (2014-Present); vacant (2013); *Country Style* coffee and *Yogen Früz* outlet (2002-2012).

77(B) Wellesley Street East (street level business): *Hero Certified Burgers* (2009-Present); *Lettieri Espresso Bar & Café* (2005-2009); *Wine Rack* (1995-2005); *Body Shop* beauty, bath, body & skin care (1993-1995).

77(C) *Hair'n After* hair salon (1994-2005); *Wine Rack* (2005-Present).

501 Church Street is currently *Friendly Stranger* cannabis shop (2019-Present), vacant (2013-2019), *Priape* gay retail store and adult sex toys (2009-2013) « *Priape* was previously at 465 Church Street, upper (1998-2009) » *Bar 501* (1993-2007); *The Flowerman* florist (1988-1993); vacant (1984-1988), *Chateau-Gai Wines* (1975-1982).

501(A) Church Street (street level business): *Royal Bank* (2016-Present); *7-24 Movies & More* video rental store, with an adult section renting gay porn (1995-2013); vacant (1992-1993); *Splendeurs Restaurant & Bakery* (1987-1992)].

100 Wellesley [28-storey apartment building at 100 Wellesley Street East (1971-Present); known as *Plaza 100*, and jokingly dubbed ‘stack a fag’ or ‘stack of fags’ referring to the majority of gay men who lived in the building, especially during the 1970s to the early 2000s].

101 Dewson Street Collective [founded in 1985 and located at 101 Dewson Street in Toronto through the end of the 1980s, it was a significant hub for lesbian and gay activism and community building in the 1980s, particularly for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) in the LGBTQ2+ community; co-established by lesbian/feminist activist *Makeda Silvera* with her partner *Stephanie Martin* becoming a living and social space for a collective of lesbian and gay activists and organizers such as *Debbie Douglas* and *Courtney McFarlane*].

519 Community Centre [(1976-Present) previously named the *519 Church Street Community Centre* (1976-2010), a charitable, non-profit organization, run by the City of Toronto that operates in the Church-Wellesley Village, established in 1975].

524-540 Church Street [mixed retail and residential; long-standing businesses in the building include: *Super Freshmart*, 24-hour independent grocery store (1987-2017) at 524 Church Street, downsized in 2013 reportedly affected by 2011 opening of Loblaws Maple Leaf Gardens, closed in 2017; *Reither's Fine Foods International*, specialty meats and international foods (1980-2012) at 530 Church Street, closed after owner Peter Reither retired; *Baskin-Robbins*, ice cream parlor chain (2005-Present) at 536 Church Street; *Café California* [restaurant & bar (1996-2018), 538 Church Street; now *Cherie Bistro* fine dining restaurant (2019-Present); apartments/condo units located on third floor (1980-Present) with address 540 Church Street].

Affirm [support organization formed in 1982 to promote acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in the United Church of Canada].

AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) [Toronto activist group founded in 1987 and continued into the 1990s in response to the Canadian government's medical inaction in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; name adopted to avoid confusion with *ACT* (AIDS Committee of Toronto) formed in 1983) and *ACT UP* (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) international activist and political group, formed in 1987, advocating change in government and public policies around HIV/AIDS].

AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) [founded in 1983 by community activists and volunteers in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, formerly at 66 Wellesley Street (1983-1993), longstanding location at 399 Church Street (1993-2015) and at 543 Yonge Street (2015-Present)].

AIDS Memorial [at first, a temporary memorial, displayed on Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in 1988 in *Cawthra Park* (now *Barbara Hall Park*) to acknowledge those who died from an AIDS-related illness in the local community; gay activist *Michael Lynch* initiated a permanent memorial, designed by Patrick Fahn, and opened in the park in 1993].

Alex Korn [straight entrepreneur who owned The Waldorf Astoria Hotel at 80 Charles Street, East where the original *Boots* gay bar without *Bud's* gay bar was located in 1980 before moving to The Selby Hotel at 592 Sherbourne Street. Korn had been involved in the gay bar business since 1983 when he and Ward Hagar opened *Chaps* (1983-1992), *Woody's* (1989-Present) and *Sailor*, which opened next to *Woody's* (1994-Present); under Korn's ownership, *Woody's* became involved in fundraising for AIDS-related causes in the 1990s; Korn received an Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award at the Pink Toronto Awards].

Alexander Wood [a statue was erected in 2005 near the corner of Church and Alexander Streets of Alexander Wood (1772-1844). Wood was a Scottish merchant and magistrate in the town of York (now Toronto) who was accused in a gay sex scandal in 1810 of overzealously examining men's genitalia in the rape case of a woman who scratched her assailant's penis. Wood's property became known as 'Molly's Bush' (Molly, being the term for homosexual at the time) and is now part of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. The statue was controversially removed and destroyed by the Church-Wellesley Business Improvement Area in 2022 to recognize links to a colonial past. The controversy questions Wood's involvement as secretary with a group called "The Society for Converting and Civilizing the Indians and Propagating the Gospel Among Destitute Settlers in Upper Canada." The group was raising funds for a missionary school that later became part of the Indian Residential School System in Canada, twenty-nine years after Wood's death].

Allan Gardens [formerly known as Toronto Horticultural Gardens and opened in 1860 on land donated by William Geroge Allan to the Toronto Horticultural Society. It was renamed in 1901 in honour of Allan after his death the same year. Known as a cruising area for men to meet other men for sex throughout the twentieth-century, particularly when a public washroom was located on the property where gay men were spied on by police and arrested].

Amsterdam Coffee & Bake Shop [started as De Jong's Bakery in 1956 at 483 Church Street (downstairs), with baker Jack De Jong living 483 A (upstairs); the other half of building at street level occupied by Waverly Cigar and Smoke Shop at 483 ½ Church Street (downstairs) until 1969, then sitting vacant (1970-1973); Amsterdam opened in 1974 expanding into 483 ½ Church Street (downstairs) with the combined properties now listed as 483 Church Street (downstairs) and Art Custom Tailor now 483 ½ Church Street (upstairs); Amsterdam closed by 1984; *This Ain't The Rosedale Library* independent bookstore (1986-2008); 483 Church Street ground floor divided into two again with About Cheese cheese-shop at 483A (2008-2013) becoming All the Best Fine Foods specialty grocer (2013-2016) and Eyes on Church optometrist at 483B (2008-2018) now at 530 Church Street (2018-Present); properties combined again as Craig's Cookies at 483 Church Street (2019-Present) owned by gay entrepreneur Craig Pike].

Anita Bryant [U.S. singer and political activist known for anti-gay views who was invited to Toronto to speak in 1978 by Canadian evangelical Baptist minister, politician and leader of the Christian Freedom Party, Ken Campbell, and was met by thousands of anti-Anita Bryant protesters in Toronto, including a march up Yonge Street and at the People's Church in North York where Bryant spoke].

ArQuives [Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives (2018-Present) at The Village Centre building at Church and Wellesley streets; formerly *Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* (1993-2018), *Canadian Gay Archives* (1975-1993), and *Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives* (1973-1975) founded by *Body Politic* editorial collective (known as *Pink Triangle Press*)].

AYA [social support group for Black gay and bisexual men throughout the 1990s, founded in 1994, and successor of *Zami* (1984-1989), the first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality; *Zami* is the West Indian Creole word for lesbian; first meeting at *101 Dewson Street Collective* (1984); moved to *519 Church*

Street Community Centre (1985-1989) and included mostly Black, West Indian and Afro-Caribbean gay men as Black lesbians became increasingly involved in Black feminist issues, forming separate groups like the Black Women's Collective; in 1989, many Zami members formed the *Black CAP* - Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (1989-Present) and many AYA members became members of Black CAP when AYA came to an end].

AZT [antiretroviral medication, known as azidothymidine, originally developed in the 1960s as a cancer drug and used to treat HIV/AIDS, became a controversial drug with severe side-effects, but only HIV/AIDS treatment until subsequent antiretrovirals were developed].

Back Door Gym and Sauna (c1980-1981) at 12 ½ Elm Street (back entrance); raided by Toronto Police during Operation Soap on February 5, 1981].

Badali's [independent grocery market at 487 Church Street (1983-1998); previously *Pusateri's Fruit Market* (1975-1983); Dale's Mart convenience store (1999-2001); followed by various gay -2010); Elevate Bar and Lounge (upper, 2009-2010); Statler's Bar/Statler's Piano Bar & Cabaret (2010-2020); The Well Bar & Restaurant (2020-Present)].

Badlands [denim/cowboy-themed gay bar (1990-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street (upstairs) after owners of *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992), originally two floors downstairs and upstairs, opened upstairs as *Badlands* with the popularity of country-line-dancing, maintaining *Chaps* on downstairs floor].

Bank of Montreal [Canadian financial institution branch office at 492 Church Street location (2008-Present); trans icon *Enza "Supermodel" Anderson* known for working as Financial Service Coordinator at this branch; previously American Apparel (2006-2008); BodyBodyWear (2000-2006)].

Bar 501 [gay bar at 501 Church Street (1993-2007), previously Flowerman florist (1987-1993); vacant (1984-1988); Chateau-Gai Wines (1975-1982); currently Friendly Stranger cannabis shop (2019-Present); previously vacant (2013-2019), *Priape* gay retail store and adult sex toys (2009-2013)].

Barbara Hall [Canadian lawyer who provided legal aid for gay men during the Toronto bathhouse raids, last mayor of Toronto (1994-1997) before amalgamation, and Chief Commissioner of Ontario Human Rights Commission (2005-2015)].

Barbara Hall Park [neighborhood park (2014-Present) beside 519 Community Centre, previously Cawthra Park (1977-2014) and before that a Loblaws Grocery Store and parking lot (1961-1976) at 513 Church Street].

The Barn (1976-2012) bar/dance club at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street); *Jojo's* (1975, upstairs) mixed lesbian and gay bar with *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) gay bar; *The Barn* (c1976-1991, upstairs) gay dance club; *Club Ivory* (1985, downstairs) lesbian piano bar; after short attempt with *Club Ivory* returned to

Stables (1985-1991, downstairs) gay bar. Later became *The Barn Complex* (1991-2012, upstairs & downstairs) gay dance club. The property was owned and operated by Janko Naglic (1946-2004), a gay entrepreneur who was previously hired as bookkeeper and bartender by Bob Grimson (1916-2011) the owner of *The Quest*. Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as *Tanks* (1980-1981), *Sapho* (1981), *Together* (1981-1985), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986), *The Bulldog* as mixed lesbian and gay bar (c1986) and *The 457* (c1986-1997) all at the same location at 457 Church Street].

The Barracks [gay leather bathhouse (1974-2005) at 56 Widmer Street; raided by Toronto Police on December 9, 1978, prior to being raided again by Toronto Police with Operation Soap on February 5, 1981].

Bathhouses Toronto [*Oak Leaf Steam Baths* (c1941-c2015) at 216-218 Bathurst Street; *Beverley Steam Baths* (1949-1974) at 137 Beverley Street; *Romans Sauna Bath* then *Romans II* after a fire in 1971 (1964-1989) at 742 Bay Street; *International Steam Bath* (1968-c1980s) at 485 Spadina Avenue; *Library* (1971-1974) at 5 Wellesley Street West; *Terminus* (1974-1979) at 600 Bay Street; *Club Toronto Baths* (1973-2010) at 231 Mutual Street, became Oasis Aqualounge, “a sexually progressive social club for adults 19+” (2010-Present); *The Barracks* (1974-2005) at 56 Widmer Street; *Richmond Street Health Emporium* (1975-1981) at 260 Richmond Street East; *Hot Tub Club* (1978-1979) at 7-9 Isabella Street, became *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992) with *Badlands* (1990-1992) denim/cowboy-themed bar/dance club; *Back Door Gym and Sauna* (c1980-1981) at 12 ½ Elm Street (back entrance); *Spa on Maitland* (1990-1997) at 66 Maitland Street became *Steamworks* with new entrance and address 540 Church Street (1997-Present); St. Marc’s Spa (1991-2010) at 543 Yonge Street, fourth-floor; *Spa Excess* (1998-Present) at 105 Carlton Street].

Bathhouse Raids [although bathhouse raids occurred prior to 1981 by Toronto Police, Operation Soap is what sparked the most pushback when Toronto police raided four gay bathhouses (5 February 1981), *Club Toronto Baths* (1973-2010), *Romans II* – previously *Romans Sauna Bath* before a fire in 1971 (1964-1989), *The Barracks* (1974-2005), *Richmond Street Health Emporium* (1975-1981), followed by further raids in mid-June 1981, and the Pussy Palace raid at *Club Toronto Baths* (14 September 2000) raided on the second anniversary celebration of the first-ever, open-to-the-public bathhouse for women and transgender people of all sexual identities] at *Club Toronto Baths* (1973-2010) which became Oasis Aqualounge, “a sexually progressive social club for adults 19+” (2010-Present)].

Bemelmans [trendy ‘New-York-style’ bar & restaurant (1977-1994) at 83 Bloor Street, West; frequented by gay clientele].

Beverley Steam Baths [bathhouse (1949-1974) at 137 Beverley Street; not formally a gay bathhouse, it provided a meeting place for gay, bi, and queer men; located a few properties south of the family historic home of Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King who lived at 147 Beverley Street with his parents while studying at the University of Toronto between 1893 and 1896)].

Bill Davis (1929-2021) [Progressive Conservative Premier of Ontario (1971-1985)].

Black CAP [Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (1989-Present) community support and educational organization in response to HIV/AIDs in Toronto's Black, African and Caribbean communities].

Blackcat [Mykel Hall, known as DJ Blackcat, is considered one of the first disc jockeys to spin R&B, hip hop, and reggae dance music for Toronto's Black queer communities].

Black Eagle Toronto [gay leather/denim bar, originally located at 459 Church Street (1994-1997), moved to 457 Church Street (1997-Present)].

Blockorama [a stage presenting musical performances that began in order to address the lack of African, Black and Caribbean representation at Toronto Pride events (1999-Present); organized by a group of volunteer professional DJs, stage and visual artists known as Blackness Yes! (1998-Present)].

Bob Grimson (1916-2011) [gay entrepreneur who owned *The Quest* gay bar (1973-1984) at 665 Yonge Street; Grimson became mentor and friend of *Janko Naglic* (1946-2004) whom he hired as bookkeeper and bartender at The Quest before Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as *Jo-Jo's*, *Les Cavalier* and *The Barn & Stables* at 83 Granby Street/418 Church Street, along with *Tanks* (1980-1981), *Sapho* (1981), *Together* (1981-1985), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986), The Bulldog and The 457 all at the same location at 457 Church Street. Janko was murdered in 2004].

Body Politic [gay liberation activism-based Canadian monthly magazine (1971-1987)].

Boots & Bud's at Selby Hotel [*Boots*, gay dance bar (1981-2000), *Bud's*, gay bar (Original Boots – without Bud's – was at 80 Charles Street East at Waldorf Astoria Hotel (1980), later an apartment building and condo. The Waldorf Astoria Hotel was owned by straight entrepreneur Alex Korn who opened gay bars Chaps ((1983-1992) and Woody's (1989-Present). Boots & Buds location was originally the Selby Hotel Bar at 592 Sherbourne Street (1912-1981) becoming popular with gay clientele starting in 1970 and a gay bar (1976-1981); Boots, gay dance bar, & Bud's (became Kurbash) at The Selby (1981-2000)].

Brent Hawkes [gay activist and former senior pastor of Toronto's Metropolitan Community Church openly affirming LGBTQ2+ parishioners, performing a loophole marriage ceremony of two same-sex couples in 2001 based on publishing legal banns for three weeks. This was considered a legal marriage without requiring government permission before legal same-sex marriage in Ontario in 2003].

Brothers Restaurant [family-style restaurant (1979-2000) at 698 Yonge Street frequented by gay clientele who remember a popular waitress named Vula].

Buddies Backroom Bar [gay bar (1978-1987) at 370 Church Street; later just called Buddy's and was in same building as *Crispins* restaurant (1978-1987)].

Buddies In Bad Times Theatre [longest-running LGBTQ2+ theatre in the world (1978-Present), 12 Alexander Street; Tallulah's Cabaret theatre company at Buddies has been producing LGBTQ2+ productions since 1979; Buddies Bar, often just called 'Buddies,' is open on weekends to raise money for theatre programming and community events].

The Bulldog [mixed lesbian and gay bar (c1986) at 457 Church Street; the property was owned and operated by gay entrepreneur *Janko Naglic* (1946-2004); previously *Together Again* (1985-c1986), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together* (1981-1985), *Sapho* (1981) and *Tanks* (1980-1981); became *The 457* (c1986-1997) then *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar occupied the space, moving from 459 Church Street next-door].

Bumpkins [fine dining restaurant at 21 Gloucester Street, (1971- Present), frequented by gay clientele, renovated with a grand re-opening in 2012].

Byzantium [Restaurant and martini bar, 499 Church Street (1993-2016), then *Glad Day Bookshop* (2016-Present) with new coffee shop-cocktail bar included as an event space; previously Bersani & Carlevalle Fine Foods Restaurant (1987-1993); Sweet Stuff Candy Store (1985-1987); Mini-Delights Delicatessen (1981-1985)].

Cabbagetown Group Softball League (CGSL) [non-profit gay & lesbian organization, founded in 1975-Present].

Café California [restaurant & bar (1996-2018) at 538 Church Street; now Cherie Bistro fine dining restaurant (2019-Present)].

Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives [(1973-1975) founded by *Body Politic* editorial collective (known as Pink Triangle Press), renamed Canadian Gay Archives (1975-1993), Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (1993-2018), and currently ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives (2018-Present), 65 Wellesley Street and 34 Isabella Street].

Canadian Human Rights Code [in 1996 an amendment was made to the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination; a decade earlier in 1986, the Ontario Human Rights Code was amended to include protection from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation].

Carole Pope [lesbian British-born Canadian rock singer known for homo-erotic song lyrics; found popular success as lead singer of the band Rough Trade in the 1980s].

Carriage House [Motor Hotel dance bar (1965-1973) switched to gay dance bar and disco (1973-1978) at 300 Jarvis Street. Known for disputes over conflicting male/female dress codes. The first gay male beauty pageant, the Mr. Club Contest was held there in December 1973].

Casey House [originally a hospice for people dying of AIDS and now a hospital to care for those living with HIV at 9 Huntley Street opened in 1988 and expanded to 119 Isabella Street and a renovated house that fronts Jarvis Street, completed in 2017; founded by June Callwood, named for her son Casey who died in a car accident].

Cavaliers [formally Les Cavaliers at 418 Church Street, downstairs, originally opened as a restaurant in 1959; gay clientele (1975-1985) when purchased by *Janko Naglic* and converted to *The Barn*].

The Cellar [gay ‘bathhouse’ with no saunas or baths (1995-2019) described more as a ‘sex-dungeon’ with rows of maze-style halls leading to rooms, lockers, and showers at 78 Wellesley Street, East; previously Centennial Billiards (1969 -1993); now Pew Pew airsoft gun recreational shooting (2020-Present)].

Chaps [gay bar (1983-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street, originally two floors with a downstairs bar and restaurant dance space upstairs; co-owned by straight entrepreneur *Alex Korn* and gay entrepreneur Ward Hagar (1942-1984). Later the upstairs was opened as Badlands denim/cowboy-themed gay bar (1990-1992) with popularity of country line-dancing, maintaining Chaps on downstairs floor; then Power gay bar (1992-1995); Rabba’s grocery store (1996-Present); upstairs was previously Hot Tub Club gay bathhouse (1978-1979) where a bathhouse raid by Toronto police took place in 1979 as a precursor to Operation Soap bathhouse raids in 1981].

Charles McNaughton (1911-1987) [Progressive Conservative Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (1958-1973) and Chairman of the Ontario Racing Commission responsible for firing racehorse jockey, John Damien, for being gay in 1975].

CHAT [Community Homophile Association of Toronto (1971-1977), founded by George Hislop, Canadian gay activist and businessman; first meeting at Holy Trinity Church, 10 Trinity Square connected to Hagerman Hall, 14 Hagerman Street, where other meetings and gay dances were held; first service organization location at 6 Charles Street, E., third floor (1971); first gay community centre, 58 Cecil Street (1971); relocated to 201 Church Street with administrative and counselling offices at 223 Church Street (1973)].

Cherie Bistro [fine dining restaurant (2019-Present), previously *Café California* restaurant & bar (1988-2018) at 538 Church Street].

Cherry Beach [lakeside beach park at the foot of Cherry Street on the eastern part of Toronto Harbor where Toronto police were known to take gay men to assault them illegally by physically gay-bashing them in the 1960s to 1980s].

Chris Bearchell (1953-2007) [lesbian activist and writer, often ‘only lesbian’ writer for *Body Politic* (1975-1987) and collective member (1978-1987), co-founder of LOOT – Lesbians Organization of Toronto (1976-1980), her statement, “No more shit” became recurring protest chant at bathhouse raids marches (1981), member, and first Chair of the CLGO – Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (founded in 1975), advocate for Maggie’s sex workers rights group (founded in 1985)].

Church Street Public School [established in 1872, three schools have been on the property with the current school built in 1957 with several additions since and most recent expansion in 2010 at 83 Alexander Street at Church Street (1872-Present)].

City Park [three, 14-storey tower apartments (1956-Present), bounded by Church, Wood and Alexander Streets, where many gay residents lived, particularly from the late 1960s to early 2000s].

Charles Dobi [gay activist and writer; he and his partner Peter Zorzi were two of the founders of the *Body Politic*, and Toronto Area Gays (TAG)].

Charly's [gay disco - upstairs St. Charles Tavern (1978-1981) at 488 Yonge Street; previously Club Triangle (1977-1978) and Maygay Dance Club (1971-1977); became Y-Not (1985-1987) and later Empire Dance Bar (1988-1992)].

Chez Moi [lesbian dance club (1984-1989) at 30 Hayden Street].

Chicken and Chicken Hawk [slang terms, popular in the 1970s and 1980s, to describe a younger gay man who would be pursued for sex by an older gay man known as a Chicken Hawk; now often referred to as a Daddy in relation to pursuing or interest from a Twink, a popular slang word to describe a younger gay man, often in late teens to twenties, with a slimmer physique and youthful appearance].

Church Street Espresso [neighborhood espresso-based coffee shop (2014-Present), previously named Zaza Espresso Bar (2014), previously Java Jive coffee shop (2006-2014), Pam's Coffee & Tea (1996-2006) at 585 Church Street].

Clayton Ruby (1942-2022) [Canadian civil rights lawyers who defended gay men who were arrested during the 1981 Toronto police bathhouse raids].

Club 101 [alternative dance bar (1984-1986); previously Jarvis House Tavern (1963-1983); Hotel Jarvis (1929-1963); McFarlane's Hotel (1898-1929); became Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1989) hosting weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night Rock & Roll Fag Bar (1988-1989) at 99-101 Jarvis Street].

Club 511 [private drag club (1968-1972), previously Soul City club (late 1960s-1970) catering to mostly Black clientele before owner Harry Holst turned it into a gay venue; Women paid higher admission price than men and trans people paid even more; became short-lived The Monkey Club Discotheque (c1975) at 511 Yonge Street].

Club Toronto Baths [gay bathhouse (1973-2010) at 231 Mutual Street; site of Pussy Palace police raid at Club Toronto Baths (14 September 2000) on the second anniversary celebration of the first-ever, open-to-the-public bathhouse for women and transgender people of all sexual identities; became Oasis Aqualounge, "a sexually progressive social club for adults 19+" (2010-Present)].

Club Colby's [gay dance club at 5 St. Joseph Street (1986-2000); previously Katrina's gay bar (1978-1982); became Bachelors (2001) then Five gay dance club (2001-2002); in same building at 9 St. Joseph Street (upstairs) Epic Fitness (2002-2007); L3 Fitness (2007-2008); 5-9 St. Joseph Street became FIVE Condos (2015-Present)].

Club Manhattan [urban music dance club (1990s to early 2000s) weekly Saturday nights for mostly Black gay, bisexual, and non-labelling men who have sex with men at 19 Balmuto Street; now Crystal Blu Condos (2011-Present)].

Cornelius [gay leather/denim dance club (c1975-1986) at 579 Yonge Street].

Country Style [donut shop (1977-1985) at 558 Yonge Street, popular place for meeting up with friends, gay cruising and “crotch watching” spot of passersby on the street at eye level to the elevated seats in front of the plate glass window facing Yonge Street].

Courtney McFarlane [gay activist, visual artist, and poet; founding member of *AYA* (1994), a social support group for Black gay and bisexual men throughout the 1990s; and Black Yes! organizing committee member for *Blockorama* events at Toronto Pride starting in 1999].

Craig Russell (1948-1990) [Russell Craig Eadie was a Canadian drag queen, better known as Craig Russell, who gained an international following for famous female celebrity impersonations and starring in movies *Outrageous!* (released in 1977) and *Too Outrageous!* (released in 1987)].

Crews & Tangos [current LGBTQ2+ drag and dance bar (1994-Present) at 508-510 Church Street; originally two separate lesbian and gay bars (1994-2004) that merged Tango (later Tangos with an ‘s’) lesbian bar (508 Church Street) with Crews gay bar and nightclub (510 Church Street) in 2004, briefly closed in 2019 and reopened in 2010; previously *Ghetto Fag* dance club (c1992)].

Crispins [popular fine dining restaurant (1978-1987) at 64-66 Gerrard Street, East, frequented by gay clientele; in same building as *Buddies Backroom Bar* (1978-1987) owned by *George Hislop*].

Croissant Tree [brunch & lunch restaurant (2000-Present) at 625 Church Street].

Cumbrae’s [butcher shop (1993-2017) at 481 Church Street; previously Simon De Groot Meat Market (1955-1993); vacant (2017-2020); then Five And Flower Cannabis (2020); vacant (2020-Present)].

David’s [gay, lesbian & bisexual bar/dance club (1975-1977) at 16 Phipps Street closed after a fire in early hours celebrating New Year 1978].

Debbie Douglas [lesbian activist; member of the 101 Dewson Street Collective; founding member with Douglas Stewart of Zami (1984-1989), first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality].

Dennis Findlay [gay activist, educator, chair of the *Right to Privacy Committee* (RTPC) - previously called the December 9 Legal Defence Fund (1978) formed after the Barracks bathhouse raid on December 9, 1978, prior to Operation Soap (1981) that sparked the most pushback when Toronto police raided four gay bathhouses on February 5, 1981 – renamed RTPC in 1979 and dissolved in 1991; Findlay founded Gay Court Watch (1982–late 1980s), volunteer

group who recruited lawyers and legal resources, raised funds, and observed gay-related trials; also served as President of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (2017-2021) now ArQuives: Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives].

Devon Restaurant [Chinese restaurant (1964-2004), 556 Church Street; previously Devon Tea Room (1940-1964), Devon Lunch (1934-1940); became Kaiseki Sakura Japanese resto-bar (2005-2011), Oishii Japanese bar & restaurant (2011-2013), Chou Izakaya Japanese restaurant (2013-2104), Tacoritto Mexicana restaurant (2014-2020), Zeba Berlin Donar (2020-2021), currently Amor Fusion Donar & Kebab (2021-Present) at 556 Church Street].

Dewson Street Collective [founded in 1985 and located at 101 Dewson Street in Toronto through the end of the 1980s, it was a significant hub for lesbian and gay activism and community building in the 1980s, particularly for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) in the LGBTQ2+ community; co-established by lesbian/feminists activist *Makeda Silvera* with her partner *Stephanie Martin* becoming a living and social space for a collective of lesbian and gay activists and organizers such as *Debbie Douglas* and *Courtney McFarlane*].

Dignity [support organization founded in 1969 in San Diego, California, forming Dignity Canada Dignité in 1981 to promote acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in the Roman Catholic Church].

Douglas Stewart [gay activist; founding member of *Zami* (1984-1989), first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality; founding Executive Director of the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (*Black CAP*), community support and educational organization in response to HIV/AIDs in Toronto's Black, African and Caribbean communities (1989-Present)].

DQ [drag show/variety show fundraisers to support HIV/AIDS care, between 1987-2007].

Dudes [gay bar (1977-1982), later known as Crowbar with laneway entrance behind Parkside Tavern (1964-1986) at 10 Breadalbane Street].

Dudley's Hardware [hardware, paint and home décor store (1936-Present) at 511 Church Street].

Ed Jackson [gay activist, counselor at CHAT - Community Homophile Association (1971-1972) and committee member of Toronto Gay Action (early 1970s), collective member and editor of *Body Politic* (1974-1986), a founder and director of community education at ACT – AIDS Committee of Toronto (1985-1992), board member and director of Toronto Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies (1990-2002), director of program development at CATIE – Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (2008-2015), independent queer community historian, and early and ongoing supporter of Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (now ArQuives)].

EGALE [Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) Canada, established in 1986 as an advocacy group dedicated to promoting equality for LGBTQ2+ individuals and their families].

El Convento Rico [Latino nightclub (1992-Present) that has welcomed Toronto's Latin American 2SLGBTQ+ communities with dancing and drag performances, 750 College Street].

Empire Diner [restaurant and after-hours café (1979-1985), 678 Yonge Street, opened late to serve bars/clubs party crowd, large gay clientele].

“Enough Is Enough: Stop Police Violence” [slogan written on a banner and remembered in an iconic photo taken during a midnight march (6 February 1981) the following night after the ‘Operation Soap’ Toronto Police bathhouse raids (5 February 1981)].

Enza “Supermodel” Anderson [is a trans activist, media personality, journalist, and Ontario politician when Anderson unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Toronto in 2000 and Toronto City Council in 2003 and 2010; Enza also known for working as Financial Service Coordinator at the Bank of Montreal branch in The Village on Church Street].

Flash [gay member's strip and dance club (2011-Present), previously Bigliardi's Seafood & Steakhouse (1977-2009), 463 Church Street].

Fly [gay dance nightclub (1999-2014), reopened as Fly 2.0 (2014-2019) at 6 Gloucester Street].

Fly by Night [lesbian bar (1979-1981) at the Stage 212 Hotel, 212 Dundas Street, East; previously known as the Side Action Lounge which earlier welcomed both lesbian and gay men].

Fran's Restaurant [24-hour diner, small chain of Toronto restaurants opened in 1940 with popular gay hangout eating place at 20 College Street (1950-Present), especially after nearby late-night/early-morning gay bars and dance clubs closed].

The Fraternity [Professional Gay Men's Business Networking and Social Club in Toronto founded in 1989].

Fruit Cocktail [a fundraising cabaret event of musical and comedy skits started in 1982 to raise money for various gay, lesbian, and other community groups with the founding of the Lesbian & Gay Community Appeal, now Community One Foundation; iconic five Fruits, alternating over the years as Kiwi, Pineapple, Banana, Blueberry, Orange, Plum, Apple and Tomato as Foundation mascots and continue to attend fundraisers and community events].

Gary Kinsmen [gay activist and one of Canada's leading academic sociologist focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans issues; writer for *Body Politic*; founder of Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere and Lesbian and Gay Pride Day Committee Toronto (1981)].

GATE [Gay Alliance Towards Equality, one of the first Canadian gay liberation organizations, (1971-1980)].

GAY [Gay Alliance at York, gay and lesbian student social group, formerly YUHA - York University Homophile Association (founded in 1970) became the Lesbian and Gay Alliance at

York, then Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Alliance at York, and today is TBLGAY Transgendered, Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Alliance at York (1970-Present)].

Gay Asians Toronto (GAT) [social organization for political advocacy and support of gay Asians in Toronto (1980-2002)].

GCDC dances [Gay Community Dance Committee, a volunteer-run fundraising organization for various lesbian and gay community groups that divided the profits among participating groups. GCDC hosted dances in Toronto at the Masonic Temple Hall, 888 Yonge Street between 1981-1992].

Gay Court Watch (GCW) [a volunteer group who recruited lawyers and legal resources, raised funds, and observed gay-related trials, founded by Dennis Findlay in 1982 and continuing to the late 1980s].

Gay Youth Toronto [first gay community support program offered at The 519 Church Street Community Centre in 1976 when weekly Tuesday night group meetings offered LGBTQ2+ youth an opportunity to connect and organize events such as dances; became Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto (late 1970s)].

George Hislop (1927-2005) [Canadian gay activist and businessman, founder of CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto), unsuccessfully ran for Toronto City Council (1980) with support of then-Mayor John Sewell with loss attributed to Toronto Police Association openly campaigning against both Hislop and Sewell; first and successive President of Hassle Free Clinic (1980 -2005); sued federal government of Canada for same-sex survivor's Canada pension benefits after his partner, Ronald Shearer, died in 1986, but Hislop was not within the 1998 cut-off date; Hislop filed class-action lawsuit that went to Supreme Court of Canada, but died two years before the successful final judgement (2007) granting Canada Pension Plan benefits for all same-sex partners].

George Smith (1935-1994) [Canadian gay activist, writer, educator; chair of the Right to Privacy Committee after bathhouse raids in 1981; founding member of Toronto's AIDS ACTION NOW activist group founded in 1987 and continued into the 1990s in response to the Canadian government's medical inaction in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; co-developed the Treatment Information Exchange (TIE) project for people living with HIV/AIDS leading to the AIDS Treatment Information Service for doctors and patients across Canada; member of the National Advisory Committee on AIDS].

George Smitherman [openly-gay owner of *Prints on Church* camera film-to-print photo developer (c1984-1998); first openly gay Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (1999-2010), Cabinet Minister and Deputy Premier. He unsuccessfully ran in 2018 Toronto municipal election against openly lesbian and successful Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam].

George's Play [gay, drag and Karaoke bar (2002-2012), renamed Play in 2010 at 504 Church Street].

Gerald Hannon (1944-2022) [gay activist and journalist, collective member and principal photographer of *Body Politic* (1974-1986), wrote controversial article “Men Loving Boys Loving Men” for *Body Politic* (1977) which led to obscenity charges against Hannon and *Body Politic* that were eventually dropped after the publication was acquitted in 1979; part-time journalism instructor at Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University) whose contract was not renewed after a *Toronto Sun* article “Ryerson prof: I’m a hooker” (1995) detailed Hannon’s admission to also working as a sex worker].

Ghetto Fag [gay dance club (c1992) at 508-510 Church Street; became *Crews & Tangos* current LGBTQ2S+ drag and dance bar (1994-Present); previously two separate gay and lesbian bars (1994-2004) that merged Tango (later Tangos with an ‘s’) lesbian bar (508 Church Street) with Crews gay bar and nightclub (510 Church Street) in 2004, briefly closed in 2019 and reopened in 2010].

Ginger [Vietnamese cuisine restaurant (2004-Present), now 546 Church Street; previously *Prints On Church* with former location address at 544 Church Street beside Second Cup at 548 Church Street. The restaurant was one of the expanded establishments that eliminated *The Steps* in 2004].

Glad Day [oldest LGBTQ2+ bookshop in the world, opened in 1970 by Jearld Moldenhauer out of his 65 Kendall Avenue apartment (1970-1972); home at 4 Kensington Ave (1972-1973); 139 Seaton Street (1974-1975); first retail store at 4 Collier Street (1975-1978), then 598A Yonge Street (1978-2016) for much of its history before moving to its current location at 499 Church Street in 2016; previously Byzantium Restaurant (1993-2016)].

Golden Diner [family restaurant (2001-Present), previously Lucky Stage Restaurant (1990-2001) Stage Coffee Shoppe (1976-1990), and Studio Coffee Shoppe (1968-1976), 105 Carlton Street].

Grindr [a location-based social networking and online dating/hookup application (2009-Present) targeted towards gay, bisexual and transgender people, with some also using Scruff as an alternative application (2010-Present)].

Guardian Angels [international, non-profit volunteer organization of unarmed civilians patrolling streets for crime prevention, including gay-bashing, known for wearing identifiable red berets; Toronto chapter opened in the mid-1980s with failed attempts to sustain it in Toronto in the 1990s and early 2000s].

Guerilla [a Toronto grassroots counterculture newspaper (1970-1973) with locations, first briefly at 17 St. Joseph Street, a few months later at 463 Dundas Street West and at 201 Queen Street East by 1971; periodically published gay content from some who became members of the *Body Politic* collective].

Hanlan’s Point [a Toronto Island beach (now a clothing optional beach) that, as early as the 1940s, attracted many from gay men due to its secluded area. Gay and Lesbian picnics were held there during the 1970s and remains a popular LGBTQ2+ clothing-optional beach area officially recognized by the City of Toronto in 2023].

Harold Desmarais [gay community organizer, co-founder Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (1975), known as Sister Atrociata von Tasteless as member of gay charitable group Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, secretary of GCDC dances (1982-1992), board member and volunteer at AIDS Committee of Toronto and The Toronto People With AIDS Foundation (1990s), and iconic Grape and Pineapple as one of the Fruits in Fruit Cocktail].

Harvey Hamburg [gay Toronto lawyer and activist; co-founder of the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal of Toronto (LGCA) established in 1980, and the Fruit Cocktail fundraising cabaret event of musical performances and skits started in 1982 to raise money for various gay, lesbian, and other community groups with the founding of LGCA; Harvey, along with Jeremy Vincent were two of the longstanding iconic five Fruits, which included over the years the Kiwi, Pineapple, Banana, Blueberry, Orange, Plum, Apple and Tomato as event mascots; LGCA is now Community One Foundation and continues with fundraisers and community events].

Hassle Free Clinic [originally a street clinic started in 1973 by Rochdale Free Clinic counsellors offering drug crisis counselling and medical treatment, moved to 556 Church Street (upper) in 1980 offering HIV/AIDS education and prevention counselling and anonymous HIV testing when it became available in 1985. In 2004 the clinic moved to 66 Gerrard Street where it continues today].

Heavens [male strippers for predominantly gay male clientele on upstairs floor at Brass Rail strip club during the late 1980s and early 1990s until Remington's gay strip club became popular; Heaven renamed Upper Brass featuring nude female strippers].

Hola [Latino community-based volunteer-run social support group for Latin-America Spanish-speaking LGBTQ2+ people founded in 1991 by Salvadoran brothers Samuel Lopez (interviewee) and Mario Raul; early focus on educating Toronto's Latin-American about HIV/AIDS, now including immigration and human rights (1991-Present)].

Homo Hop [the rename, in 1980, of the semi-regular same-sex dances sponsored by the University of Toronto Homophile Association, a gay and lesbian student organization founded in 1969, with annual dances continuing and now sponsored by LGBTQOUT at the University of Toronto, the oldest LGBTQ2+ student organization in Canada].

Hot Tub Club [gay bathhouse (1978-1979), one of the earlier bathhouses raided by Toronto Police in 1979 before the infamous Operation Soap bath raids in 1981; 7-9 Isabella Street; became Club Isabella gay bar (1980-1981); Chaps gay bar (1983-1990); Badlands denim/cow-boy themed gay bar (1990-1992); Power gay bar (1992-1995); became Rabba Foods grocery store (1996-Present)].

Ian Scott (1934-2006) [Liberal Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (1985-1992) and Attorney General of Ontario (1985-1990) who introduced an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1986 to include protection from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation].

International Lesbian and Gay People of Color Conference (ILGAPOC) [planned by the 101 Dewson Street Collective which formed a Toronto group of Black/People of Color to host the event in Toronto (1988) and attended by delegates from the Caribbean, England, and the U.S.].

International Steam Bath [bathhouse (1968-c1980s) at 485 Spadina Avenue].

Janko Naglic (1946-2004) [gay entrepreneur who opened Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as Jo-Jo's, Les Cavalier and The Barn & Stables at 83 Granby Street/418 Church Street, along with Tanks, Sapho, Together, Private Eyes, Together Again and The 457 all at the same location at 457 Church Street; Bob Grimson (1916-2011) the gay entrepreneur who owned The Quest (1973-1984) became mentor and friend of Janko Naglic whom he hired as bookkeeper and bartender at The Quest before Naglic went on to open other bars. Janko was murdered in 2004].

Jingles [gay piano bar at 467 Church Street (c1980s); became *Woody's* (1989-Present) owned by straight entrepreneur Alex Korn and managed by long-time gay manager Dean Odorico; Sailor was opened as an adjacent and connected gay bar next door (1994-Present) at 465 Church Street].

John Damien (died February 7, 1987) [Canadian racehorse jockey who was fired by the Ontario Racing Commission in 1975 for being gay; newly founded CGRO - Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario (1975) led by their first chair and lesbian, Chris Bearchell, along with groups like GATE – Gay Alliance Towards Equality, fought for Damien and the rights of other lesbians and gays for over a decade until Ontario included sexual orientation in the Ontario Human Rights code (1986); Damien died three weeks after it became law in Ontario, but CGRO continued to work with the National Gay Rights Coalition and other groups advocating for human rights protection for all Canadian lesbian and gays in the Human Rights Code until, after more than twenty years of debates, an amendment was made to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1996 to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation].

John Sewell [former mayor of Toronto (1978-1980), straight-ally and defender of gay rights, defeated in 1980 Toronto municipal election after being criticized for supporting gay activist George Hislop's attempt to be city's first openly gay city councillor with loss attributed to Toronto Police Association openly campaigning against both Sewell and Hislop].

Jo-Jo's [gay bar and disco (1975-1976), became The Barn gay bar, 83 Granby Street (upstairs)].

June Callwood (1924-2007) [journalist, author, social activist who founded Casey House named for her son Casey who died in a car accident; originally a hospice for people dying of AIDS and now a hospital to care for those living with HIV; first opened at 9 Huntley Street in 1988 and expanded to 119 Isabella Street and a renovated house that fronts Jarvis Street, completed in 2017].

Kathleen Wynne [Liberal Party Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (2003-2022) and Premier of Ontario (2013-2018) serving as first female premier of Ontario, first openly-gay premier in Canada, and second openly-gay Cabinet Minister after Ontario Deputy Premier George Smitherman].

Katrina's [gay bar (1978-1982), 5-9 St. Joseph Street; became Club Colby's gay dance club (1986-2000); Bachelors (2001); Epic Fitness (2002-2007); L3 Fitness (2007-2008); building façade incorporated into FIVE Condos (2015-Present)].

Kenneth Zeller (1945-1985) [teacher and librarian murdered in Toronto's High Park by five youth as a victim of a homophobic 'gay-bashing' hate crime].

Ken Campbell (1934-2006) [Canadian evangelical Baptist minister, politician and leader of the Christian Freedom Party who crusaded against gay rights, same-sex marriage, and a supposed 'homosexual agenda' since the 1970s, describing gays as child-molesters and Toronto's Gay Pride Parade as an "AIDS Parade;" a strong supporter of political activist Anita Bryant's anti-gay views, inviting her to speak in Toronto in 1978 and met by thousands of anti-Anita Bryant protesters in Toronto, including a march up Yonge Street and at the People's Church in North York where Bryant spoke].

Khush [group organized to initially support South Asian Gay Men of Toronto, first named South Asian Gay Association (SAGA) and was changed to Khush to include South Asian gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people (1987-1998)].

Komrads [gay dance club (1985-1991), 1 Isabella Street, known for its shiny stainless-steel dance floor; previously Oz, gay/straight alternative dance club (1983-1985)].

Kristyn Wong-Tam [openly lesbian Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (2018-Present), and former Toronto City Councillor (2010-2018), earlier franchise owner of Timothy's World Coffee at 500 Church Street (1999-2007)].

Kyle Rae [openly gay former Toronto City Councillor (1991-2010), Executive Director of 519 Church Street Community Centre (1987-1981), Toronto Police successfully sued Rae for defamation in 2002 for comments criticizing police about Pussy Palace bathhouse raid].

KY Tower (also known as Vaseline Tower) [Village Green apartment tower (1965-Present) at 50 Alexander Street; a round, phallic-looking high-rise colloquially named for the popular lubricants used by many gay men during sex; many gay residents lived there from the late 1960s to early 2000s].

Lesbians of Colour (LOC) [Toronto social support group for lesbians of colour, founded in 1984 at the Dewson Street collective at 101 Dewson Street, in response to racism within the lesbian and gay communities, along with homophobia and heterosexism in, leading to the formation of groups such as Black Women's Collective (1986-1989) and World Majority Lesbians in 1990s].

Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) [first openly lesbian feminist group in Toronto (1976-1980); evolved from a CHAT – Community Homophile Association of Toronto meeting in 1976 to create a lesbian centre at 342 Jarvis Street opened in 1977)].

Les Cavaliers [Les Cavaliers, 418 Church Street, downstairs, originally opened as a restaurant in 1959; gay clientele (1975-1985) when purchased by Janko Naglic and converted to the future *The Barn*].

Library [gay steam baths (1971-1974) at 5 Wellesley Street, West].

Linda Gardner [women's health and AIDS activist, counsellor and lead administrator of Hassle Free Clinic].

Makeda Silvera [lesbian/feminist activist, organizer, writer; co-established the 101 Dewson Street Collective in 1983 with her partner *Stephanie Martin* where they founded Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press in 1985].

The Manatee [non-licensed (no alcohol) gay bar/dance club (1970-1984); known for younger clientele, including gay teens; 11 St. Joseph Street; building façade incorporated into FIVE Condos (2015-Present)].

The Maygay [gay dance club (1970-1977), 488 Yonge Street, upstairs, St. Charles Tavern].

Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of Toronto [a congregation of worldwide MCC (head office in Los Angeles) openly affirming LGBTQ2+ parishioners that started in Toronto with services at Holy Trinity Church, 10 Trinity Square (1973-1985); outreach of Gay Community Services at 29 Granby Street (late 1970s); moved to church at 2029 Gerrard Street East (1985-1991) offering hospice and support groups for HIV/AIDS; moved to church at 115 Simpson Avenue (1991-Present); Rev. Brent Hawkes, former senior MCC pastor and gay activist is best known for performing a loophole marriage ceremony of two same-sex couples in 2001 based on publishing legal banns for three weeks as a legal marriage without requiring government permission before legal same-sex marriage in Ontario in 2003].

Michael Lynch (1944-1991) [gay activist, journalist, editorial collective member of *Body Politic* and first professor in Canada to teach a gay studies course; founder of Toronto Gay Academic Union, Gay Fathers of Toronto, Toronto Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies, and co-founder of the Toronto AIDS Memorial who initiated a permanent memorial, designed by Patrick Fahn, and opened in 1993, which replaced a temporary AIDS memorial first displayed on Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in 1988 in Cawthra Park (now Barbara Hall Park) to acknowledge those who died from an AIDS-related illness in the local community].

Michelle DuBarry (born in 1931) [Russell Alldread is a Canadian drag queen, better known as Michelle DuBarry, considered Canada's oldest performing drag queen].

Michelle Ross (1954-2021) [Earl Barrington Shaw was a Jamaican-Canadian who performed as drag queen, Michelle Ross (especially known for portraying singer Diana Ross) from 1974 until her death in 2021].

Neighbours Restaurant [dining (1980-1986), then Windows Restaurant & gay bar (1988-1994), Josephine Bistro (1994-1996), Slack Alice (1997-2005) - rebranded Slack's (2005-2013), 562 Church Street].

Norman Bolter [The Bolter family purchased the building of the former Hotel Breadalbane (formerly 530-534 Yonge Street) which became The Parkside Tavern in 1950; Norman and his wife Edythe owned and operated The Parkside during the time it became a popular gay bar in the early 1970s, and purchased the St. Charles in 1978, where both their two adult sons, Gary and Howard worked as managers; Norman allowed police harassment and surveillance of gay men through peep holes in the Parkside's washroom leading to arrests of gay men in the late 1970s, before gay activists threatened to report Bolter to liquor licensing commission and go public to the greater Toronto community, although several reports and warnings to gay men about the incidents were published in the *Body Politic*].

NOW Magazine [alternative/queer-friendly weekly print newspaper (now digital online) focusing on news, arts, culture and entertainment in Toronto (1981-Present)].

Oak Leaf Steam Baths [bathhouse (1941-2007) at 216-218 Bathurst Street; not formally a gay bathhouse, it provided a meeting place for gay, bi, and queer men, and a place of AIDS education by Hassle Free Clinic counsellors in the 1980s and 1990s].

Olivia Chow [Toronto School Board trustee (1985-1991) advocated for student protections based on sexuality; Metro Toronto City Councillor (1992-1998) and post-amalgamation Toronto City Councillor (1998-2005); New Democratic Party (NDP) member of Canadian Parliament for Trinity Spadina (2006-2014) and mayor of Toronto (2023-Present); married to Jack Layton - pre-amalgamation Toronto City Councillor (1982-1985), Metropolitan Toronto Councillor (1985-1988 & 1994-2002), post-amalgamation Toronto City Councillor (1988-1991) leader of NDP (2003-2011) - who died from cancer in 2011; Layton was an early advocate for AIDS patients, and both Chow and Layton were political advocates and supporters of LGBTQ2+ communities].

Ontario Human Rights Code [provincial law that was amended in 1986 to include protection from discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation; sexual orientation was not included in the Canadian Human Rights Code until a decade later in 1996, when an amendment was made to the Canadian Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination].

Operation Soap [a coordinated police raid on four gay bathhouses in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, that took place on February 5, 1981. Although bathhouse raids occurred prior to 1981 by Toronto Police, Operation Soap is what sparked the most pushback when Toronto police raided four gay bathhouses (5 February 1981), *Club Toronto Baths* (1973-2010), *Romans II* – previously *Romans Sauna Bath* before a fire in 1971 (1964-1989), *The Barracks* (1974-2005), *Richmond Street Health Emporium* (1975-1981), followed by further raids in mid-June 1981].

O'Grady's [pub restaurant with The Lodge (upstairs), former gay venues at location include Pints (1989-1997), Wilde Oscars (1997-2004), previously Harry's Steakhouse (1966-1989), 518 Church Street, 2004-Present].

Out and Out [a LGBTQ2+ Toronto not-for-profit social club, volunteer-run, founded in 1980-Present].

Out On The Street [LGBTQ2+ marketed retail clothing and merchandise store, 551 Church Street, 1991-Present].

The Parkside [Tavern, gay bar (1964-1986) at 530 Yonge Street; owner Norman Bolter allowed police harassment and surveillance of gay men through peep holes in the Parkside's washroom leading to arrests of gay men in the late 1970s, before gay activists threatened to report Bolter to the liquor licensing commission and go public to the greater Toronto community, although several reports and warnings to gay men about the incidents were published in the *Body Politic*; Bolter also purchased the St. Charles Tavern gay bar in 1978].

Pegasus [(1993-Present) gay sports bar at 489B Church Street (upper level)].

Pepsi [popular Toronto drag queen in the late 1980s and early 1990s; first drag host at Woody's for first Best Chest contest in 1992].

Peter Bochove (1948-2013) [gay activist and gay bathhouse owner/rights advocate, co-owned Richmond Street Health Emporium gay bathhouse (1975-1981); co-owned Spa on Maitland gay bathhouse (1990-1997) - became Steamworks (1997-Present); co-owned Spa Excess (1998-Present)].

Peter Zorzi [gay activist and writer, wrote articles for *Guerilla*, a Toronto grassroots counterculture newspaper (1970-1973), and histories of the early gay and lesbian rights movement in Toronto including the founding of TAG (Toronto Area Gays, *Body Politic*, CHAT - Community Homophile Association of Toronto, and GATE – Gay Alliance Towards Equality].

PitBull [gay entertainment company (2010-Present) known for hosting dance parties at Phoenix night club, concert and theatre venue, 410 Sherbourne Street].

Pink Patrol [community street patrol of gays, lesbians, and queers in the late 1980s and early 1990s (also known as Gay Street Patrol) created to protect those in the Church-Wellesley area from a string of gay-bashings that had been taking place at that time and lack of police protection].

Pink Triangle Press [Canadian media organization and longest-publishing LGBTQ2+ media group in the world, founded in 1971; published *The Body Politic* (1971-1987); *Xtra* magazine (1984-2015) print newspaper and 2015-Present, digital online].

P.J. Mellon's [wine restaurant (1987-2006) now Sambucas On Church Italian restaurant (2006-Present) 489 Church Street].

Playground [gay dance club (c1992-c1996) 11A St. Joseph Street].

Poppers [recreational inhalant drug used by many gay men on the dance floor and during sex for a quick, short-lasting high].

Priape [gay store and adult sex goods (2009-2013), 501 Church Street, previously at 465 Church Street (upper, 1998-2009)].

Pride and Remembrance Run [annual 5km charity run/walk during Toronto Pride to raise funds for LGBTQ+ organizations, 1996-Present].

Pride Toronto Events/Marches/Parades [A shift occurred from August Pride events held sporadically in the 1970s to annual June Pride events starting in 1981, establishing the month of June for all subsequent Pride events in Toronto. The earlier August Pride events included picnics at Hanlan's Point on Toronto Island (1971), and rallies and marches (1972, 1973, & 1974) which included starting on Church Street from CHAT (Community Homophile Association of Toronto) and at Allen Gardens. The earlier August Pride marches/events in the 1970s were to commemorate the "We Demand" protest on Parliament Hill as the first Canadian gay and lesbian rights demonstration. The latter June Pride events were held to align with the 1969 June Stonewall rebellion against police oppression and the 1981 Toronto police bathhouse raids earlier that year in February. The first June Pride march/events took place at Grange Park on Sunday, June 28th, 1981].

Prime Timers [worldwide social group for older gay and bisexual men, with a Toronto group, founded by a retired professor in Boston in 1987].

Prints On Church [camera film-to-print photo developer (c1984-1998) owned by first openly gay Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (1999-2010), Cabinet Minister and Deputy Premier, *George Smitherman*, unsuccessfully ran in 2018 Toronto municipal election against openly lesbian and successful Toronto City Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam].

Private Eyes [mixed lesbian and gay bar (1985) at 457 Church Street. The property was owned and operated by gay entrepreneur Janko Naglic (1946-2004) who earlier opened mixed lesbian bar *Jojo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) with gay bar *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) and gay dance club *The Barn* (1976-2012) at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street); Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars at 457 Church Street such as *Tanks* (1980-1981), *Sapho* (1981), *Together* (1981-1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986), *The Bulldog* (c1986) and *The 457* (c1986-1997) all at the same location at 457 Church Street. It became *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar that moved from 459 Church Street next-door].

Pusateri's [fruit and vegetable grocery market, originally located at 485 Church Street (1967-1975), then 487 Church Street (1975-1982) becoming Badali's independent grocer (1982-1998); Pusateri's moved to 497 Church Street, (1982-2023). The property is now Pusateri SR-Express Food Market with the new business owners keeping the Pusateri name for its longstanding familiar association with the space when the new business opened (2023-Present).

PWA – Toronto People With AIDS Foundation [community-based non-profit charitable organization providing support and services to people with HIV/AIDS (1985-Present); started in a founder's apartment at 44 Huntley Street; then Casey House at 9 Huntley Street; followed by 399 Church Street; 200 Gerrard Street East; 163 Queen Street East].

Queen of Hearts [bookstore known for gay cruising at 599c Yonge Street].

Queens Park [downtown Toronto park opened in 1860 by Edward, Prince of Wales in honour of Queen Victoria. Location of Ontario Provincial Government. Known as a gay cruising area throughout the twentieth-century (1860-Present) at 110 Wellesley Street, West].

Queen's Dairy [burger restaurant (1977-1993), became the Unicorn Restaurant (1993-2000), Village Rainbow Café Restaurant (2000- 2010) then The Garage Restaurant (2010-Present) at 477 Church Street].

Queer Nation [LGBTQ2+ activist organization founded in New York City in 1990 and established in cities across North America, including Toronto, in response to increasing anti-gay violence].

The Quest [gay bar (1973-1984), 665 Yonge Street owned by gay entrepreneur Bob Grimson (1916-2011); previously *Famous Door* gay bar (c1964-1973). Grimson became mentor and friend of Janko Naglic (1946-2004) whom he hired as bookkeeper and bartender at The Quest before Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as Jo-Jo's, Les Cavalier and The Barn & Stables at 83 Granby Street/418 Church Street, along with Tanks, Sapho, Together, Private Eyes, Together Again and The 457 all at the same location at 457 Church Street. Janko was murdered in 2004].

Randall Coates [medical doctor and AIDS researcher with the Toronto AIDS Research Project with colleague Stanley Read, tracking sexual contacts of symptomatic gay men in Toronto to study how the, then unnamed, HIV/AIDS virus (named in 1986) progressed before testing became available (1985), early educator of AIDS awareness in Toronto and a co-founder of ACT - AIDS Committee of Toronto throughout the 1980s, had the virus and died in 1991].

The Red Spot [gay bar frequented by Latino clientele (1998-2003); became Papi's (2003-2009); Chino Locos Burrito Restaurant (2009-2014); Healthy Greek Restaurant (2014-2016); Urge XXX Cinema Maze & Booths (2016); vacant (2017); The Drink gay bar (2018-Present) at 459 Church Street].

Reither's Fine Foods International [specialty meats and international foods (1980-2012) at 530 Church Street, closed after owner Peter Reither retired].

Remington's Men of Steel [gay strip club (1993-2018); ended audience gender segregation in 2009 allowing both men and women to watch naked men dance as mixed clientele at all shows at 379 Yonge Street].

Richard Fung [gay award-winning filmmaker, activist, educator, and community organizer; founder of GAT – Gay Asians of Toronto, a social organization for political advocacy and support of gay Asians in Toronto (1980-2002); his first documentary *Orientations* (1984) presented lesbian and gay Asians to counter the stereotypical opinion that gay people are white people; artistic works and writings influential on LGBTQ2+ studies; professor of Integrated Media and Art and Social Change at OCAD – Ontario College of Art & Design (2003-Present)].

Richmond Street Health Emporium [gay bathhouse (1975-1981) at 260 Richmond Street East; raided by Toronto Police with Operation Soap on February 5, 1981; considered one of the most modern and elegant bathhouses in Toronto that was severely damaged during the raid beyond financial recovery for co-owner Peter Bochove (1948-2013) who later went on to open other Toronto bathhouses as co-owner of Spa on Maitland (1990-1997) - became Steamworks (1997-Present) and co-owner of Spa Excess (1998-Present)].

Right to Privacy Committee [a group of volunteer activists who organized protests and support after the bathhouse raids by Toronto police, including a fundraising campaign for legal defense representing those charged as “found-ins” at the bathhouses (1981-1991)].

Robert Trow [gay and HIV community advocate with Hassle Free Clinic, a co-founder of ACT – AIDS Committee of Toronto, member of Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS, and *Body Politic* collective member and contributor, 1948-2002].

Rock & Roll Fag Bar [weekly gay/queer/alternative Friday night (1988-1990) held at Tazmanian Ballroom alternative bar (1987-1990); formerly Club 101 gay and lesbian bar (1984-1987); previously Jarvis House Tavern (1963-1983); Hotel Jarvis (1929-1963); McFarlane’s Hotel (1898-1929) at 99-101 Jarvis Street].

Rock & Roll Fag Bar Two [On Wednesday May 27, 1992, Club Go-Go (1990-1993) introduced the return of Rock & Roll Fag Bar Two (1992-1993) as a weekly Wednesday Go-Go Men event at the new location, 250 Richmond Street, West; before Club Go-Go reopened as Whiskey Saigon (1993-2002)].

Roman Sauna Baths [bathhouse (1964-1989) at 742 Bay Street; originally opened in 1964, becoming known for more gay clientele by the 1970s; the building was renovated after a fire in 1977 and reopened as The Romans II].

The Rose Café [lesbian bar (1991-1999) previously Purple Onion (1984-1991), then Pope Joan (1999-2003), Foxy’s (2003), Coyotes (2003-2004) at 547 Parliament Street].

Roy McMurtry [Progressive Conservative Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (1975-1985) and Attorney General of Ontario (1975-1985) who was criticized for approving the 1981 Toronto Police bathhouse raids].

The St. Charles [originally St. Charles Restaurant (downstairs) & Dining Lounge (upstairs) (1951-1987), 488 Yonge Street, became known for gay clientele by mid-1960s; in the 1970s, patrons would get eggs thrown at them by homophobes when entering and exiting, particularly

on Halloween when many were dressed as drag queens; St. Charles Tavern gay bar remained downstairs with owners converting upstairs to the following gay dance clubs over the years: Maygay (1970-1977); Club Triangle (1977-1978); Charley's Disco (1978-1984); Y-Not Bar (1985-1987); Empire Dancebar (1988-1992); after St. Charles closed, the upstairs continued as a dance space as Time (1994) and Circus (1995-2001) before the building was renovated (2002) as retail (downstairs) and residential (upstairs) before being torn down and replaced with the 45-storey Halo Condos scheduled to open in 2023].

St. Michael's Hospital [between 1998-2002, St. Mike's (as it is often referred to) became the primary care centre in Toronto for gay men with HIV/AIDs from after these health services were transferred from Wellesley Hospital prior to its closure in 2003; The Positive Care Clinic (PCC) at St. Michael's continues to provide HIV care and services].

Sapho [lesbian bar (1981) at 457 Church Street, damaged by an arsonist's blaze only two weeks after opening. It was reopened as *Together* – “a restaurant and bar catering to women and men.” The property was owned and operated by gay entrepreneur Janko Naglic (1946-2004) who opened mixed lesbian bar *Jojo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) with gay bar *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) and gay dance club *The Barn* (1976-2012) at 418 Church Street on the corner of Granby Street (and sometimes listed as 83 Granby Street); Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars at 457 Church Street such as *Tanks* (1980-1981), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986), *The Bulldog* (c1986) and *The 457* (c1986-1997) before *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar that moved from 459 Church Street next-door].

Scruff [a location-based social networking and online dating/hookup application (2010-Present) targeted towards gay, bisexual and transgender men seeking men, with some also using Grindr as an alternative application (2009-Present)].

Second Cup [Canadian coffee shop franchise, now at 544 Church Street (2011-Present), originally located at 548 Church Street connected to the famous Steps (1984-2004)].

Singing Out [LGBTQ2+ mixed voice choir (1992-Present)].

Slack Alice [lesbian bar (1997-2013) at 562 Church Street, then rebranded Slack's in 2005].

Spa Excess [gay bathhouse at 105 Carlton Street, 1998-Present].

Spa on Maitland [gay bathhouse, 66 Maitland Street (1990-1997) became Steamworks with new entrance and address 540 Church Street at other end of the building (1997-Present)].

Splendeurs Restaurant & Bakery [at 501 (a&b) Church Street (1988-1991), previously vacant (1991-1993); 7-24 Movies & More video rental store with adult section renting gay porn (1995-2013); Royal Bank (2016-Present)].

St. Marc Spa [gay bathhouse (1991-2010) at 543 Yonge Street, fourth-floor].

Stages [gay dance club - upstairs *Parkside Tavern* (1977-1984), 530 Yonge Street; with several gay venues at this location: previously *The August Club* (1970-1972), *Momma Cooper's* (1972-1973), *Milkbar* (1973-1974), *Quazimoto's* (1974-1976), *Bimbo's* (1976-1977); and then became *Avalon* (1984-1985) and *Changes* (1985-1986)].

Stanley Read [medical doctor and AIDS researcher with the Toronto AIDS Research Project with colleague Randall Coates, tracking sexual contacts of symptomatic gay men in Toronto to study how the, then unnamed, HIV/AIDS virus (named in 1986) progressed before testing became available; Read began focusing on and specializing in pediatric HIV in 1987].

Steamworks Baths [gay bathhouse (1997-Present) at 540 Church Street, previously *Spa on Maitland* gay bathhouse with old entrance and address at 66 Maitland Street (1990-1997)].

Stephanie Martin [lesbian/feminist activist, organizer; co-established the 101 Dewson Street Collective in 1983 with her partner Makeda Silvera where they founded *Sister Vision: Black Women and Women of Colour Press* in 1985].

The Steps [iconic social spot where many gay men would gather and socialize on southwest corner of Church and Wellesley Streets, in front of Canadian coffee shop franchise, *Second Cup* at 548 Church Street, (1984-2004); In the early 2000s the nearby Yonge Street business association hired private security to 'clean up' Yonge Street of homeless youth. Some street youth moved to Church Street and found *The Steps* a good hangout as a result. Some gay men and clientele at *Second Cup* and adjacent businesses felt threatened by the homeless youth's increasing presence, aggressive panhandling and insults leading to complaints from Church Street business owners, and the removal of *The Steps*].

Studio II [lesbian and gay bar (1977-1979) at 72 Carlton Street; became *P.M. Toronto*, straight/gay-friendly nightclub (1992-1998); *Buttons* (1998-2000); then *Zipperz Cellblock*, gay piano and dance bar (2000-2016)].

Super Freshmart [24-hour independent grocery store (1987-2017) at 524 Church Street, downsized in 2013 reportedly affected by 2011 opening of *Loblaws*, and finally closed in 2017].

Susan Eng [Toronto lawyer and former Chair of Metro Toronto Police Services Board (1991-1995) had a tense relationship with Toronto Police Chief William McCormack over policy issues to reform Metro Police including race relations and Toronto's LGBTQ2+ communities. McCormack served as Toronto Police Chief from 1989-1995].

Tanks [military-themed gay bar/restaurant (1980-1981) at 457 Church Street; the property was owned and operated by gay entrepreneur Janko Naglic (1946-2004) who opened mixed lesbian bar *Jojo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) with gay bar *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) and gay dance club *The Barn* (1976-2012). Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as *Sapho* (1981), *Together* (1981-1985), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986), *The Bulldog* (c1986) and *The 457* (c1986-1997) all at the same location at 457 Church Street, before *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar occupied the space, moving from 459 Church Street next-door].

Terminus [gay bathhouse (1974-1979) at 600 Bay Street; appropriately named for its convenient location beside the Toronto bus terminal].

The 457 [mixed lesbian and gay bar (c1986-1997) at 457 Church Street; the property was owned and operated by gay entrepreneur Janko Naglic (1946-2004) who opened mixed lesbian bar *Jojo's* (1975-1976, upstairs) with gay bar *Les Cavaliers* (1975-1985, downstairs) and gay dance club *The Barn* (1976-2012). Naglic went on to open other Toronto lesbian and gay bars such as *Sapho* (1981), *Together* (1981-1985), *Private Eyes* (1985), *Together Again* (1985-c1986) and *The Bulldog* (c1986) all at the same location at 457 Church Street, before *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar occupied the space, moving from 459 Church Street next-door].

This Ain't The Rosedale Library [independent bookstore (1986-2008) at 483 Church Street; previously Amsterdam Coffee and Bake Shop (1974-1984); in 2008, 483 Church Street ground floor divided into two with About Cheese cheese-shop at 483A (2008-2013) becoming All the Best Fine Foods specialty grocer (2013-2016) and Eyes on Church optometrist at 483B (2008-2018) now at 530 Church Street (2018-Present); properties combined again as Craig's Cookies at 483 Church Street (2019-Present)].

Tim McCaskell [gay and political activist, writer, and educator, collective member of *Body Politic* (1974-1986), Chair of Public Action Committee of the Right to Privacy Committee against police raids on gay bathhouses 1981, a founding member of AIDS ACTION NOW! (1987-2000s); advocate for Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (2010-2015); author of *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (2016)].

Timothy's World Coffee [Canadian coffee shop franchise, originally established by openly lesbian Kristyn Wong-Tam and franchised (1999-2007), now Member of Ontario Provincial Parliament (2018-Present), and former Toronto City Councillor (2010-2018), 500 Church Street, 1999-2019].

Toby's Good Eats [hamburger restaurant (c1988-2007), 542 Church Street; then Zelda's drag-queen themed restaurant which moved from original location at 76 Wellesley Street, East (1997-2007) to 542 Church Street (2007-2009), before Zelda's relocated outside Church-Wellesley Village to 692 Yonge Street in 2009].

Together [mixed lesbian and gay bar (1981-1985) at 457 Church Street; previously *Sapho* lesbian bar (1981) damaged by arson fire only two weeks after opening, and *Tanks* gay bar (c1980-1981); became *Private Eyes* mixed lesbian and gay bar (1985) then *Together Again* (1985-c1986) followed by *The Bulldog* as mixed lesbian and gay bar (c1986) and *The 457* (c1986-1997) before *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar occupied the space, moving from 459 Church Street next-door].

Together Again [mixed lesbian and gay bar (1985-c1986) at 457 Church Street; previously *Private Eyes* mixed lesbian and gay bar (1985), *Together* mixed lesbian and gay bar (1981-1985), *Sapho* lesbian bar (1981) damaged by arson fire only two weeks after opening, and *Tanks* gay bar (1980-1981); became *The Bulldog* (c1986) as mixed lesbian and gay bar and *The 457*

(c1986-1997) before *Black Eagle* (1997-Present) gay leather/denim bar occupied the space, moving from 459 Church Street next-door].

TD (Toronto Dominion) Bank [Canadian financial institution branch has been located on the southwest corner of Church and Wellesley Streets since 1963 originally in older Edwardian brick building at 550 Church Street until ChurWell Centre (now The Village Centre) five-stories office building was constructed in 1975 creating a diagonal-corner Church/Wellesley Street entrance, further renovated in 2012 to have entrance facing Wellesley Street, currently 65 Wellesley Street, East (at Church Street), 1963-Present].

Toronto Gay Action [gay activist group (early 1970s) that helped organize and participate in the We Demand Rally with various homophile and gay liberation groups at the first extensive gay rights demonstration, protesting in front of the Canadian federal parliament buildings in Ottawa on August 28, 1971].

The Toolbox [gay leather bar (1987-2004), originated from an earlier gay leather bar *18 East* at 18 Eastern Avenue (1979-1984) when owners purchased the Simcoe Hotel at 508 Eastern Avenue to open The Toolbox].

Toronto Police Headquarters [formerly located at 590 Jarvis Street (1967-1988) and torn down for residential development. Also where protests took place against Toronto police bathhouse raids in 1981; current location at 40 College Street was previously Toronto Central YMCA (1913-1984) before the property sold to Metropolitan Police for new headquarters (1984-Present)].

TNT Men (Totally Naked Toronto Men) [social group celebrating male nudity and body positivity, 1997-Present].

Trax [gay leather/denim bar with a piano lounge and dining lounge (1985-2005) at 529 Yonge Street; then Alibi nightclub (2005-2008), known for hosting underwear dance parties and Wednesday College nights in the early 2000s].

Twink [slang word to describe a younger gay man, often in late teens to twenties, with a slimmer physique and youthful appearance; Chicken was also a popular term used in the 1970s and 1980s to describe a younger gay man who would be pursued for sex by an older gay man known as a Chicken Hawk, now often referred to as a Daddy in relation to pursuing or interest from a Twink].

University of Toronto Homophile Association [a gay and lesbian student organization founded in 1969 to provide resources, support, programming and events such as semi-regular same-sex dances (renamed the Homo Hop in 1980); became Gays at U of T (GAUT), then Lesbians and Gays at U of T (LGAUT); now named LGBTQOUT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, of University of Toronto) and continues to Present Day].

Vagara Bistro [fine dining restaurant, 475 Church Street (c1980s to c1990s)].

Vaseline Tower (also known as KY Tower) [Village Green apartment tower (1965-Present) at 50 Alexander Street, a round, phallic-looking high-rise colloquially named for the popular lubricants used by many gay men during sex; many gay residents lived there from the late 1960s to early 2000s].

Violence and vandalism in Church-Wellesley Village [The Village residents and business owners took to the streets on July 22, 2023, to protest an increase in violence and vandalism in the neighbourhood. Local media reported that Dudley's Hardware (1936-Present) at 511 Church Street, directly beside the 519 Community Centre and Barbara Hall Park had its front window smashed several times, along with other incidents effecting local businesses, blamed on anti-social behaviour by drug users and homeless who frequent the park and use the services of the 519. Dudley's announced the store's closure after more than 85 years in the neighbourhood. Community support from the demonstration has prompted Dudley's to reconsider closure for now].

Ward Hagar (1942-1984) [co-owner of *Chaps* gay bar (1983-1992) at 7-9 Isabella Street with straight entrepreneur *Alex Korn*. Korn owned *The Waldorf Astoria Hotel* at 80 Charles Street, East where the original *Boots* gay bar without *Bud's* gay bar was located in 1980. Hagar worked as front-desk manager at the hotel. Hagar died of an AIDS-related illness within a year of opening *Chaps* with Korn. Hagar's death had a tremendous impact on Korn who helped raise funds for AIDS-related causes. Ward Hagar is listed on the *AIDS Memorial* in *Cawthra Park* (now *Barbara Hall Park*) among the many acknowledged who died from an AIDS-related illness in the local community.

We Demand Rally [first extensive gay rights demonstration that brought together several gay liberation groups together to protest in front of the Canadian federal parliament buildings in Ottawa on August 28, 1971].

Wellesley Hospital [primary care centre in Toronto for gay men with HIV/AIDs from 1988-2001 before transferring health services to St. Michael's Hospital between 1998-2002 prior to the Wellesley Hospital closure in 2003; area redeveloped with residential, commercial, retail buildings and health care, including the Re kai Centre, Wellesley Central Place long-term care seniors home (2005-Present)].

Wilde Oscars [pub restaurant (1997-2004), former pub/restaurants at location include Wilde Oscars (1997-2004), Pints (1989-1997), previously Harry's Steakhouse (1966-1989), currently O'Grady's (2004-Present) with The Lodge (upstairs) at 518 Church Street].

Woman's Bakery [baked goods (1976-1978) at 497 Church Street; vacant (1982) became *Pusateri Fruit Market* (1982-2023); vacant (2023)].

The Woman's Common [lesbian, women-owned club, restaurant, and event space (1988-1994), 580 Parliament Street].

Woody's [gay bar at 467 Church Street (1989-Present) owned by straight entrepreneur Alex Korn and managed by long-time gay manager Dean Odorico; Sailor was opened as an adjacent and

connected gay bar next door (1994-Present) at 465 Church Street. The location was previously *Jingles gay piano bar* (c1980s)].

Xtra Magazine [LGBTQ2+ focused weekly print newspaper (now digital online) published by Pink Triangle Press previously publishing *Body Politic*, 1984-2015 (print newspaper), 2015-Present (digital online) at 491 Church Street].

YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association, non-profit organization providing health, fitness, housing and social programs, Toronto Central YMCA (1913-1984) at 40 College Street, sold to Metropolitan Toronto Police for police headquarter (1988-Present), new Metro Central YMCA opened at 20 Grosvenor Street (1984-Present), two blocks north of the old building on College Street, now referred to as the Y].

Zami [first organized Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual support group in Toronto focusing on racism and sexuality (1984-1989); Zami is the West Indian Creole word for lesbian; first meeting at 101 Dewson Street (1984); moved to 519 Church Street Community Centre (1985-1989) and included mostly Black, West Indian and Afro-Caribbean gay men as Black lesbians became increasingly involved in Black feminist issues, forming separate groups like the Black Women's Collective; in 1989, many Zami members formed the Black CAP - Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (1989-Present); AYA, founded in 1994, is the successor of Zami and provided social support for Black gay and bisexual men throughout the 1990s].

Zipperz Cellblock [gay piano and dance bar (2000-2016), previously Buttons (1998-2000); P.M. Toronto, straight/gay-friendly nightclub (1992-1998); Studio II, gay nightclub (1977-1979) at 72 Carlton Street].

Appendix B: Feedback Grid Research Themes Generated from Community Engagement Workshop

1. The Future

1. *What worked:*
 - “Building community & fighting for a future/a safe place”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Did people have the same concerns about Village future as today?”
 - “Too big!”
 - “How to share history in an engaging & informative way (learn from our mistakes)”
3. *Questions:*
 - “How do you want to be connected to younger generations?”
 - “Where does BIPOC perspective/desire fit in”
 - “How do we honour the past while learning from the present and looking towards the future?”
 - “Do we still have “the Village”? If not, why? What next now to protect advocacy work that has been done”
 - “How to better honour our elders?”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “Is Village growing to encompass more of Toronto, but diffused”
 - “Where are our communities now”
 - “How is a shifting sense of identity politics affecting communities & social change”
 - “What steps did City, community take to protect Village as the LGBTQ2S hub? Are they needed now?”
 - “How is the changing cultural & social demography of TO impacting the evolution of the gay village”
 - “Is the future of the Village a physical place?”

2. Heritage, Diversity & Inclusion

1. *What worked:*
 - “This was an excluded community”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Inclusion of families (bio, adopted, chosen)”
 - “How language changed and affected inclusion (Gay – LGBTQ, but also Homophile – Gay)”
 - “How was this seen then & has the Village been a centre for evolving this term?”
 - “Engage people with diversity to create better inclusion”
 - “How did social/cultural diversity develop? Cause?”
 - “Women & other inclusivity”
 - “Look at interactions of sectors that worked, rather than failed”
3. *Questions:*

- “How can this PhD include non-former research – existing archives? Don’t repeat or replicate”
- “What do these people think about changing spaces?”
- “How is this PhD research different than has been done? What will you add?”
- “What is true purpose of this PhD? If this demographic has been researched?”
- “Disappointed that gay became mainstream”
- “What do/did you see as central leaders for marginalized groups within the queer community?”
- “What did they think the future looked like?”
- “How did you see D & I at the time”
- “This demographic is already well documented. What could be added?”
- “How are we recording and archiving what’s happening now?”

4. *Ideas:*

- “Making history accessible & engaging, i.e., plaques in Village”
- “Visible representation of diverse communities in the village then vs now”
- “Stop starting with white people as your starting place”
- “Today’s actions are tomorrow’s history!”

3. **Social Justice & Political Action**

1. *What worked:*

- “Challenges to queers created allyships”
- “Talking/advocating helped”

2. *What could be improved:*

- “Continue the fight; how topic/focus has or needs to change, i.e., LGBT seniors housing/services”
- “Racial makeup is only white”
- “How have social justice needs changed?”
- “Continue advocacy”

3. *Questions:*

- “How much research is happening in this area?”
- “Do you still feel a need to engage in this work? Are there barriers?”
- “Urgency?”
- “Mainstream acknowledgement. What changed?”

4. *Ideas:*

- “Learning from past helps guide future actions”
- “Explore dynamics, tensions, impact of “liberation” vs “rights/equality” activism and “rocking the boat” vs “working within the system”
- “How is the history & ‘particulars’ of mobilization impacting communities now?”
- “Identify what issues brought groups together & what issues divided?”
- “Political/Municipal leaders. Who were they & who cared? & Who didn’t care?”

4. Evolution of Safety: From bars to community organizations & spaces

1. *What worked:* (No feedback in this quadrant)
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Who was safe first (cis, white, gay) and who was not?”
 - “Include people of colour”
 - “Sharing of where they are”
3. *Questions:*
 - “Do people feel safer in bars/restaurants clubs outside the Village?”
 - “What changes in policing? Impact?”
 - “Who were the gate keepers?”
 - “Dry/non-alcohol spaces (early days)”
 - “Why are spaces disappearing?”
 - “Is the Village a safe ‘zone’?”
 - “Where are the communities that are starting? Not safe”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “What role did relationship with law enforcement have? (Who engaged on behalf of community to liaise w police?)”

5. Trace the evolution from protest & resistance to pride & celebration

1. *What worked:*
 - “What is the next fight?”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Research into history of bars & spaces: where they were & where they went”
 - “Tracing history journey”
 - “Open public knowledge on display. Education”
3. *Questions:*
 - “What brought sides together?”
 - “Is this only a white evolution?”
 - “Was the Village always seen as the only space for this?”
 - “Impact of Capitalism”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “Changes in physical space to adapt to queer community moving from hiding to marching”
 - “Public display education of moments, stories - signs/murals/sculptures etc.”

6. Impact of HIV/AIDS on community development & sense of community

1. *What worked:*
 - “Smaller community orgs”
 - “Sharing info/medical support”
2. *What could be improved:*

- “How did the Village become the de facto health care space then? Is it still seen this way today?”
3. *Questions:*
 - “How AIDS has evolved to meet different community needs”
 - “Development of community of cure – What was this? Who was excluded & included?”
 - “How have changes in gov health care contributed to impacts”
 4. *Ideas:*
 - “How queer kids entered a space full of fear and kept/lost their hope/optimism”
 - “How can younger generations be informed about the impact of HIV/AIDS thru honouring the generation who lived in 80’s/90s”
 - “ASAAP, ACAS, Latinos Positivos, Black CAP, etc.”
 - “Development of services & business models of services & not”
 - “Impact of HIV/AIDS on community development & sense of community – impact on org – change in focus from protest & visibility to social services”

7. **Social & Sports Groups: Bridge to Village (language, names of groups)**

1. *What worked:*
 - “Recognize importance of social cohesion/safety”
 - “Many non-sport community groups such as choirs etc.”
 - “Building community spirit”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Future: Do these groups still exist? Especially co-ed?”
3. *Questions:*
 - “Politics of sport & who can play – what were the challenges of playing on a team or in a league?”
 - “Who was allowed to participate?”
 - “Whatever happened to the gay games?”
 - “Does this feed/play into desirability politics/shape who is part of the community?”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “Intergenerational sports leagues?”
 - “Sports as an example of a non-alcohol space to meet”

8. **Market Demographics**

1. *What worked:* (No feedback in this quadrant)
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Document how and why it changed. Impact of change on Village. – i.e., more straight people living here. Do they also socialize here?”
 - “Include all races”
 - “Define ‘market’”
3. *Questions:*

- “How do you decide which demographics to study? Think differently”
 - “Gentrification of LGBTQ2+ spaces”
4. *Ideas:*
- “How diversity changes who has the money and power”
 - “Corp sponsorship of LGBTQ2S+ & marketing of same”
 - “Money/Market is root of all changes and conflicts!”
9. **Change in Cultural Makeup: Types of stories told/not (representation); How values have evolved; What spaces, things are missed**
1. *What worked:* (No feedback in this quadrant)
2. *What could be improved:*
- “Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour inclusion, *power*”
3. *Questions:*
- “Who is or isn’t represented when you talk about spaces?”
 - “How is a current sense of identity impacting the history”
 - “Cultural history is not static – needs to be studied pre-colonial”
 - “What don’t we know about cultural make up? Who is excluded?”
4. *Ideas:*
- “Not just gay culture but openly LGBT people participating in other cultural activities”
 - “Explore what ‘culture’ has meant and means for diverse LGBTQ communities and thru lenses of diverse sexuality (e.g., sexual liberation) gender, and race”
10. **Business Ownership & Other: Queer (Church-Wellesley) vs Non-Queer / Village vs The Rest of City**
1. *What worked:*
- “Created a community – supported each other”
 - “The past bar scene which largely no longer exists and hasn’t for women since the early 2000’s”
2. *What could be improved:*
- “Had to expand to economic forces changing in city”
 - “Where are the communities now?”
 - “How to support other types/colour income of owners”
 - “LGBT2+ actually reap the economic benefits?”
3. *Questions:*
- “Safety & risk of running an LGBTQ2S+ friendly business”
 - “What do community think about these changing spaces?”
 - “Can old businesses support new businesses?”
 - “How did political forces help &/or hurt?”
4. *Ideas:* (No feedback in this quadrant)
11. **Changes in Resources/Media, how that impacted change in the Village (Physical, Diversity, Inclusion)**

1. *What worked:*
 - “Print culture”
 - “Helped lessen stigma”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Trace from print to digital”
 - “How cost of rent has pushed people out”
 - “Improve sense of belonging”
3. *Questions:*
 - “How did the community communicate before 1950s?”
 - “Publication changes. Print to digital.”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “How/who has access”
 - “Apps & hookup culture”
 - “Open education. Public display of culture/history stories”

12. **Change: Old days – spaces occupied / do seniors feel they belong?**

1. *What worked:*
 - “Recognize the strength of a ‘gathering place’”
 - “Not all change is negative or positive”
2. *What could be improved:*
 - “Good old days for whom?”
 - “How is our community going to address/compensate for the irresistible force of development”
 - “Limited spaces for inter-generational exchange”
3. *Questions:*
 - “How are generations being brought together?”
 - “What was community and how did it look then vs now?”
 - “How do we honour nostalgia & queer histories while making room for change & diversity?”
4. *Ideas:*
 - “Document the ‘Good Old Days’ in an engaging & educational way”
 - “Evolution & experiences of LGBT community members/activists & impact on their sense of community/belonging – activists/community builders in 70’s/80’s were primarily young. How do they feel about community now?”

Appendix C: Feedback Grid Research Themes Synthesis

Feedback Grid Research Theme 1: The Future

Synthesized Research Theme 1: Different Perspectives On The Future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village & How to Maintain a Sense of Community Advocating a Safe and Inclusive Space

Thinking about the future of Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village as a research theme it is important to consider how building a sense of community and advocating for a safe and inclusive environment in the past continues to be significant today.

Using this research theme can provide reflections on how people who experienced the Village in the past may share similar or different concerns about the future of the Village from those experiencing the Village today. Being aware of different time perspectives allows us to learn from history and avoid repeating past mistakes to make conveying the history of the Village more engaging and informative.

It is important to think about how the overall oral history research project will engage younger generations and connect with them to ensure a continuum of knowledge, while also valuing and incorporating the perspectives of marginalized communities, such as BIPOC individuals in the research project.

Using this research theme can help the research look for perspectives on the changing dynamics of identity politics, the evolving demography of Toronto, and the steps needed to protect and preserve LGBTQ2S+ spaces.

In contemplating the (past) future of the Village, using this research theme in oral history interviews can help the researcher listen for whether the Village is defined solely as a physical place or if its essence transcends boundaries, encompassing broader communities and is evolving in response to cultural and social shifts.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 2: Heritage, Diversity & Inclusion

Synthesized Research Theme 2: Heritage, Diversity & Inclusion Includes Families & the Evolving Language of Identity While Promoting Historical Visibility of Diversity through Physical Plaques & Commemorations

Thinking about heritage, diversity, and inclusion as a research theme needs the researcher to listen for narratives about various types of families, whether biological, adopted, or chosen. This research theme can examine how changes in language, such as the evolution from "Homophile" to "Gay" and then to "LGBTQ" have influenced heritage, diversity, and inclusion. Using this research theme can help the researcher explore historical perspectives of the Village as one of the places where this evolution of language has occurred. This research theme can also help us understand the development of social and cultural diversity to identify in oral history interviews the perceived factors that have contributed to this diversity.

It was recommended within this research theme that this PhD research should aim to incorporate non-former research through existing archives, avoiding repetition and replication. The research should consider the voices of marginalized groups and their thoughts on changing spaces of the Village and their vision for the future, and how diversity and inclusion were perceived at an earlier time in the Village compared with now.

It is also important to focus on making history accessible and engaging by utilizing methods like plaques in the Village. (This speaks to the point in Theme 1: "learn from history

and avoid repeating past mistakes to make conveying the history of the Village more engaging and informative.”)

A history of Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village should pay attention to the visible representation of diverse communities, both in the past and present, to challenge the tendency to centre white perspectives, and acknowledge that today’s actions shape tomorrow’s history.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 3: Social Justice & Political Action

Synthesized Research Theme 3: Social Justice & Political Action: Forming Allyships, Different Types of Activism, and Contemporary LGBTQ+ Seniors Needs

Thinking about Social Justice and Political Action as a research theme, observations can be made about what challenges have been faced by those being interviewed that have led to the formation of allyships and how open discussions and advocacy through political action have played a crucial role in driving social change.

Using this research theme can point to the importance of continuing this action by recognizing evolving needs such as housing and services for LGBTQ+ seniors, and examining the changing social justice landscape and engagement in this area.

The oral history research can draw from narratives about understanding the historical dynamics, tensions, and impact of different activism approaches, such as liberation versus rights/equality activism, and “rocking the boat” versus working within the system” with a focus on identifying the issues that have united or divided LGBTQ2S+ communities.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 4: Evolution of Safety: From Bars to Community Organizations & Spaces

Synthesized Research Theme 4: Evolution of Safety from Bars to Community Organizations & Spaces, and the Historical Relationship Between LGBTQ+ Communities and Police

Thinking about the evolution of safety from bars to community organizations and spaces as a research theme, the research can examine the initial safety dynamics that predominantly favoured cisgender, white, and gay individuals and gain further perspectives by actively including people of colour in the oral history interviews.

Using this research theme can help the researcher seek information about what were considered safe spaces beyond bars and restaurants within the Village and how individuals felt and currently feel secure. This can include exploring changes in policing and their impact on safety, including the historical relationship between the LGBTQ2S+ communities and law enforcement and individuals who engaged on behalf of the community to liaise with police. Using this research theme can also inform the research about who were considered the gatekeepers in perceived safe spaces.

Using this research theme can help the researcher listen for the historical presence of dry/non-alcohol spaces, and the factors contributing to the disappearance of certain spaces within the safety landscape. With this research theme the researcher can look for whether the Village itself was and is considered a safe zone.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 5: Trace the Evolution from Protest & Resistance to Pride & Celebration

Synthesized Research Theme 5: Tracing the Evolution from Protest & Resistance to Pride & Celebration: “What’s the next fight?” - Bars and Transformations of Spaces Beyond White Perspectives – And How to Commemorate Important LGBTQ2S+ Moments and Stories

Thinking about tracing the evolution from protest and resistance to pride and celebration as a research theme can identify what oral history interviewees think is the next fight in the ongoing pursuit of equality and justice.

With this research theme the researcher can listen for a history of bars and spaces to understand their locations and transformations and, by exploring this historical journey, the oral history research can promote open public knowledge and education about LGBTQ+ history, including examining the factors that brought different sides together.

Using this research theme, the researcher can learn whether this evolution has been solely a white evolution emphasizing a need for inclusivity beyond white perspectives, and listen for whether the Village has always been perceived as the sole space for LGBTQ+ communities.

Using this research theme, the research can include perceptions about the impact of capitalism in the Village, and the changes in physical spaces to accommodate the transition from “hiding to marching” within Toronto’s LGBTQ+ communities.

There was a reminder of the importance of promoting public educational displays (signs, murals, sculptures) about the history that this research theme can capture that contribute to the education and preservation of important LGBTQ2S+ moments and stories.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 6: Impact of HIV/AIDS on Community Development & Sense of Community

Synthesized Research Theme 6: Impact of HIV/AIDS on Community Development & Sense of Community, Smaller HIV/AIDS Organizations, The Village as “de facto” Healthcare Space, The Formation of “a community of cure” and The Impact of Changes in Government Healthcare Policies

Thinking about the impact of HIV/AIDS on community development and a sense of community as a research theme, the researcher can listen for narratives about the emergence of smaller community organizations dedicated to sharing information and providing medical support that developed in response to HIV/AIDS.

Using this research theme, the researcher can look for perspectives on how the Village became a de facto healthcare space during the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and whether it still holds that perception today.

As the impact of HIV/AIDS led to the development of different community needs, and the formation of “a community of cure,” using this research theme in oral history interviews, the researcher can listen for who was considered included and excluded in this sense of community.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for what changes in government healthcare policies influenced the impacts of HIV/AIDS on the lives of those participating in the oral history interviews, along with how these individuals (when younger) experienced this time filled with fear and how they kept or lost their hope and optimism. Using this research theme in

the research can honor the generation that lived through the epidemic in the 80s and 90s and can help inform younger generations about its profound impact on their lives.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for any involvement or understandings that the oral history interviewees may have had in organizations such as ASAAP, ACAS, Latinos Positivos, Black CAP, and others, and how these organizations were perceived in providing services and shaping different business models within the community.

Using this research theme, the researcher will seek out in interviews how the interviewees think about how the impact of HIV/AIDS shifted the focus of organizations from protest and visibility to providing social services, resulting in changes in community development and the sense of community.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 7: Social & Sports Groups: Bridge to Village (language, names of groups)

Synthesized Research Theme 7: Social & Sports Groups as a Bridge to Village (language, names of groups); Fostering Social Cohesion & Safety; Co-Ed LGBTQ2S+ Groups; Non-Alcohol LGBTQ2S+ Groups; The Politics of Inclusion in Groups including Intergenerational Social & Sports Groups

Thinking about Social and Sports Groups as a bridge to Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village as a research theme, the researcher can listen for how these groups were important to the oral history interviewees in fostering social cohesion and safety within the Village, and the use of language and names of these groups.

Using this research theme, the research can point to narratives of being part of traditional LGBTQ2S+ sports teams, along with any social community groups such as choirs, book clubs, or other interest groups that contributed to building connectedness within LGBTQ2S+ communities, and if any of the interviewees were involved in any co-ed groups, and non-alcohol socializing in these spaces. Using this research theme, the researcher can find out if any of the interviewees participate in these groups today and if any of these groups today are co-ed ones.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen to find out if the interviewees have experienced the politics of sports that posed challenges regarding who can play and participate in shaping the dynamics of teams and leagues while also determining who becomes part of the community.

Using this research theme can uncover any involvement or interest of interviewees in intergenerational sports leagues (and non-sports groups) that offer opportunities for different age groups to engage in activities together.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 8: Market Demographics

Synthesized Research Theme 8: Market Demographics & Toronto's Changing Church-Wellesley Village: Peoples, Gentrification & Commercialization

Thinking about using Market Demographics as a research theme, it is important to explore the changes that have occurred in the Village and their impact, including a changing presence of straight individuals living in the Village and whether they also engage socially in the community. The oral history interviews will attempt to include all races when examining these changes.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for interviewee thoughts on how gentrification of LGBTQ2S+ spaces has been a significant factor in these changes, and how corporate sponsorship of LGBTQ2S+ events and marketing surrounding them also plays a role in these changes.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 9: Change in Cultural Makeup: Types of stories told/not (representation); How values have evolved; What spaces, things are missed

Synthesized Research Theme 9: Change in Cultural Makeup: Types of Stories Told/Not (Representation) Illustrating How Values & A Sense of Identity Have Evolved & Represents History to Define ‘Culture’ Then & Now

Thinking about using Change in Cultural Makeup as a research theme, the researcher can listen in oral history interviews for the representation and inclusion of different groups, such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, in the discussion of spaces in Toronto’s Church-Wellesley Village. Using this research theme, the research can explore how each interviewees past and current sense of identity impacts their understanding of history.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for what ‘culture’ has meant and continues to mean to draw from narratives in the oral history interviews.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 10: Business Ownership & Other: Queer (Church-Wellesley) vs Non-Queer / Village vs The Rest of City

Synthesized Research Theme 10: Business Ownership & Other: Queer (Church-Wellesley) vs Non-Queer / Village vs The Rest of City – A Significantly Changed Bar Scene (especially for women since early 2000s); Effect of Political Forces on Queer Businesses

Thinking about using Business Ownership & Other as a research theme, the researcher can explore in oral history interviews the dynamics and experiences of queer-owned businesses in the Church-Wellesley Village and non-queer establishments, as well as perceptions about the relationship between the Village and the rest of the city. Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for how, historically, queer businesses supported each other and fostered a sense of community and gather thoughts about how the past bar scene has significantly changed, especially for women since the early 2000s.

Using this research theme, the researcher can seek out opinions in oral history interviews regarding these evolving spaces, and how thoughts on the role of political forces in both helping and hindering queer businesses.

Feedback Grid Research Theme 11: Changes in Resources/Media, How That Impacted Change in the Village (Physical, Diversity, Inclusion)

Synthesized Research Theme 11: Changes in Resources/Media, How That Impacted Change in the Village (Physical, Diversity, Inclusion): Transition From Print to Digital Media and Its Influences on Availability, Accessibility and Use of Resources/Media; Emergence of Apps and Hookup Culture

Thinking about using Changes in Resources/Media, How That Impacted Change in the Village (Physical, Diversity, Inclusion) as a research theme, the research can listen for how such changes have influenced the transformation of the Village in terms of its physical landscape,

diversity, and inclusion. As print (and digital) culture played a significant role in reducing stigma and fostering a sense of belonging, using this research theme can look for the impact the transition from print to digital media had on oral history interviewees.

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for how oral history interviewees were influenced by changes in publication formats from print to digital, and thoughts on how available and accessible and consumed these resources and media were to interviewees.

It is important to listen for the emergence of apps and hookup culture and how interviewees experienced these changes from previous ways of connecting for sexual/social encounters.

There was a reminder of the importance of open education and public displays of cultural and historical stories to promote an awareness and understanding of LGBTQ2S+ communities (this is also pointed out in Synthesized Research Theme 5 about “the importance of promoting public educational displays (signs, murals, sculptures) about the history”).

Feedback Grid Research Theme 12: Change: Old days – Spaces Occupied / Do Seniors Feel They Belong?

Synthesized Research Theme 12: Change: Old days – Spaces Occupied / Do Seniors Feel They Belong? Are Changes Positive or Negative or Both? Who Benefits From The “Good Old Days” Exploring Intergenerational Exchange and An Evolving Sense of Community

Thinking about using Change: Old days – spaces occupied / do seniors feel they belong as a research theme can explore the dynamics of the “old days” and how spaces were occupied by oral history interviewees, as well as whether the interviewees feel a sense of belonging in the Village community. The researcher will listen in the oral history interviews for how interviewees see the strength of the Village as a gathering place, and views on whether changes in the Village are thought of as negative or positive or both.

It is important to listen in the oral history interviews for those who benefited from the “good old days” and thoughts about the force of development that have brought changes in the Village.

Using this research theme can note perceptions from oral history interviewees about limited spaces for intergenerational exchange and ideas about how to bring different generations together (this speaks to the point in theme 7 about how social and sports groups can provide opportunities for different age groups to engage in activities together).

Using this research theme, the researcher can listen for how interviewees perceive the concept of community evolving over time, how we honour nostalgia and queer histories while making room for change and diversity, and how interviewees feel about community in the Village now.