

**BEAN THERE, GRIND THAT: QUEER COFFEE CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF
PLACE, BELONGING, AND REPRESENTATION**

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Abstract

The “gay village” located in Toronto, Ontario, is generally thought by mainstream society to be excessively determined by the establishments, individuals and normative LGBTQ identity representations located in the area i.e. mostly white, middle/upper class. Based on this and the interviews with my informants, I assert how the dominance of normative LGBTQ identity makes the area over-determined. However, I will attempt to highlight the importance of alternative queer places along the strip in the Church and Wellesley Street area. My thesis will explore the relationship between place formations, LGBTQ identity construction, and coffee consumption. I aim to create a richer understanding of the various ways in which queer identities are understood, created, and negotiated within coffee shops. I highlight how, at times, queer coffee shops are open and dynamic, and allow for new and old meanings to become generated in and out of these places. Queer coffee shops shed light on how my research informants grapple and work with or against these complex sites of negotiations. Ultimately, queer coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area are microcosms of the larger LGBTQ community in the same neighbourhood. These processes help to shape LGBTQ identity, membership, place, rootedness, and belonging while simultaneously encouraging misunderstanding, tension, conflict, and estrangement.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
The Significance of Coffee Culture	5
Introducing the Fieldsites	9
Research Design/Methods	12
Summary	19
Chapter 2 - Literature Review	21
Spaces and Places	22
Queer Identity and Community-Building	27
Coffee Culture and Coffee Consumption	31
Summary	37
Chapter 3 – Homonormativity and the Construction of “Queerness” in the Church and Wellesley Street Area	38
What is Queer/ LGBTQ Identity Today?	39
Inclusion and Exclusion	45
Racialization of Queerness	47
Gender and Queerness	52
Summary	56
Chapter 4 – Queerness and Coffee shops	578
Coffee, Queerness, and Contemporary Media	60
Place, Queer Identity, and Coffee shops	63
Coffee shops and the Queer Community	71
Sex and Sexuality in Coffee shops	74
Race/Privilege/Gender and Coffee shops	77
Summary	80
Chapter 5 – Down to the Last Drop: Conclusion and Final Thoughts	84
Toronto’s Gay Village	84
Queer Coffee shops: A Microcosm of the Gay Village	86
Conclusion:	87
Bibliography	89
Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions	104

List of Figures

Figure 1: Coffee and gay identity	1
Figure 2: A map highlighting the area commonly known as the “Gay Village” in Toronto, Ontario	3
Figure 3: Banner Found at Church and Wellesley	29
Figure 4: Oreo celebrating Pride month on Facebook	62

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Identity, place and practices are tightly intertwined, both enabling and constraining the ongoing, uneven and unstable formations of subjects and spaces – (Catherine Jean Nash 2005).

Different coffeehouses developed for distinct purposes. The coffeehouses created a social space that was defined in terms of political affiliation, or “lifestyle” – (Brian Cowan 2005:169).

Figure 1: Coffee and gay identity



Coffee: the energy source of early risers, the non-alcoholic social beverage of choice for others and the addiction of millions. Coffee and its consumption have become entrenched into many parts of our society, and it has taken on its own rules, norms and standards. It has been grown to support nations, picked selectively to ensure power, and grinded in and against various identities. While you might think that your morning java is just a cup of hot, liquid, and delicious comfort, there is much more nuance that can be extracted from the bean. Coffee has become attached to various political, economic, social, and cultural meanings, which we see reflected throughout different vignettes in society. Thus, particular “coffee cultures” have been developed around social behaviors and social atmospheres that depend heavily on the process of coffee consumption.

My thesis investigates queer coffee shops and culture through “categories, meanings, and values that people use to understand their world. This emphasis [will

¹ <http://www.slapupsidehead.com/2011/12/conservative-mayor-outed-over-gay-adult-store-purchases/>
Accessed on June 1, 2013

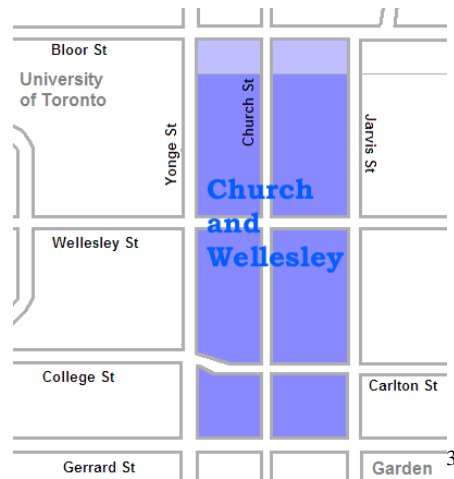
move the idea] of bounded cultures to the interpretation of shared meanings” (Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragone, Patricia Zavella 1997:2). My research will attempt to answer a central question: *How does the construction of queer coffee shops contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places in the “gay village” of Toronto?* My thesis will explore:

- 1) How queer coffee shops (or places) open up possibilities for engagements with homonormative identities and practices
- 2) How place-making practices for LGBTQ individuals produce tensions and potentialities

My ethnographic research on individuals who frequent queer coffee shops explores how concepts of “LGBTQ practices” and “LGBTQ identities” are negotiated in two LGBTQ coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area of Toronto, Ontario, often referred to as Toronto’s “gay village.” Nathaniel M. Lewis defines gay villages as “spatially concentrated configurations of bars, entertainment venues, community spaces, and homes associated with a gay-identified population” (2013:233).²

² Other theorists have discussed the shifts and changes of the “gay village” (see Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009; Nash, in press; Ruting, 2008; Visser, 2008).

Figure 2: A map highlighting the area commonly known as the “gay village” in Toronto, Ontario



The “gay village,” as the Church and Wellesley Street area can often be considered as an over-determined “gay place.” By overdetermined Bradley L. Garrett argues that “overdetermined places [are where] ... certain practices are privileged and others aren’t” (2010:1453). Overdetermination of identities, as argued by Debbie Rodan, occurs where particular identity characteristics intersect, and thus over-determine one another (2004:61). Through my research informants’ conversations around their experiences with LGBTQ identities and the places of the gay village, I aim to unpack how normative identities produce places that determine who can access them and who cannot. Rodan goes on to suggest that identity construction is based on particular processes of “fixing” identity categories in particular conditions (2004:61). What is ultimately important to note is that “subjects are deeply implicated in the social production of space, in assumptions about the ‘natural’ and the built environment and in the sets of regulations with influence who should occupy” (Nash 2005:118). What makes

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Church_and_Wellesley_map.PNG Accessed on August 8th, 2013

the space of the Church and Wellesley Street area over-determined is the particular identity categories that dominate these places, at the exclusion of others.

Coffee shops in particular are important sites of investigation as they are not just public places for all to occupy, but also places with social rules and norms that individuals negotiate. By investigating the LGBTQ subject through the lens of coffee consumerism, I discuss other types of consumptions. I investigate how coffee shops produce a particular “coffee culture” in which some LGBTQ individuals come to consume, imagine, experience, and construct queer⁴ identities, spaces, and places. I examine coffee shops through the concept of third-place⁵ in an attempt to highlight how these places raise questions around LGBTQ identities, and the places of exclusion, and representations.

By exploring my research informants’ understandings and experiences of their LGBTQ identities and how they come to self-identify, I am able to unpack homonormative processes that construct the LGBTQ cultural meanings and understandings in the Church and Wellesley Street area. I highlight the relationship of these identifications to that of the LGBTQ places they do or do not use and how they are able to delve into various understandings of what an LGBTQ community is to them. I investigate whether particular coffee shops are important for my research participants, and highlight narratives that may connect individuals through imaginaries, experiences

⁴ “Queer” is an umbrella term I use to reference the LGBTQTIQQ2S (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Transsexual Intersex Queer Questioning 2-Spirited) community. I note that while not all members use this term as self-identification, it is in opposition to the concept of normative straight. Helen Hok-Sze Leung explores this concept further noting that the term “queer” provides an analytical framework to look for what denaturalizes, disrupts, or resignifies the relation conventionally drawn between gendered embodiments, erotic desire, and sexual identities (2008:2).

⁵ “The character of a third place is determined most of all by its regular clientele and is marked by a playful mood, which contrasts with people's more serious involvement in other spheres. Though a different kind of setting from a home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort they are the heart of a community's social vitality” (Ray Oldenburg, 2001). See further discussion in Chapter 2.

and practices of “sharedness.” My research highlights the various ways coffee shops may facilitate the sense and practices of identity construction. Also, I investigate the importance and significance of how, and why, a place is LGBTQ.

The Significance of Coffee Culture

Coffee shops are important sites of study as “coffee is inextricably connected with our everyday lives ... even if we are not coffee drinkers; it is difficult not to be embraced by the social place of the café” (Lee Jolliffe 2010:3). It is important to research coffee consumption, because, as Jolliffe argues, coffee moves beyond the act of simply drinking a beverage, and opens up social possibilities and complexities for individuals who consume coffee. This I found to be true for some of my research informants. My research focuses not only on why an individual chooses a particular coffee shop, but also how their decisions are intertwined with notions of identity, culture, and community. Ole-Jorgen Skog states that “drinking together is a way of being together – a vehicle for social interaction” (287:2006). My research highlights and explores how drinking coffee in *specific* coffee shops allows some individuals to explore, generate, construct, and produce social norms and codes around “being LGBTQ.”

By engaging participants to explore the reasons behind their coffee consumption habits, I deconstruct the concept of “coffee culture” through the discourses of place, identity, and community. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, notes that:

the concept of culture as a coherent entity privileges forms of sharing, agreement and bounding, and thus neglects facts of inequality and differences in lifestyles. The adjective cultural, to the contrary, recognizes differences, contrasts, and comparisons. (1996)⁶

⁶ My thesis explores “queer culture” by examining the various cultural formations that become produced by and for my informants. By opening culture to cultural as argued by Appadurai, my thesis is able to

By exploring my research informants' experiences with a perceived homonormative LGBTQ culture, I will demonstrate how queer coffee shops at times reproduce particular homonormative LGBTQ discourses and a culture of "queerness" for some of my research informants.

Lisa Duggan in her book *Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*⁷ explains the concept of homonormativity through the lens of neoliberalism and its practices. Duggan discusses how neoliberalism organizes material and political life in terms of identity categories such as race, gender, sexuality, economic class, nationality, ethnicity, and religion; homonormativity as a neoliberal strategy obscures crises of increasing LGBTQ inequality and difference.

Homonormativity is thus

"a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (2003:50).

In this thesis I will explore homonormativity in queer coffee shops. And I will examine how my informants engage with these normalizing practices and discourses. Exploring my informants' experiences of the Church and Wellesley Street area and two coffee shops, allows me to unpack how "the most assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population (Duggan 2003:44), are reinforced or challenged in LGBTQ "spaces".

investigate the various queer cultural meanings that become produced for those using queer coffee shops.

⁷ The term "homonormativity" was first theorized in Michael Warner's 1999 book *The Trouble With Normal*, though the term was further developed by Duggan.

How coffee culture relates to the ways in which identities of patrons are constructed and negotiated is important to explore. Taylor Clark, for instance, touches on this point when she explores how Starbucks became one of the biggest coffee chains in the market today. Discussing the various aspects of Starbucks coffee franchise's success, Clark notes that:

throughout history, all civilized societies have had places where people could get together and socialize, share gossip, discuss ideas, or just unwind. These public gathering places are vital to a culture's health, and they have always reflected the unique national character of their patrons ... Today, we have the cozy indulgent coffeehouse as our social hub ... the things Starbucks provides – feelings of extravagance and invigoration, of social connection, of safe refuge – are things people desperately want. (2007:13)

The “things” Starbucks provides for its patrons are the particulars that construct what “coffee culture” has come to be known for (i.e. a comfortable setting, WIFI, ambient music etc.). What makes Starbucks thrive is also found in the important role of coffee shops and LGBTQ cultural formations I investigate. As Clark (2007) argues, feelings of connections and safe refuge are produced in Starbucks for its patrons; this argument was also true for some of my informants who frequent the coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley area. Furthermore, Catherine M. Tucker (2011) explores the idea of coffee culture by stating that “coffee is a material substance, but culture infuses coffee with social and symbolic meanings. Culture can be defined as everything that humans think, have, and do as members of a society (Ferraro 206)” (2011:6). Coffee thus moves away from being a beverage to something imbued with meanings and purpose. What is most important to note is that:

through culture, consuming coffee can affirm identity, express values, or affirm social ties. Coffee ... has proven easily adaptable to different cultural contexts. Coffee combines well with many flavors and

additives, therefore it fits within existing cuisines and evolving tastes.
(Tucker 2011:7)

I explore how coffee shops become places imbued with purpose and meaning, which allows for multiple “LGBTQ cultures” to interweave and work together, and at other times clash. Queer coffee shops work in specific ways to produce moments of what it means to be LGBTQ for some research participants in Toronto, Ontario, and thus serve as a microcosm of the gay village more generally. Therefore, I argue that while coffee culture engages well with many other cultures, LGBTQ normative identities are both reinforced and challenged in coffee shops. What makes studying coffee shops so important is that coffee culture “refers to the ideas, practice, technology, meanings, and associations regarding coffee” (Tucker 2011:7). It is these discourses, codes, and modes that produce consuming processes for identifications. By exploring the way coffee culture structures, shapes, and negotiates the patron, we can begin to untangle the many ways identities are generated, created, and destabilized. It is important to note that “coffee culture can unite actions, beliefs, and special knowledge to distinguish members from non-members, and the more knowledgeable from the less knowledgeable” (Tucker 2011:7). Coffee culture already produces places where individuals can or cannot situate themselves comfortably and queer coffee shops in particular highlight these inclusions and exclusions further. Queer coffee shops work in complex ways with coffee culture and LGBTQ identities to produce and reproduce LGBTQ normative discourses that move particular LGBTQ individuals in specific ways in and out of these places.

Class, race, politics, and, notably, gender and sexuality are important sites of analysis when contextualizing the rise of the early spread of hot beverages over time. The relationship between coffee culture and LGBTQ identities can be seen in more

contemporary examples. Recently, the publication LGBTQNation considered how the right-leaning and conservative National Organization for Marriage (NOM) launched a boycott of Starbucks after the C.E.O. Howard Schultz defended the company's pro-gay marriage stance (Staff Reports, March 21st, 2012).⁸ NOM's boycott of Starbucks emphasized the inherent heterosexuality embedded into everyday social thought, codes, and norms. Through the support of gay marriage, Schultz openly acknowledged and accepted LGBTQ individuals within Starbucks and tied his coffee shops and the consumption of Starbucks coffee with that of one strand LGBTQ politics and identities. In this one example, we can see the frictions and problems that are related to coffee shops and the consumption of coffee and identities. Furthermore, commitment to particular brands attempts to create particular consuming individuals and identities, but also highlights an acceptance of those very identities through the act of consumption.

Introducing the Fieldsites

My thesis explores two coffee chains in the Church and Wellesley Street area: *Smartfolk Café*, and *Double Mug Café* (both pseudonyms). They are both national/international companies with many outlets. I enmeshed myself into these two coffee shops so that I could begin to observe what my informants observed and attempt to feel what they ultimately expressed in their discussions through their interviews. I visited these locations two to three times a week to gain a broad analysis of the relationships in these places.

⁸ For more information on Starbucks and gay marriage visit: <http://www.LGBTQnation.com/2012/03/nom-launches-boycott-after-starbucks-rejects-anti-gay-marriage-sentiment/> Accessed: March 25th, 2012.

Smartfolk Café was my first hangout spot to sit, enjoy coffee, and jot a few notes. The café seemed like other coffee shops in this chain. This one slightly differed, with a long hallway in front of me going quite far back, a coffee counter to my right, and a set of stairs to my left that went upstairs. Usually, upon entering other Smartfolk Cafés, you encounter a more spacious room with ambient lighting and music. The music was low, even barely audible, and the café seemed darker. Looking around at the empty few chairs, I decided it was best to try the upper level. I placed my order for a pricey cup of fresh roast coffee. The barista was friendly, asking, “What will you have today, handsome?” After receiving my cup of joe (and the barista’s name was Joe), I made my way up the stairs. The upstairs section resembled a loft, where it was directly located above everything and everyone; somewhere that everyone wanted to be. Multiple chairs, plugs and silence filled this section. I could hear orders being placed downstairs. The sanitary feeling of downstairs made the upstairs warm colours and inviting seating feel more welcoming. While trying to observe any sort of action, I listened to the clicking of keyboards and the odd phone conversation. My attention fell to the large window that faced outside to the street. The window made this area feel more open and brighter, especially more than downstairs. I felt like I was in a penthouse – I felt oddly misplaced, yet comfortable. I was used to this coffee chain and the working space it provides for me. I was not surprised that every individual in that café was roughly my age and dressed better than me. The patrons were mostly male, Caucasian, mid-twenties to early-thirties, and kept to themselves. It felt polished and fake to me – things I have felt with LGBTQ community places in the past. I had similar experiences at this café throughout the week; a joke with the barista, a coffee in hand, and a view with no one to share it with.

Double Mug Café was the second site of my ethnographic fieldwork. I initially found myself lost while finding this café. The protruding patio met the other store fronts on the sidewalk, pushing the coffee shop back. Doing a turn-around, I noticed I had in fact walked past the café. Inside, coloured lights, friendly baristas, and brightly decorated walls with open-concept floor plans were alluring to me. This café was different from Smartfolk Café. Usually, when I entered this coffee chain, the spatial experience was different; I never have the same experience from location to location. I first entered this café in late February 2013, with heart-shaped decorations still hanging from the ceiling. The mostly male clientele reminded me of Smartfolk Café, but the age diversity made the coffee shop more appealing. Tables were to my right along the wall, and the coffee bar was to my left where I ordered my beverage. Ordering my coffee and having a less conversational barista compared to my previous experience at Smartfolk Café, I sat down. Sitting at the far back past the coffee counter I had a view of the entire café – I could see patrons walking in and baristas making coffee. I could observe the folks against the wall, and could glance over at the elevated sitting area to my left. Over the course of a week, many regulars (unlike in the other café) entered the coffee shop, but one stood out. Shawn was an older gentleman in his early-forties and Caucasian. Shawn liked to joke around with customers and baristas alike. I found him telling baristas, “Put that cake down, you’re gonna be tired for tonight!” and to customers, “Hey! I haven’t seen you in here before, have I? (winks).” There was a lot of social interaction bustling within this place between Shawn, other patrons and the employees. This café was a social hub. Walking into the café and past the coffee bar and seats located adjacent to the grand bookshelf, I noticed this place had an elevated “loft” area as well. This area was only

higher up by a few stairs and the side railings allowed you to peer over into the main area. I found most patrons, a mostly younger crowd, used this area for studying, and the downstairs and patio were used for conversing and socializing by the mostly older crowd.

Smartfolk Café and Double Mug Café together provided me with an avenue where I could observe and begin to understand how individuals, particularly LGBTQ folks, use places like coffee shops to formulate experiences, meaning and understandings of themselves and their community. The “openness” of the places was unlike any other place I could occupy in the village. The coffee shops allowed me to sit for hours, observe without causing concern, and later a place to have conversations with my research informants. The two coffee shops helped shed light on the ways coffee culture works to adapt to local LGBTQ communities and the people who use them. They also helped my informants describe moments of discomfort or feelings of inclusion within the LGBTQ community of Toronto, Ontario.

Research Design/Methods

I would like to note that my thesis and research are merely snapshots of the LGBTQ coffee drinking experience and that I do not see it as determinative of any broader understanding of coffee shops in general. I am providing a glimpse into the experience of a handful of LGBTQ informants who make choices to consume coffee from two particular locales, in one particular part of Toronto. I explore “queer” coffee shops – where LGBTQ individuals, identities, and subjectivities become defined, generated, and moved in and through place usage. My research design observes the relationships between queer coffee shops and LGBTQ identity formations. Paddy

O'Toole and Prisca Were argue that observing how place and material objects intersect is overlooked in research; using qualitative research proves to be fruitful when analyzing how place provides insights into power, identity, and status (2008:616).

I solicited research informants by using social media, such as Facebook. I wrote callouts to my friends and on LGBTQ-specific clubs and organizations' "Facebook walls." I briefly outlined my project and the demographic I am interested in working with, which is 8 to 10 LGBTQ-identified individuals between the ages of 18 and 35, any gender, ethnicity, or race. My research informants provided access to other informants who I may not have had access to otherwise because of my identity markers and position as a Master's student. In my ethnography, I do not interview owners of the establishments as this was outside the scope of my project. My research informants were able to contact me via e-mail, telephone, or in person. I conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation with these patrons in order to ask about their experiences about particular coffee shops, as well as to gain information about what coffee shops to go to.

On the website cyborganthropology.com, it is noted that online networks such as Facebook and Twitter have their own subgroups and sets of cultures that gravitate towards each other (2011). Using Facebook to access coffee shops located in the Church and Wellesley Street area allowed me to communicate with individuals who use these places, and they were able to provide information as to what makes these places important and "LGBTQ." The use of social media allowed those who talked to me to remain anonymous and still be able to discuss topics that may be sensitive and taboo around identity politics. As a researcher, I felt my fieldsite should be produced through the narratives of my research informants rather than my preconceived notions and ideas

of “good places” in the area. I found this to be a useful method and the coffee shops I used as fieldsites were rich and offered much for observation. As discussed above, I selected two coffee shops that are located in the Church and Wellesley area of Toronto, Ontario – both of which are larger franchise coffee shops. Due to various constraints of my thesis, I was not able to explore smaller, locally run coffee shops.

By understanding the relationship between identities and place-making practices, I will address the following: How do LGBTQ identities come to be defined and produced? What makes the area and places patrons use LGBTQ? How are LGBTQ cultural processes developed and moved? How do LGBTQ communities exist (or do they)? What are the limitations for such communities?

Patricia L. Sunderland and Rita M. Denny argue that anthropologists should have a cultural ethnography that is multimodal and that allows one to listen, observe, and be analytical (2007:57). When conducting interviews or sitting within the coffee shops, I therefore took in the sensory experiences that allowed me to delve into how places may transform and construct identities, as well as how identities transform and are constructed through representational imaginaries and realities, making spaces into a places.⁹ Lisa Malkki’s sensory experiences, for example, provided her other insights and forged relationships otherwise not possible (2007:175). Malkki argues that “it was because our senses provoke imagination in complex ways” (175). The complex sensory relationships Malkki experienced, such as fear and anxieties in Tanzania, allowed her to experience new insights and relationships. Similarly, by allowing myself to engage with my research informants personal sensory experiences, I began to construct an understanding of why my research informants access certain places, use the place, and ultimately how queer

⁹ The distinction between places/ spaces will be spelled out in the literature review.

coffee shops can have an interaction with their identities and LGBTQ consumption places. I found that sometimes these close relationships with places allowed my research informants to feel more comfortable talking, hanging out, and providing me with stories. This became beneficial to my project as it allowed for a greater analysis of information and provided me a wider range of narratives to incorporate into my ethnography.

Karen O'Reilly discusses Malinowski's methodology as another one anthropologists should include in their ethnography as it allows one to explore closely and carefully the daily habits and customs that might seem boring and routine (2005:9). Exploring the "routine" habit or "mundane" acts of coffee consumption within my research helps to shed light on the very complex and sometimes uneasy terrain of LGBTQ identity formation and navigation in the area.

I was mindful of the challenges of such research, yet I attempted to not become too enmeshed into the places I observed and overlook my subjectivity when asking questions to my research informants. I tried to keep conscious of my presence, trying not to may make people uncomfortable. However, because of my sexuality, gender, and race, it was easier to find informants than in non-queer or normative places. My objective as a queer anthropologist discussing matters of "queerness" and identification in relation to place-making was always to remember my identity in relation to those who were building my project. Lawrence Knopp discusses how social relations and practices have particular understandings and interpretations of our embodied experiences as human beings. As such, they reveal broader sets of social relations and power relations (Foucault, 1980). Sexualization, however, is a set of processes whereby identities are re/constructed in relation to these relations (Butler, 1990, 1993; DeLauretis, 1991). Therefore, "when we

identify ourselves, others, and various features of our environments in relation to these bodily experiences, virtually all aspects of our experience become sexualized in some way or other [see, for example, Chauncey (1994), Bell and Valentine 1995)]” (1999:116-117). Like Knopp argues, my social relationship to my research informants would shift and change how they discuss topics and their level of comfort with my project and me. I made sure to check my privileged language periodically in my thesis, and to highlight the growing and dynamic LGBTQ community within Toronto.

I conducted interviews in places that were located inside and outside of the Church and Wellesley Street area, to make it easier for all my informants to make time to meet with me, allowing them to provide me with the “knowledge” I needed to construct an understanding of the relationship between place and identity formation. Interviews were where the bulk of my data was collected. These included 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting between 1.5 and 2 hours in length, which allowed me to probe my participants’ views to find out their reactions, experiences, imaginaries, and important side-thoughts that would have not be available to me in a structured interview. My goal was to allow my participants to interpret my questions so that they could steer the interview in new directions or to seek and gain clarification on questions I asked. I used non-directive questions in interviews, which kept the interviews open-ended in nature. I also utilized active listening skills so that I provided a positive place, the adequate room and comfort for my participants to relay information to me. These methods allowed me to gather a diverse group of research informants, perspectives, and narratives in order to better understand the relationship between LGBTQ identity and places. Gaining an array of research informants provided diverse answers to certain

questions: Is using the Smartfolk Café at Church and Wellesley the same for someone who may use a Smartfolk Café in any other location? What is the purpose of using one coffee shop over another in the Church and Wellesley area? How do various LGBTQ identities intersect? What limitations and barriers exist in the Church and Wellesley Street area? I made a conscious effort to interview participants of not just one identity normative category (e.g., white gay males), which allowed me to gain more diverse perspectives. I found this to be most important to uphold throughout my project as I explored the construction and understanding of various LGBTQ identities, realities and imaginaries.

Kovach notes that research is about choices made about representation and how the participants “voices” are presented to reveal assumptions of knowledge, where there is an entanglement of researchers’ assumptions around power (2009:81). It was important to be sensitive to how I gained information, questions I asked, informants I chose, my verbiage, and to be conscious of my research and the information I decide to integrate with or exclude from my thesis. Two important ways I attempted to have an anti-oppressive approach to my research were to, first, give back to those I was interviewing by providing a report of my final research project, and second, to use unstructured interviews which allowed my research participants to share their experiences on their own terms (Kovach 2009:82).

Gupta and Ferguson discuss localized fieldsites and the problem of the anthropologist studying cultural, racial, ethnic, or social groups to which they associate:

“difference at home” as gay and lesbian communities in the United States profoundly unsettles anthropological sensibilities. Who is the native and who is the ethnographer when “queers study queers”? Trying to speak as a professionally qualified ethnographer of gays and

lesbians, Weston finds that she is heard as a “native” speaking for “her own people,” maybe even “an advocate.” (cf. Narayan 1993)

I maintained a consciousness around this point when I conducted my research and when I wrote about my research informants’ experiences. Their experiences are never my own, and at times, I make connections to feeling similar sentiments, but never do I take their comments, experiences, and problems as my own. I provide my research informants with a lot of room to fully express themselves, with very little alteration on my behalf.

Subsequently, “focusing on the person, the self, and the emotions ... is a way of getting to the level at which cultural differences are most deeply rooted” (George Marcus and Michael Fischer 1999:46). I solicited my research informants to dig deeper, and did my best to not edit out the raw emotion collected throughout their interviews.

Throughout many stages of my ethnographic writing experiences, I found it tough to dislodge myself from my research informants’ conversations surrounding LGBTQ identity formations in Toronto, Ontario. I live in Toronto, use the places they discuss and have faced many similar challenges to them. I made a conscious effort to release my narrative from my ethnography in order to dismantle my authority and privilege and reinstate agency and power to my research informants. James Clifford, for instance, states that ethnographies create a specific strategy of authority (1988:25). As anthropologists speaking to and about others’ lives and places, we must be conscious of how our authority is used to our benefit, and to represent those we encounter and study. As a researcher, I allowed the representation within my writing to be generated and constructed through the narratives of my participant. I allowed my participants to generate pseudonyms for themselves and select gender pronouns that matched their chosen identity. In a subliminal way, authority is generated through participant

observation and I needed to be overtly conscious of this relationship as this was a method I used in the field. Instead of making grand generalizations from my participant observation, I used the data I collected in my in-depth semi-structured interviews to gain participants' observations and knowledge on subject matters. For instance, Chandra Mohanty argues that gendered writing creates "women" as a category of analysis and results in the characterization of women as a singular group on the basis of shared oppression (1988:65). This reminds me that I had to reflect carefully on the identity categories around sexual orientation, the categories I chose to use and, identify with in my writing and questions – i.e., gay, lesbian, queer, male, or female. I was careful not to categorize LGBTQ experiences and oppressions I recorded as representational of the lived experiences of all LGBTQ self-identified individuals who might use these coffee shops. By allowing my research informants to discuss their particular reactions, realities, experiences and imaginaries around how they related to or envisioned queer coffee shops, I opened up static categories of queer identity.

Summary

In summary, this thesis aims to answer the following research question(s): How do queer coffee shops (or places) open up possibilities for engagements with homonormative identities and practices? And how do place-making practices for LGBTQ individuals produce tensions and potentialities? In order to answer these questions, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ research informants who do, do not, or have used the places (specifically coffee shops) in the Church and Wellesley Street area. My research uses a quantitative approach which consists of interviews, participant observation, and analysis of scholarly work. This approach was useful, as it allowed me

to generate a holistic overview of the construction of LGBTQ identity in Toronto, Ontario. In Chapter 2, I review the relevant literature that will touch on the themes of space/place, queer identity construction, community building, and coffee culture/consumption. In Chapter 3, I will address how queer identity is constructed through homonormalising practices. In Chapter 4, I explore how queer identities help to shape spaces into places through place-making practices, and vice versa. Finally, in Chapter 5, I provide my conclusions and discuss how the Church and Wellesley Street area build or limit community building practices for some of my LGBTQ research informants.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

While there has been tremendous research on the rituals and practices of drinking, there are gaps in anthropological literature concerning LGBTQ identities, drinking cultures, and place-making. There is a great deal of historical work on coffee consumption and habits tied to identity. The link between sexual orientation and gender to coffee is not a new phenomenon within the literature, but one I will explore in more depth. These places highlight and reflect what is happening within the microcosm of their built environments. I utilize this argument to discuss the intersections of relationships of identity, place-making, and community to one another.

My thesis takes on an interdisciplinary approach when exploring the relationships between queer coffee shops and the production, negotiation, and regulation of LGBTQ identities in the Church and Wellesley Street area. To help explain the concepts of identity, place-making and community, I therefore evoke various theoretical lenses, such as space and place, queer identification, coffee culture and consumption, and community building practices to help explore how and why LGBTQ identities are created, re-created and negotiated. I also explore how these very identities are utilized to make queer places and vice versa, and ultimately how these help or hinder in the making of an inclusive queer community – and what that means for my research informants. In particular, this chapter expands upon the following three key concepts: space and place; queer identity and community-building; and coffee culture/coffee consumption generally, drawing from a broad body of literature from anthropology, geography, and sexuality studies.

Spaces and Places

There is a strong relationship between how places are constructed and how identities are formulated and negotiated, and how these very identity categories help to reinforce place-making practices. Anthropologists such as Setha M. Low, Nancy D. Munn, Paul Rabinow, Akhil Gupta, Liisa Malkki, and James Ferguson have studied these aspects of the anthropology of space and place (1993, 1997, 2003). There is a great need to pay attention to the relationships of the built and imagined environments around us.

Yi-Fu Tuan explores the difference between space and place, noting that:

the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value ... we [often] think of place as that which allows movement then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (1977:6)

Place imbues spaces with meaning and vice versa, and cultural meanings are produced through various symbols. Jenny Tatsak notes that “not only do spaces [and places] differ in their function and purpose, but in their meaning expressed to inhabitants. Spatial [and platial¹⁰] segregation and boundaries are the symbolic representation of values and meanings ... and therefore, intensify roles, beliefs and perceptions that already exist” (2006:10). Much of the imagined over-determination of the Church and Wellesley Street area is built from many of those symbolic representations of values and meanings reinforced through places and the surrounding spaces. By unpacking how my research informants not only experience, but imagine the Church and Wellesley Street area, I can begin a discussion of how and why places are inclusive for some and not others.

¹⁰ Tatsak argues that “place is the combination of the behaviors enacted by environmental participants as they experience meaning from space” (2006:10). Space as argued previously works within a power

By exploring how and why my research informants feel included or excluded from the space of the Church and Wellesley Street area, or from particular places along the strip, I can unpack the concept of LGBTQ culture and why it is important to understanding queer identity construction. Roger Keesing argues that “cultures are systems (of socially transmitted behaviour patterns) that serve to relate human communities” (1974:75). The normative identity categories of any community are important to unpack as it serves to understand why some feel included and excluded. Keesing argues “culture ... is an organization of things. It is the form of things that people have in mind” (1974:77). How the LGBTQ culture in Toronto, Ontario is managed, conceived and perceived in my research informants’ minds, helps to reinforce normative notions of the area. My research informants have perceived experiences that were inclusive or exclusive to their particular identity. These experiences were subsequently built on imaginaries of homonormativity of the area, built into the consciousness of most, if not all who used or did not use the area.

Identity therefore has a strong relationship with the notions and constructions of space and place, whose connections theorists have tried to show through various facets in many different cultures. I heavily use the work of Ray Oldenburg and Arturo Escobar to further explore the question of the relationship between, and the impact of, identity on spaces (and vice versa). Oldenburg, in *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (1999), also theorizes that there are “in between spaces,” or “third places.” Oldenburg identifies “third places” as the public places which are on neutral ground where people can gather and interact. In contrast to “first places” (e.g., home), and “second places” (e.g., work),

these “third places” allow individuals to do, say, and be what they may or may not be in the two other places (1999:20–25). These third places form the basis of my structural and theoretical understandings of the relationship between coffee shops and LGBTQ identities in Toronto.

Escobar, on the other hand, explores the discourses of culture and place within the local and global context. Escobar suggests that:

identities engage in more complex types of mixing and dialectics ... [through] the dynamic of place, networks, and power ... places are surely connected and constructed yet those constructions entail boundaries, grounds, selective connection, interaction, and positioning. (2001:169)

There are social bubbles of inclusion and exclusion that overlap within any given place. It is intersections of these interactions, relationships, identities, and the way bodies navigate through places that become important. Though culture is produced in, and out of, places, it is important to note that:

culture is carried into places by bodies – bodies are enculturated¹¹ and, conversely, enact cultural practices. ‘Personal and cultural identity is bound up with place ... geographical experience begins in places, reaches out to others through spaces, and creates landscapes or regions for human existence. (Escobar 2001:143)

Escobar asks a critical question which I also employ through my research and fieldwork:

“How do people encounter places, perceive them, and endow them with significance?”

(2001:151). This cultural ritualization is a process which Escobar argues renders places meaningful and which can be explored through local knowledge, localized expressions and language (2001:151).

¹¹ Fitz John Porter Poole notes that **enculturation** refers to “the process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity. Where an individual acquires understanding, orientation, and competence in one’s culture” (1994:831–833).

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson discuss how “culture” is produced along the lines of space, identity, and difference. Gupta and Ferguson argue that representations of space rely on breaks, ruptures, and disjunctions, when in reality spaces is constructed to look like it has naturally discontinuous spaces (1992:6). Subsequently, they also highlight how LGBTQ identities are produced to form similarities or differences between individuals. When the assumption of a singular cultural identity is produced about a particular group, we begin to lose sight of cultural differences, historical memories, societal changes, and cultural transformations within interconnected spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7-8). What is profound about Gupta and Ferguson’s argument is that “the rapidly expanding mobility of people combines with the refusal of cultural products and practices to ‘stay put’ to give a profound sense of a loss of territorial roots, of an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of places” (1992:9).

Another important element of space and place is power. Spaces and places are not a neutral grid, but rather a complex network of power and knowledge¹² where relationships and values are highlighted (Tatsak 2006:9). David Halperin discusses relations of power from Foucault’s arguments, stating that within relations of power, power is not a unidirectional model of oppressor to oppressed, but is rather a complex web (1995:17). What is important to note about the creation and dissemination of power and how it moves bodies is that “power comes from below” (Halperin 1995:17), as much as it comes from above; in fact, it is reinforced from below. This is essential to my research because I explore the power relations in and out of these coffee shops are

¹² Michel Foucault argues that discourses shape our world through meanings, knowledge and understandings (1980). Foucault posits that the discourses that surround gender, sexuality, race, ability, and coffee shops produce “webs” of power and knowledge that are not static but rather subject to constant modifications, and continual shifts (99:1978).

highlighted by the exploration of queer coffee shops through my research participants' experiences. Halperin states that "power is not negative: it is not just the power to deny, suppress, to constrain-the power to say no, you can't. Power is also positive and productive. It produces the conditions for the exercise of freedom" (1995:17). When theorizing power relations and sexuality, Halperin refers to work by Leo Bersani, noting that

power in our societies functions not by repressing spontaneous sexual drives but by producing multiple sexualities, and that through the classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined, or normalized. (1995:19-20)

I explore the power "from the bottom" within particular queer coffee shops and examine how LGBTQ meanings and identities are produced and negotiated for my research informants.

What is important to take away from this discussion is the complex nature of space and place, and how they are important concepts to analyze and consider, especially within policy-making. Places play an important aspect in these relationships and interactions because in any given day, we move through many spaces and places that ultimately maneuver and alter our bodies, interactions and identities in many ways. We must also consider the networks that become produced between space and place and how they exist simultaneously and not without the other. Tatsak notes that "space is often treated as a static concept and that research [should] focus attention on its influence on the organization and behaviours that characterize daily living" (2006:4). There is a sense of acknowledgement and belonging to a particular place which is critical to any given space. Tatsak references the researcher W. G. Roy when stating that "spatial organization [of people, places and objects] is organized to symbolically represent the values and a

meaning of what takes place in space” (Tatsak 2006:5). The Church and Wellesley area is constructed through the various Church Wellesley Business Improvement Area (CWBIA) policies to reflect particular political, cultural and economic LGBTQ values and meanings that emanate from places that are situated in the area. Through such spatial workings, we can begin to understand how “the symbolic representation of hierarchy takes on a life seemingly in its own, reinforcing and reproducing inequalities based on gender, race, and class” (Tatsak 2006:7).

Queer Identity and Community-Building

My concepts of place-making and identity- and community-building are separate but intertwined. The concept of third place helps in our understanding of how cultural meanings are generated, and is particularly important to my research on queer coffee shops as it helps to set the foundation to understanding how the uniqueness of coffee shops aids in understandings the ways various LGBTQ individuals come to experience, negotiate, and understand what it means to be LGBTQ and their identities. I also weave together the work of many theorists attempting to bring some understanding to such a socially constructed term: “community.”

Jonathan Hill and Thomas Wilson, for instance, discuss “the “politics of identity,” referring to a more “bottom-up” process through which local people challenge, subvert, or negotiate culture and identity. How individuals come to understand, perform, and navigate particular identities to which they relate is important when deconstructing power relations.

I also draw on the work of Stuart Hall to show the connections between meaning, representation and culture. Through Hall’s conversation on meaning systems we can

better understand how individuals come to understand, navigate, and construct themselves and the world around them. In his text *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying* (1997), Hall provides my thesis with the ground work in order to begin to unpack how my research informants discussed, experienced and negotiated their LGBTQ identities. Hall's argument is that "meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we belong" (1997:3). According to Hall, my research informants would come across this meaning "through social and personal interaction in which we take part" (1997:3). On a related note, researcher Mary Douglas notes that:

the message is that it is useless to look for the meaning of a symbol, useless to take meanings one at a time, item by item, expecting to find something that will translate into our language. Meaning is part of a constructed world; the problem of understanding symbols is how to take a grip on a whole world. What is actually said in words is only the tip of the iceberg. The unspoken understandings are essential. (2003:vi)

Hall, as well as Paul du Gay, uses the conversation of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler to argue that identity is constructed from its relation to the "Other," the relation to what it is not and what it lacks (1996:4). Both Hall and du Gay make a strong statement in that "identities can function as points of identification and attachment (community) only because of their capacity to exclude" (1996:5). The best way to describe this is through the tagline found on many of the banners found in the Church and Wellesley Street area: shop and play local – see below figure.

Figure 3: Banner Found at Church and Wellesley



13

My research informants describe in various ways how they come to define and relate to the larger LGBTQ community that is found in the Village. Through their discussion, themes inclusion and exclusion become evident and provide a framework in which I think through an understanding of LGBTQ identities and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places in the “gay village” of Toronto. The tagline: *Shop & Play Local* contributes to a narrative of helping to sustain a particular community that have a set of practices and behaviours that are normalized. By exploring how and who can contribute through behaviours of “shopping and playing” locally, I begin to unpack the intersections of LGBTQ identities. Understanding of community, for instance, is important to my research informants’ conversations around inclusions and exclusion because community is built on feelings of sharedness and feeling welcomed. When LGBTQ individuals do not feel incorporated into the area through various mediums, they will feel excluded.

Another researcher whose work I draw from is Debra Curtis. Curtis’s work discusses the relationship between commodities, consuming desires, and sexual practices (2004:96). I am more interested in sexual identities and commodity culture, which as

¹³ Accessed from <http://stayingnative.com/en/blog/family-pride-at-toronto-pride-week/> on December 9, 2015

Curtis explores, can highlight how sexual subjectivities (and identities) can be best understood as a process which is always in the making (2004:96). The work by Curtis is important to my research because, as she notes, there has been a lot of research on consumer culture and identity, but within anthropological literature the relationship between consumption, desire, and sexual practices, desires and meanings is lacking (2004:99). My research attempts to continue this work on how places of consumption, more specifically queer drink places, help us in better understanding how queer identities are created, negotiated, and regulated.

To better understand how representations and meanings are utilized and reproduced around queer identities, I utilize the work of Judith Butler, but the work of Kath Browne, Jason Lim and, Gavin Brown (2007), and Sara Ahmed (2006) can be interesting for readers to divulge into for further discussion. Utilizing Butler, I am to make connections between various gender, queer and feminist theory. Butler, for instance, discusses the relationship between gender and performance. The performance of gender in our everyday lives is transferable to other identity categories such as sexuality, Butler makes this point by stating “normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of screening heterosexuality” (1999:xii). The gendered hierarchies that Butler explores come forward in my interactions with my informants which work along the same lines to reinforce and reproduce a particular type of homosexuality.

As with any group, the LGBTQ community in Toronto is based on a series of identity politics that are constantly at play, such as, Caucasian, hyper-sexualized masculinity, and individuals in the bracket of ages 18–40, to name a few. Through

mainstream media and society, Toronto's LGBTQ community is associated to very specific ideas of "queerness" along the lines of class, ability, race, gender, and sexuality, and the places which are created further reinforce those normative ideals and hierarchies. The inclusion or segregation that exists within LGBTQ places relies heavily on the various identity politics at constant play. In other words, a particular LGBTQ hierarchy is created and reproduced by and through the Church and Wellesley Street area, giving the neighbourhood its homonormative feel.

The meanings produced in this neighbourhood – i.e., symbols such as gay rainbow flags, flagship stores, bars, clubs and the like – all come through in my participants' narratives, CWBIA policies towards the construction of LGBTQ places, and homophobic ideologies within the public and private realm producing various normalizing LGBTQ cultural meanings. These LGBTQ cultural meanings come together to form a complex web of relationships which further reinforce existing LGBTQ meanings and imaginaries or produce new ones. By exploring the various meanings produced around queer coffee shops and coffee, I will investigate how "queerness" becomes produced within queer coffee shops and the relationship to the queerness of the space that surrounds it. In order to highlight the importance of LGBTQ coffee as sites for the construction of LGBTQ identity and community, I explore the emergence of queer coffee shops, and why they are used and for what reasons.

Coffee Culture and Coffee Consumption

The act of drinking, the reasons why people drink, and where they drink are important to anthropologists investigating particular cultures and societies; in every culture and society people drink, yet few attempt to explain how acts of drinking are

integral to understanding identity formations. Anthropological literature, such as that of Douglas (1987), helps us understand that anthropologists have mentioned drinking within their ethnographies without a focus on it. For Douglas, drinks act as signifiers of personal identity and generate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (as discussed above). Roger Keesing (1976) argues that culture is about socially transmitted behaviours and traits, where food and drink, as an example, highlight how individuals pass on information to one another.

The act of drinking is a part of our everyday lives and involves many social rules, norms, and rituals. Drinking creates social relationships and groups, and at times can be loaded with “taboo.” Ultimately, drinking produces various social and cultural meanings, and yet there is a paucity of coffee drinking analysis within anthropological literature.¹⁴ However, what can be said for drinking alcohol, or coffee is that “drinking is essentially a social act, performed in a recognized context” (1987:4). Therefore, coffee culture can be seen as a form of symbol system in which “life is organized into understandable set of actions and events” (Douglas 1987:75), Garine also takes note of the act of drinking being time-and-place-specific, by arguing that, social organization is comprised of further questions (relating back to space and place): Who drinks? Which drinks? How? Where? And when? (2001:5). While Garine speaks to alcohol, he is able to speak more generally to the act of drinking being socially and culturally embedded with cultural meanings.

Garine goes on further to argue that:

drink, even more than food, is a socialising agent and has various culturally appraised consequences ... [and] drinking, even more than eating has a status-conferring and status-displaying function in which

¹⁴ Igor de Garine, among others makes note that “few studies are available on drinking ... [but there is] a large amount of data published on alcoholic drinking” (2001:1).

prohibitions and preferences operate. It is a socioeconomic and cultural marker. (2001:6).

While Douglas, in her book *Constructive Drinking* (1987), focuses on alcohol, I assert that many of her arguments relate to the act of drinking in a social setting more generally. Igor de Garine also takes note of the fact that “each culture has its own particular drinking behaviour” (2001:1). For Douglas, these meanings and rituals come forth through an analysis of drinking as a form of ritualization, where coffee cues the shifts from playtime to worktime and alcohol does the opposite (1987:8). However, I argue that coffee blurs the boundaries between work and play. This “blur” touches on the work of Oldenburg and third place. These are places where intersections of identities, cultures, people, representations, histories, and experiences come to meet. By unpacking the “blur” in queer coffee shops, we can begin to understand how various LGBTQ identities are represented, negotiated and produced.

Queer coffee shops are important sites to begin understanding how LGBTQ identities become reproduced through LGBTQ society and culture. Boundaries of class, race, gender, and sexuality overlap when it comes to coffee consumption, and produce moments of inclusion and exclusion. Hill and Wilson argue that this happens because:

drinking [is] an act of identification, of differentiation and integration, and of the projection of homogeneity and heterogeneity ... drinking practices are active elements in individual and group identifications, and the sites where drinking takes place. The locales of regular and celebrated drinking are places where meanings are made, shared, disrupted and reproduced, where identities take shape, flourish and change. (2005:10)

Through drinking, individuals are able to relate, and form social and cultural bonds of acknowledgement. By entering different coffee shops, ordering specific coffee based beverages, and acting and looking in certain ways, individuals are able to feel welcomed

or excluded within coffee shops, aiding in the construction of identity and community (as discussed above).

Coffee shops are thriving hubs where personal and social interaction takes place, and where I can begin to unpack queer identities. Benjamin Wurgaft, for instances, uses the coffee shop as an example of an identity-building:

The café depends on all the activities that we associate with drinking coffee. It depends not just on our physical need for caffeine, but on the way we've come to use the coffeehouse as a place to read, write, discuss – on the idea that this is the natural environment for those activities. (2003: 72–73)

What is also important to note is that “meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural things; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance” (Hall 1997:3–4). Through the consumption of coffee, I am attempting to unpack this conversation set out by Hall, to address how through the act of consumption and social interaction we can begin to understand the ways meanings produced in coffee culture and queer culture help to negotiated and value certain queer identities.

The consumption of hot beverages such as tea and coffee has transformed many facets of society and cultures around the world. Clarence-Smith notes that elites usually determined which exotic drinks were initially embraced, which allowed beverages to act as stark markers of status (2008:45). Much like the Islamic and European coffee houses of the late 1900s, there was an association with coffee and the middle-class, where coffee consumption came to represent sobriety, serious purpose, trustworthiness, and respectability, unlike that of alcohol. Coffee was by extension associated with

intellectuals, scientists, and businessmen (Clarence-Smith 2008:47). Historically, coffee shops were pivotal to the social life of new cultures because coffee shops bundled news and coffee together as a means of attracting their customers. News could be consumed in a variety of different forms: in print, aloud, as gossip, hearsay, and word of mouth (Cowan 2005:87).

Throughout history, however, how individuals consumed, what they consumed, and where they consumed coffee was sometimes the subject of contention. The social and cultural importance of the linkage between coffee gender and sexual identity, for instance, is not a recent phenomenon. Clarence-Smith argues that male same-sex behaviour, including homosexuality and cross-dressing, happened within European male-dominated coffee shops in the eighteenth century (Clarence-Smith 2008). Drawing on historical literature on coffee and identity, Clarence-Smith explores the importance of coffee and masculinity within Islamic countries, for instance, as coffee was intimately consumed at home, but with the emergence of the coffee houses, cross-dressing and male homosexuality were found within these establishments (2008:44). Cowan also explains how historical writings speak about Turkish coffeehouses which “were centers of licentious behaviour: ‘beautiful boyes [were kept and], who served to procure customers’” (2005:18). These examples demonstrate that identities, and more specifically gender and sexuality, were historically intertwined with that of coffee and dissident bodies,¹⁵ much of which can still be seen through modern day examples in media, which I explore in further detail in subsequent chapters.

¹⁵ “The biggest problem faced by new exotics was that when they were introduced to the English consciousness, many new drugs were associated with licentious sexuality or disorderly intoxication ... it was popular mostly among ‘the common people,’ prostitutes, soldiers, and slaves” (Clarence-Smith 2005:37).

The commodification of coffee thus helps to shed light on the production and navigation of LGBTQ identities, the importance of queer coffee shops, and their relationship to identity- and community-building. Tatsak, for instance, notes that commodity culture can explain the value assigned to products and their environment, as products are fetishized to reveal the importance of consumption to individual and cultural identity – desiring community through consumption. The consumption of Starbucks, for example, has little to do with the beverages they serve and more to do with the “escape” and experience provided to individuals (escape from home and work – the in-between). Cowan argues that “drinking coffee is a habit that must be learned and assimilated into one’s [life] ... [coffee] requires a process of socialization and habituation in which the novice user learns to make sense of [the greater world]” (2005:6). Cowan goes on to say that “coffee became a desirable commodity because it successfully adapted to the various wants and needs of diverse constituencies” (2005:15).

As discussed above, Cowan suggests that coffeehouses in the eighteenth century were so integrated into daily life that if one wanted to know what London life was like, one would just have to step into a London coffeehouse (2005:153). The same can be said for the coffee shops of today. Specifically, while LGBTQ bodies and identities become produced and reproduced through mainstream coffee culture, they are also produced and reproduced through the LGBTQ coffee cultures at Church and Wellesley. Thus, coffee can be used to produce social status and positions for particular LGBTQ bodies. Understanding how Toronto LGBTQ patrons use particular coffee shops and places, engage in particular networks of relationships, or interact with various barriers helps to produce discourses of LGBTQ identities and communities.

Summary

Attempting to understand how culture changes through the lens of consumption is not a new question within anthropology. Keesing proposed that “food-producing, like urbanization, has posed a critical challenge to theoretical explanation, to our understanding of how and why cultures change” (1976:97). By exploring the literature on space and place, queer identity- and community-building, and coffee consumption, we can deepen our understanding as to how coffee and queer coffee shops act as a catalyst for LGBTQ bodies and identities. As Keesing notes, culture is a “learned, accumulated experience. A culture refers to those socially transmitted patterns for behavior characteristic of a particular social group” (1976:138). Through my research, I will explore the following: What is a “queer culture”? Does it even exist, and for who? And what can be said for queer identities today? More specifically, however, *how does the construction of queer coffee shops contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places in the “gay village” of Toronto?*

Chapter 3 – Homonormativity and the Construction of “Queerness” in the Church and Wellesley Street Area

“Identity is what allows us to tell who we resemble and from whom we differ and it is the latitude and longitude that provide us with a functioning, if somewhat imprecise, orientation to the social environment that we must daily navigate” (Richard Jenkins 2002:117).

In order to discuss the queering of coffee and how coffee becomes queer, it is important to discuss the ways in which queer(ness) is discussed, imagined, portrayed, negotiated, and constructed for my research informants. As was explored in the previous chapter, identity relies heavily on the relationship between power, discourses, and representation. This relationship helps to explain those who identify with particular identity categories versus those who identify others in those categories based on various cultural processes and modes of engagements; I will continue to explore this through conversations around place-making and community. The “gay village” in Toronto reflects the dynamics in solidifying action, generating community, and constructing places for some bodies to access to be themselves, such as the 519 Community Centre. What is “LGBTQ identity” and how do we construct it, imagine it, navigate it, and move our bodies through it, and more particularly how do our LGBTQ identities construct places around us and vice versa? I begin the conversation of what queer means and its diverse realities for my research informants, in order to paint a more general picture of how interactions with the homonormativity of the village impact my research informants. In Chapter 4, I extend this discussion to coffee shops specifically.

What is Queer/ LGBTQ Identity Today?

Journalist Paul Aguirre-Livingston discusses a new type of gay, the “post-mo” – the post-modern homo – someone free of homophobia, heavily involved in partying, living in condos, vacationing with their boyfriends in country homes, and segregated from pride flags and events (Xtra, Jun 9, 2011). Livingston argues that “it’s not that we hate gay culture; we just don’t have much in common with it anymore ... Is there even a gay struggle to be had anymore?” (Xtra Jun 9, 2011). Livingston’s article reflects inherent white-gay-male-middle-to-upper-middle-class privilege within LGBTQ culture in Toronto. Places are imagined around this assimilated identity of one singular queer or “gay person,” leaving all other LGBTQ persons to be erased, with no places to congregate and explore. With the proliferation of condos, bars, clubs, travel agencies, banks, and high-end restaurants in the Church and Wellesley area, LGBTQ struggles seem to be erased and certain bodies pushed away to the margins. J. P. Larocque discusses the gay village as an ethnic enclave, where recent initiatives are attempting to “establish a more permanent sense of the strip’s queer character” (Xtra Jun 9, 2011). By holding onto a particular gay identity, “the village” (those who work on business and urban development related to the area, those who work, play, and live there) is attempting to keep its “identity” while simultaneously imagining the new gay identity to which Livingston speaks (a singular LGBTQ identity that is classist, racist, sexist, and ablest).

Livingston discusses the shift from “old gays” to “new gays” in terms of the digitization of our gay culture. He notes an informant’s comments “I supplemented my time socializing ‘on the steps’ (as we called it) at Second Cup on Church Street (old-timers, I think you know what I’m talking about) with online jaunts” (Xtra Jun 9, 2011). Coffee shops and their ability to provide hang-out places to build relationships and the

community in which they are in are seen by Livingston to be irrelevant and even “things of the past.” However, this could not be further from the truth. R.W. Connell notes that “homosexuality as an identity [and is] formed gradually through a series of steps and stages and as a subculture (or subcultures) maintained in a pluralistic society by socialization and boundary negotiation” (1992:738). And while the CWBIA may be supporting place-making practices around homonormative identification categories to support businesses that move away from and towards what Livingston now sees is the post-mo LGBTQ community, coffee shops and like places are still important aspects to any community and culture and can sometimes work alongside and against this trajectory.

Krispy Toastfinger provided a thought-provoking interview and produced moments of insight into the LGBTQ community. Krispy Toastfinger self-identified as a gay male who needed time to settle into the LGBTQ community.

DF: Do you ever feel the need to alter your identity within particular queer places?

Krispy Toastfinger: At first, I would be anxious and I would be shy but I am not anymore. After a month every day going to the village, I got used to it. I got used to my shyness, I felt like I didn’t have to hide anything, but people wanted to know if I was a top or bottom but I would never tell them.

For Krispy Toastfinger, his experiences and feelings of recreationally using places in the area of Church and Wellesley resonate much with my personal initial feelings and contacts with the area. The process of “getting used to” certain feelings, persons, and ways of being and doing things is a normal process that people undergo when first encountering communities or individuals. There are many pre-determinants (imaginaries, histories etc.) that individuals are unaware of prior to entering new groups or communities through which they must maneuver. The Church and Wellesley area, at

times, is hyper-sexualized and determined by normalizing cultural and social scripts. Commonalities based on sexual orientation and particular LGBTQ codes and modes allowed Krispy Toastfingers to move past his shyness and feel at ease. It is Krispy Toastfingers' last comment, about being constantly asked if he was a top or a bottom,¹⁶ which reflects moments of discomfort and uneasiness alongside static codes and notions of queerness which construct LGBTQ identities and realities. Krispy Toastfingers adds to the conversation on LGBTQ identity formation, discussing how hyper-sexualization is intertwined with that of the Church and Wellesley Street area community. It is in these moments when LGBTQ individuals encounter LGBTQ social scripts and they must make conscious and unconscious decisions to alter who they are to reinforce the "status quo/er" or move away from such normative cultural codes and imaginaries.

Many of my research informants solicited notions of what it means to be LGBTQ for them while exploring their anxieties and discomforts, but Will, another research informant, brought this conversation together. When asking Will if he ever felt he had to alter himself or his identity in LGBTQ places he responded with "No, not at all!" Will shared with me sentiments of not having the feeling of being excluded from the LGBTQ community and being able to occupy the places in the area, much like my other research informants. This was interesting and I needed to understand why that was so, when some of my research informants and I experienced different realities.

DF: Do you feel some people have to alter their identity?

Will: I feel like some people may, depending on their own personal preference; one of the only diverse groups I can speak to is the LGBTQ group and everyone has their own preference of what they are comfortable with, how ready they are of other people to be aware of their identity. There may be environments where someone is

¹⁶ This is common "gay slang" that is used between queer individuals, but predominately males, referring to who receives anal sex and who gives anal sex during sexual intercourse.

comfortable being exactly who they are or identifying in a certain way, where someone in the exact same environment may not feel comfortable at all.

Will's response highlights an important discussion piece. Many times, identities are thought to be active and conscious choices, developed, created, and negotiated by the subject in different places. Yet identities aid in the production of "titles," which are the socially constructed labels we generate from various meanings and interactions. Will's response regarding identity embodiment was interesting for this conversation around LGBTQ identity-formation in the Church and Wellesley Street area. Will felt that a person's personal preference was the primary factor in someone wanting to alter themselves, and therefore, whether they felt included or excluded. While Will's sentiments might be true (that individuals may or may not want to disclose their sexual orientation), there are complex and multiple levels of interworking relationships around LGBTQ cultural codes that do not allow LGBTQ individuals to "be themselves" within particular LGBTQ places. I investigated further:

DF: Do you think coffee shops specifically allow people to perform or identify as they wished in the Church and Wellesley Street area?

Will: I feel like they do, most of the people who frequent those coffee shops come from that community and they are LGBTQ and a lot of them are obviously LGBTQ just in the way they interact, the way they talk, and the way they dress, and what they say, and what they talk about ... Things of explicit nature happen all the time (laughs).

Will acknowledges, like my other research informants, that there has to be a sense of familiarity when it comes to feeling or imagining inclusion in places. Through sexual orientation self-identifications, or through navigating particular LGBTQ cultural codes and modes of dress, speech, and/ or behaviors, only then can individuals enmesh themselves into a particular "LGBTQ community." Through using these particular LGBTQ places, Will believes that specific persons occupy those places and certain rituals

and practices surrounding what it means to be LGBTQ are enacted. Will understands that a specific LGBTQ identity and community is created in this area. What is most important is to acknowledge that LGBTQ individuals do not just occupy these places and enact, perform, and imagine what he sees to be particular LGBTQ cultural codes and modes; it is much more complex than being and doing cultural particularities.

François added tremendously to the conversation of LGBTQ identity formation. François noted that he self-identified as gay, but it was not without context. Upon asking him further to explain, François suggested that his behaviour did not fit neatly into the definition of “gay,” noting that “if you tell people you are queer, it could be misunderstood in both mainstream and heterosexual circles. Gay male is easier because it is more pragmatic; queer is more political.” For François, maneuvering LGBTQ places did not allow defining labels of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and even queer to be easy. These terms were loaded and complicated, and he felt that he needed to grind away parts of who he was to make sense of his identity and the world around him. This identity process did not seem easy and sounded like it continually changed and altered from moment to moment for him. François explained his anxieties around his identity further. When asked if he felt the need to alter his identity within coffee shops in the village, he responded, “YA! Oh god fuck’n ya, definitely!” I asked if he could elaborate further:

François: Experience and prediction ... [they] have a pretty good idea of who they want you to be ... I have to sort of hush down in mainstream spaces.

Unlike Will’s experiences of being open with his identities and expressions in LGBTQ places, François felt differently. The LGBTQ cultural codes and modes enmeshed within certain places and enacted through individuals, provide the framework for certain

LGBTQ bodies to be included or excluded. What François stated next made me conceptualize my project further by understanding exclusion in a different way”:

François: I would hope there would be more acceptances in queer spaces. We are all products of the same society. I find there are a lot of criticisms from the alternative gays, the gay community, and the queer theorists saying that the gay community excludes and marginalizes. It is not that oppression dramatically teaches you how to cope in an affirmative way; you just cope because you want to belong and you do what you can to the best of your abilities. Is there is room for improvement? Sure, but that is why I have to hush down my identities, but fundamentally there is a shared experience; even the oppressive experience is part of being gay and why I keep going back. Even the “twink” being judgemental is still part of the community because of his experience of being gay. *I am part of a systemic hatred, but that hatred is a part of my community.* (Emphasis added)

François understood that his self-identification and bodily enactments were part of a larger context within society that the LGBTQ community in Toronto is part of. François eloquently acknowledged that without “othering” individuals, the LGBTQ community could not exist. My research informants’ lived realities and the places their bodies may or may not occupy all serve to reinforce the larger determination of the Church and Wellesley Street area. Queerness and queer identity are constructed around representations of particular LGBTQ sub-groups, the images being portrayed, and the way language becomes used. LGBTQ spaces and places are overly determined by particular normalizing LGBTQ cultural factors and identities, and are inextricably linked to the politics of race, gender, ability, and sexuality.

Inclusion and Exclusion

Glam-Drew was my first informant and I will not forget this remarkable person or interview. Glam-Drew and I met up at a large commercial tea chain located on the Church and Wellesley strip. We discussed meeting here to just be “ironic” to my topic on the study of coffee. Like almost all of my other interviews, I began by asking Glam-Drew a series of simple questions, hoping this would open up conversation for larger themes and segue into various conversations and topics. Glam-Drew, without the need for my facilitation, discussed discrimination and his employment within the village:

Glam-Drew: I use to like the optical job, but then my boss told me that gay people can't become doctors so I was like, “hmm.” She hired me from the village, and knew I was gay and that was all good, and then I told her I wanted to be a doctor, like an optometrist, and she flipped out! She told me, “Someone like you I wouldn't hire for Church Street!” I'm like, “Okay, I worked on Church street.” Truthfully, now that I have quit our relationship is a lot better, because it is more clear to her that this is secondary so she has hired someone else who she can torment and say, “you can't be gay!”

The ways in which Glam-Drew positions his identity within the larger context of the Church and Wellesley area is important. For Glam-Drew, and many of my research informants, there are embedded assumptions of whom and what belongs and what does not in “the village.” To Glam-Drew, working, playing, and living in the “gay village” all become LGBTQ cultural codes and modes for what it means to be LGBTQ and included, much like the countless signs located in the village that say “I <3 my Village: Shop & Play Local (see figure 3).” Just like the many coffee advertisements, the connection between identity and loyalty of consumption is real within the village.

Subsequently, notions and imaginaries of equality and inclusion in the area both erase and heighten the embedded homophobia and segregation that exists for particular queer individuals. For Glam-Drew, being gay and having close ties and connections to

the area produce moments of confusion and discomfort. How is it that a gay or LGBTQ person cannot work in a queer business located in a LGBTQ neighbourhood? It is important to understanding how identities are constructed and move in particular ways. I felt the need to question Glam-Drew about this further:

DF: Do you ever feel like you have to alter your identity when you interact with individuals upon entering certain coffee shops?

Glam-Drew: Yeah, they are intimidating – the space is constructed around a particular culture and if you don't understand it then you are secluded. I have served celebrities before who I thought were outrageous and fun, but were completely boring. I would say things like, "Here is your cappuccino, do you like lots of foam on it!?" and make really gay jokes to them and they would be like, "ok," and I am thinking, "How are you famous!? I make \$10/hr and I am funnier than you."

Glam-Drew was aware that while he sometimes "fit" within the area, at many times he did not. He understood that the ways in which cultural formations take place, such as coffee culture, work with and alongside or against other cultural formations like those of LGBTQ cultural formations. By discussing with me his experiences of working within one of the few coffee chains in the village, he expressed his own LGBTQ cultural imaginaries and experiences of what it means to be queer in the Church and Wellesley Street area. Again, such moments produce uneasiness and friction and disrupt what is means to be "LGBTQ".

I wanted to investigate Glam-Drew's discomfort with these moments of queer disruptions:

DF: Do you feel like you have to act or portray yourself differently when you are in the village than outside the village?

Glam-Drew: No, I am more outrageous outside the village because it is my defence. I am establishing my sexuality, making a clear understanding of who I am in the social context, so I will make more outrageous jokes or act more flamboyantly or what have you.

Glam-Drew's response shocked and amazed me, and I began reflecting back onto my own personal gay experiences in and out of the village. For Glam-Drew, there is a clear division between being comfortable with his sexuality, and noticing when he is not, based on a certain geographical location and/or context. Glam-Drew's overtly flamboyant gestures and behaviours act as a reference point of what it means to be LGBTQ for him and those around him, and thus "queer up" a particular location and his body. What is most interesting to explore is why Glam-Drew does not feel the need to be a particular homonormative queer body when in the village, as opposed to outside the Church and Wellesley Street area. Moments of recognition, understanding, and commonalities based on particular identities and shared LGBTQ cultural codes make it so that Glam-Drew can construct a particular LGBTQ identity through his pre-set imagining of what it means to be gay in the village as opposed to outside the village where those meanings and representations change. This will be discussed in further detail later in chapter 4.

Racialization of Queerness

Steven Seidman notes that since the late 1980s, gay men of colour have identified a major problem: invisibility in gay public life due to racism (1993:119). Seidman, for instance, uses Hemphill's argument that "dominant gay male culture does not represent the experience of black men. 'Gay' signifies the experience of a white, middle-class, urban culture organized around sex, consumerism, and civil rights" (1993:120). Some of my research informants felt moments of racial discomfort, like my informant Le Pieties Prince, who self-identified as a gay man of colour. When I asked him if he ever felt the need to alter his identity, his response was, "I am a lot more self-conscious when in homo spaces than in regular mainstream spaces." Le Pieties Prince's feelings of being

uncomfortable can be illustrated through Alan Han's discussion of racialized economies of white queer male gaze. Han notes that desire is used as capital through which white queer male desire produces racialized economies (2006:1). The systems through which these racialized economies unfold and are supported via "white values [being] celebrated and privileged within regimes of whiteness ... [and] values are themselves part of the property claimed by white" (2006:3). Unlike Glam-Drew's response, Le Pieties Prince added a different level of synthesis to thinking about what is LGBTQ identity and race within context of the Church and Wellesley Street area:

DF: Why do you feel that is?

Le Pieties Prince: Gays are cruel (laughs). It's a fact of life! I have faced a lot more discrimination within the gay community than outside.

DF: What kind of discrimination?

Le Pieties Prince: racial ... (pauses/contemplates) and it comes in the weirdest ways, because no one thinks I am who I am. They will hit on me and think I am Latino or Filipino and when they find out [who I am] shit hits the fan and goes down.

Michael Warner discusses that "people tend not to encounter queerness in the same way as ethnic identity ... theory has to understand that different identity environments are neither parallel – so that the tactics and values of one might be assumed to be appropriate for another" (1993:xviii). Similarly, Richard Jenkins argues that "ethnic and national identities mean a great deal to the individuals who claim them, and offer enormous potential for collective mobilization" (2002:117). Faye V. Harrison argues that race encodes social and cultural differences (2002:148) and, because of this,

racism can be the unintended outcome of everyday discourses, behaviours, and institutional arrangements ... racism is not only an ideology, discourse, or set of attitudes; it is a system of material relations with ideas, meanings, and sentiments embedded in those relations. (Harrison 2002:148 emphasizes original)

Race works alongside power relations, generating discourses, and meanings of desirable bodies and fetishized bodies. Niels Teunis confirms what Le Pieties Prince experiences, noting that:

sexual objectification is more than the outcome of racism in the gay male community. Sexual objectification of gay men of colour in the USA produces a white sexual community. Ideologies of inclusivity and non-discrimination blind white gay men to the harmful effects of sexual objectification. (2007:265)

The homonormativity of the gay village is reproduced with the imaginaries of pride, freedom, liberation, and inclusion to mask the differences within the LGBTQ community. As Teunis notes, the LGBTQ community in Toronto is similar to mainstream culture of the USA, but with one difference: sexual orientation (2007:265). Sexual orientation is brought to the forefront through normative discourses of sexuality and hides inequalities and discrimination beneath. The discourses that surround LGBTQ identities are built upon larger issues in the macrocosm of Toronto, such as, racism and monogyny. This can be seen in many advertisements, identities like “queer” lump together various people into a category of X “community.” Like the consumption of a product, using a particular area of the city, because of the result of similar experiences, becomes a part of a representation for identification. The “LGBTQ label” identifies and is reflective of the mainstream Caucasian middle-to-upper-middle-class representation. Le Pieties Prince and other LGBTQ research informants of colour thus feel dislodged, misplaced, and underrepresented within the LGBTQ community of Church and Wellesley Street area.

Princess adds to Harrison’s discussion of how racism unfolds. Princess discusses his painful, yet uncommon experiences with race and queerness in the Church and Wellesley Street area.

Princess: I encountered those spaces with rose-tinted glasses which idealizes it as a space that is comfortable and safe but not always. My one and only experience with physical assault in Toronto since I've moved here was when I was in the village. It was not a homophobic assault it was a racial assault by a group of white gay men. Do you want to hear that story?

DF: If you are comfortable telling it, yes.

Princess: I was coming back from a town hall on Urban Issues, (laughs) which happened in the West End, and I took the College streetcar to the East End, and because I live in St. James Town, I normally would get off at Sherbourne and Carlton. I didn't because I thought, for better or worse, it would be safer to get off at Church and Carlton and walk from there. I did and this was the night before Pride, which is even more ironic. I got off at Church, spotted a few friends of mine at the Pizza Pizza at Church and Wellesley, went in to say hi, was mistaken as butting in line and I said, "I am not butting, I just want to say hi to my friends," and I left. That group of men followed me up to about half a block away, and one of them pushed me and called me an Asian piece of trash and then left. They were probably inebriated, because that was like 12 or 1 a.m. or something. It is a possible explanation, definitely not an excuse. I structured how I navigated the city that night, trying to avoid my perceived lack of safety at Sherbourne and the village as an alternative to threat, thinking it would be safer, and what did I experience there? Assault. By gay white men. So that's lovely.

Princess' discussion of imagined geographical boundaries of "safety" and "threat" is built around cultural discourses of identities for those particular areas. Sherbourne Street is equated with poverty, danger, and crime, while Church and Wellesley Streets are seen to be related to liberation and freedom. Princess highlights not only how homonormativity operates in ways of making certain individuals feel "safe," but the very real danger put onto particular racialized LGBTQ bodies, and how the construction of LGBTQ identities is constructed around place-making, through signs, images, and representations.

Le Pieties Prince adds another element of identity construction to the conversation around queerness and LGBTQ identity in the Church and Wellesley Street area. While Le Pieties Prince has experienced racism in the Church and Wellesley Street area, he still finds himself using the area for recreation. Having to move and represent his body in particular ways, he is met at a crossroads between the racialization put onto him and his queerness. For Le Pieties Prince, maneuvering this particular homonormativity labels him queer in racialized ways. The “queerness” of the area is built in imagined and physical ways that re-appropriate whiteness and the privilege associated with it. Heidi Nast argues that white gay men occupy all racialized social strata, where only a handful of racialized men are represented in mainstream queer media (2002:880). Racialized GBTQ men only come to the forefront when other segments of the identities are within the normalised standards i.e. physically fit looking bodies. Not only are certain bodies represented in media, but within social spaces and places as well. Various socio-cultural, economic, and political economies maintain the white-upper-middle-class body as the body to invest into, construct, and maintain as a standard.

Nast goes on to argue that “certain gay men have been colonized by the market, their buying powers representing a potential niche that business are eager to cultivate. At the same time, these men would not be targeted if not for their potential as investors and consumers” (2002:880). Even though there is racism within the LGBTQ community, the white gay male would not be “valued” and commoditized if not for their potentiality as investors and consumers as Nast argues. Through the economies of buying-and-spending, privilege allows white-middle-to-upper-class gay males to have money to spend, abilities to invest in the markets, and have proper representation at large. Racialized LGBTQ

bodies do not exist for the market, which therefore means they do not belong within the Church and Wellesley Street area. The existence and accommodation of particular LGBTQ racial bodies is only one facet that permeates the homonormativity of the gay village. For Le Pieties Prince, his body is met with imagined and real violence. This violence is LGBTQ and racial violence.

Gender and Queerness

In addition to race, gender proved to be an important element of LGBTQ identity.

DF: How do you identify in terms of your gender?

Glam-Drew: The problem of the gays! (laughs) I am mostly cis-gender male.

I understood and could relate to what Glam-Drew was saying. I have done much work within various LGBTQ communities and acknowledge that gender is on a fluid continuum and always at the centre of many issues. Gender is one of the many social-cultural codes that become intertwined with LGBTQ cultural formations. Glam-Drew, in his response, knew that one could not exist without the other. I was intrigued with how Glam-Drew understood his queerness. I pressed on in the interview and asked how do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation? Without a pause he answered “gay,” but continued thereafter with jokes about his male privilege.

LGBTQ places simply do not provide a relationship that excludes and marginalizes certain LGBTQ bodies, but rather it is how certain LGBTQ bodies take up the various meanings generated in, around, and through these LGBTQ places that are important. Erika, another informant, shared similar sentiments with that of François.

Erika self-identified as a lesbian, and noted that her identity fluctuated between lesbian and queer pending on her social situation.

Erika: To a degree, I have to alter my identity. It's complicated because I identify as queer and that is hard for people to understand, so I identify as lesbian. I will shift over to lesbian to make it easier or act a certain way. It usually depends on who I am with and how they interrupted my identity. It's a process though.

Like François, Erika suggested that it was hard for people to understand what "queer" meant, and shifted by default to lesbian, in order to make it easier for others to understand her identity. Erika's emphasis on personal interaction and expectations help build, situate, and allow Erika to negotiate her queer identity in LGBTQ places. Seidman argues that:

For lesbian feminists, lesbianism is not a condition or trait of some women; it's not a sexual preference that marks women off from each other. Quite the contrary, lesbianism or being woman-identified is said to be a condition of all women. If some women fail to realize this, it is because in a male-dominated society they identify with male-imposed definitions that wed womanhood to heterosexual relations and roles. (1993:109)

Erika found this identity shift to predominately happen in male-centric spaces and places like those at Church and Wellesley. Seidman also makes note of the fact that

Lesbianism is viewed as a political act. The decision to bond with women challenges male dominance that is said to be maintained through the institution of heterosexuality. To the extent that a woman's personal and social worth is defined by her relation to men ... Lesbianism projects women as autonomous and equal to men. Lesbian feminism encourages women to become aware of their ties to other women. (1993:109)

Erika found that being lesbian can be at times tough within gay places, but expresses how by meeting with other lesbian friends she felt more comfortable:

Erika: The gay spaces can be intimidating, especially if you are grabbing a coffee and want to sit there and read – I don't do much of this anymore. Being a chick that goes into any gay space is almost like social suicide. You know you aren't welcome. I knew I wasn't welcomed. Most times I would meet with another lesbian friend, and

sometimes one that looked a little more dyke than lesbian so that the dudes knew we were here too! Knowing someone made a difference, it meant I could be there longer. And honestly, I liked being there and making them uncomfortable.

Robyn, conversely, self-identified as openly queer and acknowledged that her experiences make her fall on the various levels of the sexual orientation continuum. While Robyn felt most confident, like Glam-Drew, with her identity and its expressions, she noted having to change her identity within certain coffee shops, like François. “Absolutely, I have to change variations of my identity, small characteristics change ... [pause] my identity changes.” I questioned Robyn further to see if these were conscious or unconscious changes to which she responded, “It’s a conscious effort, for the most part I identify as an androgynous woman; I will expand the boundaries of feminine and masculine depending on who I am with.” While it was tough for Robyn to identify as queer, she was still able to queer her identity through the use of the label “lesbian,” and therefore “queer up” the place she occupied.

Another informant, Gurl Power, discussed the gender gap within the Church and Wellesley Street area further:

Gurl Power: As a woman and a lesbian, I really do not fit within the mainstream gay community ... The one lesbian bar that was there left ... granted it was full of all white people. I have been asked by white gay dudes what was I doing in their village and do not get me started on the looks. I go there to meet friends or grab a coffee – as I live close by – but I really don’t feel like me when I walked down those two blocks.

The mainstream space of Church and Wellesley is constructed and reinforced through dominant notions of homonormativity – a normativity heavily based in assumptions of gender. Homonormalizing practices work on similar exclusionary economies of particular

bodies that heterosexuality and patriarchy do. Nivedita Menon discusses heterosexuality and patriarchy:

What we need to recognise, particularly as feminists, is that the normalisation of heterosexuality is at the heart of patriarchy. Patriarchy needs the institutions of compulsory heterosexuality to survive ... the purity of these identities and social formations and of the existing regime of property relations is protected by the strict policing and controlling of women's sexuality. (2005:35)

Tiger, another research informant who self-identified as a lesbian, discusses how notions of masculinity, race, and queerness are built around the othering of women and lesbians within Church and Wellesley Street area, much like François discussed:

Tiger: My femininity, my body, my tits, my tattoos are parts of the gay community that threatens that "status quo." My black-female-tattooed body fucks up the white-washed, pure masculinized image of the village. I don't belong. My other sisters don't belong. We don't belong because we don't look like them-guys. I have been cat-called, called a slut, and received a lot of horrible looks. We had a lesbian bar, but they took that away from us too!

Tiger's lived experiences exemplify how through the construction of a particular group's identity, such as the LGBTQ community, particular identities fall outside this scope. Certain bodies begin to "not fit in" and are seen to take up too much room. Although Tiger had negative interactions, there was still a place she was able to occupy. The inherent queerness of the area allows some individuals to congregate.

Butler in particular discusses the complex nature of gender, gender identity, and expression and notes that "the distinction between expression and performativeness is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (1999:180). If there is no preexisting gender, and gender is culturally coded, space and place have real effects for LGBTQ bodies.

Summary

Where did we learn what it was like to be LGBTQ? Which bodies? What behaviours, actions and words? And in accessing places, could any queer body occupy any space or place they wished, or are there other factors at play? Many of my research informants try to make sense of the world through their identifications (gendered, racialized, and/or sexualized), by working alongside or away from the mainstream LGBTQ cultural formations, codes, and modes. The Church and Wellesley area has emerged as a “gay Mecca” because of the increase of shops in the area, a particular identity built from the imaginaries of liberation and freedom, and a central reference point constructed around a particular LGBTQ identity. The area has been constructed around particular notions and imaginaries of LGBTQ identities through economic development, which reflects the needs and wants of the heterosexual community that surrounds it.¹⁷

So ultimately, how does queer identity, moments of inclusion/ exclusion and identity categories contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places in the “gay village” of Toronto? Simply put, inclusion of some is built on the exclusion of others. Homonormativity is sustained in the Village by the exclusion of certain identities and bodies i.e. lesbians, women, trans bodies, and persons of colour. Those very bodies are only exempt from this exclusion if their bodies fall within normative frameworks of what constitutes inclusion in the area i.e. physically fit. LGBTQ identity is complex and has many intersecting points, where one identity does not “trump” another, but rather will

¹⁷ Alok Gupta discusses the intersections of class and sexuality (Gupta 2005). Coffee culture is very much a classist place situated in a classist space. Much like Menon’s discussion of gender, class operates in the same way alongside heterosexuality.

become more visible and expressed. My research informants construct their identities around experiences and knowledge (imaginaries) of who belongs and who does not; these moments then go on to reinforce and support homonormative discourses. Some of my research informants were able to navigate the uneasy terrain of their sexual identifications in LGBTQ places and others were not. Through the back-and-forth relationship between normative LGBTQ identifications and places that those bodies can use, places become built around those that can use them, and the cycle continues. Places are not built around the needs of the community and to promote a broader representation, but rather represent the wants and needs of a niche market LGBTQ community – the normative LGBTQ community.

Chapter 4 – Queerness and Coffee Shops

“To drink a beverage is to carry out a small ritual, an act that momentarily constructs a slightly more bearable, intelligible world from the chaos that threatens at all times”

(Catherine Tucker 2011:45).

Mainstream coffee culture is represented by its ambient music, warm colours, and friendly baristas, while mainstream LGBTQ culture is represented through sexual promiscuity, drinking, mostly white, middle/upper class, cis-gender male bodies, gay hook-up applications, and consumerism. These representations are found through mainstream media, but explored through my informants’ narratives of using places in the gay village. We live in a world of classification. Richard Jenkins argues that it is a complementary process between a social process (identification) and its product (identity) (2002:118). However, how can we begin to decode two distinctive “cultures” – coffee and LGBTQ – while seeing both as overlapping and often interchangeable? The mainstream culture of coffee is built around where and how we use cups, when and how we order our coffee, how and where we drink our coffee, what we do in coffee shops, whom we drink with, and, ultimately, as a society, how we create a “cultural coffee map” to follow when engaging in said culture. Mainstream LGBTQ culture is similar to coffee culture in the sense that it too is strategic in its portrayal of certain products – i.e., bodies, the placement of certain buildings equating to particular lifestyles and experiences, and the spoken and unspoken rules of how to navigate the LGBTQ terrain – therefore reinforcing a particular LGBTQ identity and culture. LGBTQ identities are culturally produced through very distinct modes of meaning. The discussions with my research informants reveal that homonormativity is both reinforced and challenged in the gay

Village coffee shops. It is important to investigate what constitutes the Church and Wellesley Street area's identity and how LGBTQ people use coffee shops and queer places to reinforce and simultaneously destabilize LGBTQ identities. The hard and static notions surrounding LGBTQ identity formations and representations seem to come under scrutiny with some of my research informants.

In the previous chapter, my research informants discussed how their particular identities shaped how they navigated the “gay scene” of the village and how their bodies were read and moved in particular ways. I examined the shaping of identity and of LGBTQ identifications in the geographic space of the gay village, and I also explored how the complex nature of identity and identification plays out through various mediums and mechanisms through this space. This chapter will focus more on the relationship between identity, places, and – in particular – coffee shops. I open the conversation surrounding coffee shops in particular to address and answer my key research question: *How does the construction of queer coffee shops contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities, and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places?*

With the help of my research informants, I will explore the complex ways in which queer coffee shops use LGBTQ identifications, sexualizations, and coffee cultural norms and modes to shift LGBTQ identities. I will begin this chapter by discussing current mainstream examples of LGBTQ identity and coffee culture. I will then discuss the relationship between identity and place, as well as place and community. I then build on this discussion of the use of queer places by informants through a consideration of how the interworking of coffee shops can produce moments not only of belonging but

also of difference and exclusion, especially with respect to sexuality, race, gender, and privilege. Ultimately, I conclude that the coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley area provide a snapshot of the larger LGBTQ community of Toronto, Ontario, in general.

Coffee, Queerness, and Contemporary Media

Through various mediums in society, like media, we can see how coffee culture and identity are so intertwined with one another that they could, at times, be mistaken for the same thing. Media use a specific identity representation which, as Hall argues, “engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer” (1997:226). Tim Hortons’ marketing strategy has come to stand for Canadian identity, and through drinking their products, you are not only a loyal customer but a loyal Canadian.¹⁸ Through the production and reinforcement of a normative Canadian identity, Tim Hortons can tie Canadian identity, patriotism, and coffee culture together, which in turn reinforce one another. The coffee shops located in the Church and Wellesley Street area work in similar ways to reinforce their particular coffee cultures, while fostering a place for a particular LGBTQ identity to be produced and reinforced.

Coffee shops play an important role in how “coffee culture” is negotiated and constructed throughout society. As with any culture, identities of who belongs and how they act are crucial to the survival and dissemination of said culture, and vice versa, as seen in the work of Clarence-Smith (2008). In America, Howard Schultz spoke to shareholders at the Starbucks annual meeting on March 20th, 2013, stating, with applause from the audience, that “if you feel, respectfully, that you can get a higher return than the

¹⁸ Douglas Hunter, in his book *Double Double: How Tim Horton's Became a Canadian Way of Life, One Cup at a Time*, discusses the connection between Tim Hortons, coffee, and national Identity further.

38% you got last year, it's a free country. You can sell your shares of Starbucks and buy shares in another company.” This was in retaliation to the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), who criticized and protested Schultz earlier in the year for supporting the legalization of same-sex marriage in the U.S.A. Even though Schultz noted a slight decline in quarter earnings after his stance, the company has since recovered.

As with the example of Tim Hortons, various products are marketed to become emotionally attached to individuals and groups of people. While Tim Hortons comes to represent “Canadiana” through branding and advertising, Starbucks is characterized by “[a] commitment to diversity, [although] the company is often associated with customers who are upper-middle class, white and college-educated” (Rafii, November 12, 2013).¹⁹ Simon, for instance, argues that Starbucks is a place that packages and sells not just coffee but authenticity, predictability, individuality, community and belonging, retail therapy and emotional perks, discovery, music, and a clean environment and global good feelings (2009:32). These cultural codes and discourses, social relations, and practices construct identities for coffee consumers. Simon discusses Starbucks further:

Limiting the access of the poor, unhoused, unwashed, and unfortunate is another way that Starbucks creates a predictable and safe middleclass environment. This isn't just about Starbucks. Exclusion is key to bringing people together in public across the United States ... America is a place where our public spaces are private spaces. (2009:69)

These processes of inclusion and exclusion are not just found in Starbucks, but with the way any particular “coffee culture” is produced for the particular location of that coffee shop. Simon notes that “customers go to Starbucks and expect to encounter people just like them” (2009:69).

¹⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ladan-rafii/the-starbucks-or-mccafe-c_b_4262104.html, accessed 26/02/2014

Commonalities based on representations and codes generate imagined communities. Most often, when those imaginaries of “who we are” and “what we stand for” come face-to-face with new meanings and understandings, frictions arise. Schultz, through his public declaration of the acceptance for the “mainstream homosexual agenda” made his coffee and brand queer. No longer could it be imagined that coffee, specifically Starbucks coffee, was only heterosexual. One example of how a particular coffee culture “grinded” against LGBTQ culture can be seen in a “gay quote” being pulled from Starbucks coffee cups (Seattle Times Staff 2005).²⁰ A more recent example of how coffee culture grinds against particular cultures is Tim Hortons’ decision to ban customers from using its WiFi to access a gay news website, due to the material not being age appropriate or “family appropriate.”²¹ Coffee is not the first product to have seen controversy “boil over” over a company’s overt or covert support of a particular group’s identity. In recent news, Oreo, the popular chocolate cookie brand, was boycotted online for publicly supporting Pride month, with the subscript “made with the colours that do not exist.”²²

Figure 4: Oreo celebrating Pride month on Facebook



²⁰ <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/starbucks-cups-with-gay-authors-quote-pulled-from-baylor/>
Accessed on December 9, 2015.

²¹ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tim-hortons-apologizes-after-wi-fi-censor-blocks-news-site-1.1351581>

²² <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/how-could-you-boycott-a-cookie>, accessed 26/02/2014

There is also the example of Family Research Council (FRC) publicly boycotting Betty Crocker for donating three cakes to gay weddings.²³

The products we consume on a day-to-day basis are mostly advertised in heteronormative ways. When that “status quo” becomes reworked or challenged, it produces moments of friction for consumers. Arvid Narrain and Gautam Bhan discuss LGBTQ politics in India, but much of their conversation around LGBTQ politics is transferable to the ways in which LGBTQ bodies are imagined, moved, and disciplined in Canada.

Place, Queer Identity, and Coffee shops

*“Interrelations between objects occur in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which **create/define** space and time.* (Nancy Duncan 1996:28).

“Identity is not at the periphery but at the core of urban life, and lesbian and gay politics is a central example” (Robert W. Bailey 1999:12).

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), through the work of Gupta and Ferguson we can begin to see how places and identities can be intertwined. We give identity to places to give identities to individuals, and we ascribe identities to individuals based on the places they use (or do not); this is largely based on exclusionary and inclusionary processes. The Church and Wellesley Street area in Toronto is known to cater to a particular LGBTQ clientele, have LGBTQ business owners, and have LGBTQ individuals who work, live and play in the area. Therefore, the space is known as the “gay village,” and all who enter into this space and partake in certain behaviours

²³ <http://www.LGBTQnation.com/2013/09/frc-boycott-betty-crocker-for-baking-wedding-cakes-for-gay-couples/>

Also watch the Cheerios commercial that gained racist backlash because of their portrayal of a ‘mixed couple’ family: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM7Q1mNg5q0>

(spending, eating and playing) are constituted and therefore labelled under the LGBTQ umbrella. My research informants dissect a normative notion of an “LGBTQ community” and showcase why places like coffee shops are important to generating new meaning and insights to future developments of the area. Coffee shops in the village at times do not act as alternative places for LGBTQ bodies to occupy, but rather as inclusive places for some said bodies to inhabit.

In their interviews, my research informants inadvertently addressed an important aspect of Tatsak’s conversation about place: “Starbucks creating an open space seemingly available to all, yet socially controlled as a place to see and be seen. An awareness of reciprocal viewing not only dictates public performances of self, but encourages the customer to portray a desired identity linked to consumption” (2006:25).

Le Pieties Prince, for instance, discussed coffee shops and LGBTQ identity:

DF: Does a coffee shop have to be friendly to all persons (e.g., gay and lesbians) for you to use a coffee shop? Why or why not?

Le Pieties Prince: I think most coffee shops are friendly no matter where they are. Almost every coffee shop I have been to have a gay barista (laughs). It’s a fact of life!

DF: Is this an important factor when choosing a coffee shop or looking for a coffee shop?

Le Pieties Prince: No, I just presume that’s the way it will be.

Le Pieties Prince here explores the intersection of place, communities, and identities. For him, coffee culture represents a particular service provided to the public which can be done only by particular individuals – usually those who are female or effeminate. Given the service being provided to him, he imagines that all service within coffee shops will be unilateral, presuming there is an automatic connection between the person providing the

service and the LGBTQ client. Coffee shops hold certain cultural norms and codes for Le Pieties Prince, assuming them to hold true for any coffee shop he may enter.

Coffee shops work in particular ways to generate and pass on knowledge about a place that feels unlike any other place available to individuals, as Oldenburg discusses in his book *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. My research informants explored issues related to Oldenburg's notion of third place, such as race, socio-economic status, gender, and sexual orientation that acted as barriers for some and granted access for others.

Glam-Drew discussed another element that became an important aspect for some of my research informants when picking a particular coffee place which had a “welcoming or home-like” feeling.

Le Pieties Prince, for instance, discusses nostalgic feelings and notions of having or needing a “welcoming or home-like” feeling in coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area:

DF: How important is it to have a “welcoming or home like” feeling within a certain coffee shop? Why or why not? Can you provide me with a time you felt this way?

Le Pieties Prince: Well, if it is a place I want to write I want it to be comfortable if I am going to be spending time in it. If I want to go to grab a coffee it doesn't matter. If I want to go hang out with friends I want a decent atmosphere.

DF: Do you feel the Church and Wellesley Street area has that welcoming or home like feeling you are looking for?

Le Pieties Prince: Smartfolk Café is sometimes, when there is no one in it, when there are too many people in it I get nervous.

DF: Why do you feel you get nervous?

Le Pieties Prince: *Because gays are cruel! *laughs* I have a gay gaze with me at all times. I can feel every square centimeter of my body under complete scrutiny* (emphasis added).

Through dialogue with Le Pieties Prince, we can begin to see how places play an important role in how bodies are consumed visually, but ultimately transform those very

bodies in particular ways. Coffee shops are important for Le Pieties Prince to enter, relax in and go about his day in various ways, but the interactions with other LGBTQ individuals produces moments of discomfort and uneasiness that define, re-define, and situate his particular body and identities within that particular place. From his experiences he is able to make sense of the processes that contribute to himself feeling included or excluded from certain practices or places that at times can be closely tied to particular identities or groups of people.

For some of my informants, however, this “home-like feeling” is not important. Glam-Drew, for instance, explains why this was not a factor when considering a coffee shop in the village:

Glam-Drew: Not important at all. I mean St. James (pseudonym) located in West End of Toronto is the least welcoming place – like, it literally feels like I am in a hospital. I think the most important thing about a coffee shop is how close it is to me. If I want to go work on my laptop, it has to be close. I am not going to travel across the city to a coffee shop. I will go for cheap coffee to work on whatever.

Similarly, informant Will discusses the notion of coffee shops having a welcoming or home like feeling and why it was not important to him:

Will: I don't think it is the most important thing in the world; it's nice, it's kind of a nice atmosphere to be like “I can go here, I recognize everyone, I know what I'm getting myself into and I can sit here for six hours and no one's going to bother me because they know me.” Those kinds of aspects are nice but I don't feel like they are not completely necessary. I realized I had gotten to that point at one of the coffee shops with the baristas at one of my visits. I would get multiple drinks a day because I would start to feel bad, because I was there all day; they would start voiding the transaction and then swiping my card (never happened, shhhh!). So after that started happening, I realized they kind of know me here, they won't bother me, they know I am sitting here working and won't kick me out.

Informant Krista unlike Glam-Drew, highlights the importance of feeling welcomed at a coffee shop, and highlights the ability to have personal interactions at coffee shops – this welcoming feeling is also a feature of third places.

Krista: I do enjoy visiting the coffee shops there. I like the area, and I enjoy people watching there and I often run into friends there. I enjoy coffee shops for the relaxed atmosphere and the ability to socialize in a quiet space if I wanted to. The 519 is the only other space that comes close to this.

DF: What can you do at the 519, which you cannot in other queer places in the village?

Krista: I take queer ASL classes there.

Krista's ability to generate meanings through the places she frequents is important, especially when conceptualizing how third places are important. For Krista, the atmosphere and location were also important aspects to wanting to use a coffee shop and why other places were inadequate. Like many of my informants, Krista discussed not wanting to have to travel "half way across the city" just to use a café," yet being in a comfortable setting was important.

Krista: I usually use coffee shops at study spots. For the most part, it's because these places often have a relaxed atmosphere which makes it easy to study in, which is a nice change from being locked up in a library.

The ability to enmesh oneself into a place is therefore important; it means an individual feels like a "regular" and is able to move their body in whatever way they want within that place, rather than feeling "locked up" in that place.

Will discussed the identity intersections of coffee shops in the village. What is interesting to take from Will's comments is how coffee culture is constructed for him, how he imagines each of the coffee shops, and maneuvers through them.

DF: Who do you feel uses these places and why?

Will: You see a lot of people like me; a lot of students, those coffee

shops have particularly nice open spaces and lots of tables to work at so you will see a lot of regulars who are there to do school work. There are a lot of students who sit upstairs and study in Smartfolk Café in particular. You will also find a lot of people who are self-employed who are looking for work. A lot of them go there to look for jobs, to do prepare to do certificate programs online that kind of things and then you see the people who do not have jobs and just chill there all day. Those are the three main types I see.

DF: Do you feel there is a difference between the various coffee shops and what happens in those coffee shops? Various groups?

Will: Yes, Tim's Café (pseudonym) another café in the village, is very much an older group, they are like 60 plus but they have interesting stories if you listen in to their conversation. It is always a lot emptier than the other two. The Double Mug Café and the Smartfolk Café are fairly similar in crowds. With Smartfolk, the people you see there are the people you see all the time, it's more regular space, and the Double Mug Café is more of an older crowd as well, you don't see many students you see more middle aged individuals.

While some LGBTQ bodies may actively seek out queer places, however, others may not. For Princess, for example, the bars and clubs were simply too loud and crowded and a sense of connection and productivity was lost. Princess found moments of discomfort, discrimination, oppression, and violence in the form of racialization and fetishization in the village bars and clubs (as discussed later in this chapter). In addition, some corporate coffee shops become predictable in terms of what to expect from them. Some of my research informants were able to derive positive experiences from certain coffee shops but not others, either because of brand homogeneity, or because of other things that allow for "connections" and similarities.

Princess: I like independent coffee shops because they feel less corporate, not to fetishize authenticity, but it feels different. I like to go to Smartfolk's because it is familiar, easy to predict your experience. They also have Wi-Fi, which is important, generally speaking, because I spend my time marking and reading the internet. My other default place is Double Mug because it also more spacious and has more seating. Delicious Tea is not easy to hang out in, they have like two tables, so it feels more like kind of a transitional space, it is not a space

to hang out in. You go in get your thing and move on. Where hanging out is more encouraged in those other spaces.

Overall, many of my research informants felt a part of a larger LGBTQ identification and community, even if they faced these barriers. My research suggests that even though some research informants at times felt included or excluded within particular places, “inclusion” into a larger LGBTQ “community,” “space,” or “identification” could still be had for some who felt included.

Will discusses the intersection of queer identity and coffee shops:

Will: I think those coffee shops are unique to the gay village. For example, a lot of people who go there like the baristas also identify as LGBTQ for the most part and people who frequent them are LGBTQ. And because the community is so close-knit you see those communities well represented in those areas.

There is clearly something important to be said about coffee shops and queer identity.

What makes the coffee shops at Church and Wellesley queer? Like Glam-Drew being “queerer” and queering up spaces and places outside the village, the LGBTQ bodies that occupy the coffee shop, from baristas to patrons, make the place queer. There, sexuality becomes a defining feature of the coffee shop. The owners are not just selling a cup of coffee, but a queer one. Building on this conversation further, Will notes that

Will: In Church and Wellesley, all three of them, actually – the Tim’s Café, Smartfolk Café, and Double Mug Café – all have regulars and they are there all the time and they all know each other. And I don’t think you get that same experience at, like, College and Yonge or Dundas Square coffee shops.

Identity was very much a part of the coffee culture and experience for Will. There was something uniquely different, or comforting about grabbing a coffee at a local LGBTQ watering hole. Coffee and the places individuals go to consume it were more than just for a hot beverage. It was a place to come together and share experiences and similarities

based on sexual familiarities. Will goes on to discuss why sexuality plays an important aspect in the coffee shops at the Church and Wellesley Street area:

Will: I think in that kind of setting, an individual may aware of the fact that people identify in the same way as them and be more comfortable in that setting. And for me it was one of the main reasons I started going there, because I knew they were gay coffee shops and I could be there and observe people and see what's going on and learn what I was getting myself into before took that first plunge.

One informant, Krispy Toastfingers, stated during his interview that he applied for a job at a coffee shop at Church and Wellesley because he wanted a chance to explore and experience the LGBTQ community in Toronto. This particular coffee shop became a central and important feature for Krispy Toastfingers to explore his sexuality, but also to explore the LGBTQ community. There is something to be said about selecting a coffee shop over a bar, restaurant or other facility located in the village. Coffee shops allow, for some, moments where there is a sense of "community." Like Krispy Toastfinger, Will had similar sentiments regarding using or going to coffee shops in relation to community:

DF: Is there is a reason why you "live there" or go there a lot?

Will: A couple reasons, I like the environment and atmosphere. I started going there when I started coming out because it was a way for me to be in the community, but not really because I could go to these coffee shops instead of a bar or club where I actually had to be out about my sexuality so to speak. Where in a coffee shop I am just sitting here doing my work and drinking my coffee. The other aspect is convenience.

Familiarity became an important factor when selecting a coffee shop located in the area for Le Pieties Prince. Unconsciously, he has been able to form moments of familiarity and comfort with the particular coffee shop he uses:

François: I like when I can go say hi to a server, makes me feel like I belong for sure. What I like least in a coffee shop when there is a clear divide between patron and server; it feels like I am really in a business.

By creating a diversion, the business aspect is an excuse for the *community*. I mean, again, I am from southern Europe, and in Europe coffee shops are an important part of our culture in a way they are not here. The Double Mug Café comes somewhat close. In Europe, you would travel half an hour to go to the coffee shop where you grow up because you know the family, you buy coffee in credit, and you pay for it once in a while. Social functions happen in coffee shops (marriages, break-ups, meeting up with friends, etc.); we don't have money to go to restaurants so our social life happens there and we don't have suburbs. I don't know where people who live in suburbs go to hang out (laughs).

François highlights how coffee is a part of very important aspect of the everyday. Coffee and its culture were connected to nationality for him. Coffee, its functions and places provided an outlet for him to explore transitions; and do whatever he needed. Coffee shops generated community and community generated coffee shops and its cultural codes and ways of being. For some research informants, coffee shops were not just places to grab a coffee – as stated in our interview by François my research informant, he does not even like coffee. However, how places work at times to include some of my research informants and not others is important to grapple with. How their LGBTQ identities are reinforced, displayed, and experienced comes down to how, where, and why they chose particular coffee shops.

Coffee Shops and the Queer Community

*“Community exists where virtues such as friendship, voluntarism and care are exhibited. What this entails is a definition of **community whereby individuals belong** to a social group either through choice or birth and **where their behaviour and status is not based on instrumental gain**” (Adrian Little 2002:3).*

The idea of “community” is real and imagined and moves LGBTQ bodies in particular ways. Many of my research informants have discussed the ways in which they

feel included and excluded in the village and, as well, specifically in coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area. My research informants have touched on the various ways “community” has developed or not been present in their minds and lives and how it produced realities. Krista, for instance, brings together queerness, coffee shops, and community:

Krista: Most often because I happen to be around that area so they're the closest ones to me at the moment. Other times I'm meeting friends who themselves feel more comfortable in that area because of how they identify. These coffee shops have a slight difference from others in the city, most prominent point being there is the atmosphere due to the greater presence of the gay community.

The sense of a “gay community” may serve to bring these individuals together. Coffee shops provide a place for individuals to congregate, and coffee catalyzes familiarity and sharedness for some. Queerness becomes a point of reference for all who enter queer coffee shops and allows some individuals a comfort zone or “in-between zone.”

Will, for example, acknowledges the special treatment provided by a place (above) where he can feel welcomed and situated and therefore be himself. These moments help individuals make connections and form what we know to be “community.” In Will’s conversation about the various coffee shops located in the village, he describes why he selected one over others. Would Will continue selecting one of the coffee shops if he did not receive that personable experience or formed that close network and/or relationships? I would suggest that as consumers or LGBTQ individuals we sometimes look to feelings of individuality or being welcomed within particular places. It makes it easier to form relationships and generate networks and bonds, and aids in making sense of ourselves and the world around us. There are important features or factors that

contribute to Will's experiences that make him feel included and make him want to continue to go back to that establishment.

Krispy Toastfinger also imagines a sense of community when thinking about the Church and Wellesley Street area. The people and commonalities based on stories produced particular desires to want to be a part of the community and work in the village. Also, these places are not utopic sites – they can at times fail to produce relationships and connections for everyone, where some feel alienated, bored, or rejected. François contrasts with Kripsy Toastfinger's and Will's comments:

François: I like the Double Mug Café better than the others.

DF: Why is that?

François: The Smartfolk Café is too stuck up. I feel a lot of people don't come there to socialize and if they do they come to people watch in a way, at least to my perception that is bitchy and detached. I never struck up a conversation there, at the Tim's Café the clientele I feel is culturally different for me.

DF: What do you mean by that?

François: At a risk to sound classist, I have never seen someone study there, someone reading a book or taking out their iPad. I know it sounds really judgmental, there is a component of me, not to say cruising, but I may meet my potential partner. Given what I have seen those who frequent Tim's Café they would not be someone who I would look for in a potential partner.

DF: Talk a little more about Double Mug Café

François: I like there is more than one generation. Tim's Café tends to be much older on average, the Smartfolk Café tends to be younger, and the Double Cup Café is more of a middle road. I think there really is a good representation of generations there.

DF: You said the people in the Smartfolk's Café are of a younger generation and are bitchy and detached. What do you find people are doing in Smartfolk's then?

François: There is a lot more people watching. If you walk through the coffee shop there is a gaze of people on you. At the same time it is not an open gaze, like you seem interesting let's strike up a conversation, it feels very evaluating. For example, if I sit there on the stool I suck in my stomach because people are watching me, or at least I think they are ... (laughs) maybe my own paranoia.

Ultimately, the coffee shops I have explored are not solely places that house and move coffee. They are places that shift identities in and out of focus as “central features” of these cafés for my research informants. Many of my research informants inscribe and generate meanings and understandings around what it means to be LGBTQ and use coffee drinking practices to form LGBTQ cultural understandings and formations. Through the processes of place-making and through the catalyst of coffee, some of my informants have been able to utilize places which they were hesitant to and which reinforce normative LGBT identities/behaviours/communities for some (i.e., whiteness, gender conformity, class) but not others.

Sex and Sexuality in Coffee Shops

Something that has been brought up by a few of my informants, and is central to the LGBTQ community and production of ideas of the community, are the notions of “cruising” and “checking out.” Coffee shops can act as an avenue in which individuals can not only explore their sexuality, but portray and depict a particular type of queerness, sexuality and body. This sexuality is charged with all the aspects of sex, flirting, masculinity, race, and privilege. Coffee and the places it inhabits bring together various power relations that individuals, particularly my LGBTQ informants, have to navigate.

François speaks about this further:

DF: What is the difference between checking and being checked out in different coffee shops?

François: Checking out opens up for friendship. In coffee shops, people are not in an altered state of mind, and they tend to communicate and speak. If you check each other out you will speak and chat and not end up fucking. This is a more pleasant experience because it opens up more doors to friendships, networks and relationships and potential partner; whereas I feel in a bar people tend to be altered. I find it way easier to introduce a sexual layer to my

communication in a bar or club.

DF: How does the process differ from different coffee shops and the processes people go about conducting?

François: At the Double Mug Café I find what I just stated as easier there because of the patio. At Tim's Café it tends to be older or mainly recently immigrant and racialized. I am not complaining, but I have noticed the immigrants won't speak to me because their sexual preferences are organized around racial lines, and the older guys hit on me, I am like "What-the-fuck? Just because I am friendly does not mean I want to hit on you."

DF: What factors allow for this? Do you feel there may be non-verbal conversation?

François: I think it is a community-type space. The younger generations don't know what community is – they haven't created it – and the older generation must have stumbled upon it. At the [Double Mug Café] they know your name and say hi to you, not to be polite, but because they know you, just like European coffee shops. Like, who the fuck has coffee in Europe if they do not know your name? It is a weird concept. They don't know my name in the [Double Mug Café] but they recognize me. It is an important factor in coffee experience.

Le Pieties Prince also builds on his discussion of sexuality and coffee shops from an earlier discussion. When asked who he felt used the coffee shops on the Church and Wellesley strip, Le Pieties Prince responded as follows:

Le Pieties Prince: Gay men, and because they want to cruise. It's like I have seen a billion hook-ups taking place in front of my eyes in that Smartfolk Café.

Similarly, when asked what activities he feels or has seen taken place in queer coffee shops, he responded as follows:

Le Pieties Prince: To cruise. You can see it; you know they will turn on Grindr²⁴ to see who is five metres away.

For Le Pieties Prince, it is evident that the LGBTQ coffee shops in Toronto are sexually charged. He believes coffee shops provide an outlet where this sexuality becomes heightened, and said these places allow for interactions to be explored and visually seen. I

²⁴ Grindr is a phone application which uses GPS to locate other interested individuals around you. Grindr connects individuals and allows them to share their location and photos.

understood his sentiments as not aligning coffee shops and culture with that of sex, sexuality, or various experiences of lived realities; rather, for Le Pieties Prince, this divided him within these places. Le Pieties Prince's tone highlighted moments of discomfort, yet simultaneously, moments of disgust, shame, and appearing not to be phased by such moments intersecting with LGBTQ culture.

Krispy Toastfingers also felt the overlap of sex and sexuality when he discussed his experiences of working at a coffee shop in the Church and Wellesley Street area:

Krispy Toastfingers: I got hit on a lot; my boss hired a certain type to work there: tall, dark, and handsome. What I didn't like about working there: customers were creepy when they hit on me. For example, every day I would work a customer would show me cock pics on his phone, or put his crotch on the counter, and my ass was grabbed when I cleaned the table. I am in a relationship, so it created a lot of problems. I worked for 5 months and I quit during Pride, not because it was busy, but I quit because I smashed all my fingers in this garage and my boss laughed at me. I took that personally, and with the beef with the boyfriend, I was given an ultimatum to break up or work there. I was happy to do it because I was tired of being hit on.

When asked how often he frequented the coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area, Krispy Toastfingers stated that when he worked there he was in the village every day and since he quit, he rarely visits the area. For Krispy Toastfinger, the urge to work at a coffee shop and use the area recreationally changed after working there. The needs and desires he had of the LGBTQ community were transformed after he was enmeshed into it. The divide between work and play were different and became different for him. The divide between work and play, while previously overlapping, emerged as a new LGBTQ imaginary and experience. Krispy Toastfinger's needs, wants, and desires altered dramatically after working at a LGBTQ coffee shop:

Krispy Toastfingers: I know too many people there ... I don't like feeling of not being protected by my work and don't have my

boyfriend with me ... I don't want those experiences of inappropriate touching and gestures.

The sex and heightened sexuality that came with the area was unfamiliar to Krispy Toastfinger. While he imagined the area to behave in a particular way, as if Church and Wellesley Street area was its own autonomous body, working at a coffee shop produced new knowledge, experiences, and situations.

François has similar sentiments about Smartfolk's located in the village and about the individuals he has encountered there, but explores the places further than my other informants. His observations about the "gay gaze," for example (above), went further to include body image and sexual desire – things that had come up in previous informants' conversations. The gaze that François felt had real effects on his body, queerness, and ability to utilize the place. Coffee shops catalyze the ability of individuals to "people watch" or gaze at one another, but with such an activity, negative consequences may ensue. Gazing allows the person doing the gazing to focus in on particular attributes or qualities of a person, therefore including or excluding them from that particular place.

Race/Privilege/Gender and Coffee Shops

"The unique cultures, aesthetic sensibilities, and politics of a particular place must inform and shape its alliances with other groups if "concrete" improvements in queer communities are made [to] be effective" (Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter 1997:3).

While coffee shops are important sites within the village for cruising and fostering relationships, they also produce barriers. Issues of accessibility, socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, and racism are everyday micro-aggressions that reflect the larger

macro-aggressions against minorities of a minority population. My informants address and bring together the conversation and various issues around inclusion of their LGBTQ identities, coffee shops, and the LGBTQ community. Princess, for instance, shares an experience of racism within one of the coffee chains in the village:

Princess: I have had experiences of predatory behaviour in some coffee shops. Sometimes feel like a racialized piece of meat, based on looks I get or the types of conversations I hear. I remember, for example, a couple of white gay men talking at the Smartfolk Café in the village about one of them going to Thailand and where the best places are to acquire – I don't know what other word to use – acquire young Thai boys. And that made me extremely uncomfortable in all its racist, classist, and imperialist consumption of queer bodies. So that was a supremely violent moment for me in a coffee shop. While that story is very much extreme, it is not uncommon; the theme is not unusual, the fetishization of racialized queerness, in coffee shops in the village, much more so in Smartfolk's than the Double Mug Café. That Smartfolk's is still very much structured by a politics of whiteness. By "a politics of whiteness," I mean it looks like what the pages of *Fab Magazine*²⁵ look like. It is occupied a lot by white bodies, white male bodies, in a particular way. Not completely, but still they hold or wield a particular power in that space, in terms of the standards of beauty and desirability and normalcy that structure who is in place. *Not just at the Smartfolk's, but in the village* (emphasis added). That was a long winded answer, but yes I go despite all the problems.

Princess discusses the power relations between race, gender, and queerness eloquently. It is important to see how coffee shops reflect the larger spaces they are located in. Princess is conscious of the realities of racism in the Church and Wellesley Street area and regardless of the discrimination and oppressions, finds himself using the coffee shops for particular reasons.

Princess also discussed using the 519 Community Centre to take drop-in classes, and why this place was different than a place like Crews & Tango's, a bar located in the village:

²⁵ *Fab Magazine* is now a discontinued Toronto LGBTQ magazine. The publications moved from paper to electronic formats for economic reasons.

Princess: I went to Crews last weekend – don’t get me started. There was a racist drag queen. This particular experience this weekend at Crews, a drag queen came out in a kimono holding a parasail, dancing to “Big in Japan,” and so I left as soon as I saw that and came back as soon as that was over thinking the performance was over, but they just transition to “Gangnam Style.” But at that point they had gotten rid of the kimono ... but they had slit-eyed glasses on. So yeah, that was violent.

Research informant Tiger also addressed the intersections of race, gender, class and coffee shops:

Tiger: Are these coffee shops super white? Sure! But it doesn’t mean I don’t go. Yeah, the coffee is sometimes expensive and I can be the only chick in the place, but I will still go. It’s coffee; I need it in the morning or when studying. While I may feel slightly out of place, I feel in place because I know I am in the community ... (pauses). I mean, whatever that is, it’s still there for me. One time while studying at one of the coffee shops I saw a homeless man come in and ask for change from the customers. I reached down to grab change; I am all for activism. I came back up with a five dollar bill in hand and saw the barista giving the man a coffee and a scone, then asked him to leave. This is exactly how I feel sometimes in the community. Like a person looking for something, sometimes getting it, and sometimes being pushed out the door. It is hard being a lesbian of colour.

Erika also speaks to what many of my informants addressed: *the village not being inclusive*. As a lesbian-identified female, she does not properly feel welcomed or represented within the village and its boundaries.²⁶ Robyn further builds on Erika’s conversation of the exclusion of women and lesbians within the Church and Wellesley Street area:

Robyn: There are some pockets, but it is predominately reserved for gay men. Even explicitly seen in the advertisements in the adult shops – the mannequins are muscular men, no women, and mix of men and women

²⁶ In the article *Queering Neighbourhoods: Politics and Practice in Toronto* (2008), Catherine Nash explores further lesbian perceptions about the Village and its inhabitants and the correlation to queer identity construction. As well, the possibilities, potentials and limitations for LGBTQ individuals to take up “space” because of complex power relations embedded in hierarchical social relations of class, race, and gender.

representation. There are more subtle but explicit things, like some street signs for bars – there are no signs for queer-identified women.

Coffee shops, therefore, while they allow for some individuals to transgress the rigid boundaries of hierarchies and oppression, expose others to these hierarchies and oppressions face-first, with their hot, scolding realities.

Robyn goes on to build on the conversation about gender:

DF: Does a coffee shop have to be friendly to all persons (e.g., gay and lesbians) for you to use a coffee shop? Why or why not?

Robyn: Most definitely! I prefer the coffee shops with the gender-neutral bathrooms, as I identify as androgynous. I have experienced some negativity when I enter women-specific washrooms in other spaces. For example, this happened in multiple occasions, where I would get odd looks from women, direct remarks saying you can't be in here, and saying that this washroom is reserved just for women. From my experiences, I have never felt anyone being overtly hostile to me; it just was not welcoming. Especially in Canada, we should have the right to use these public spaces!

Robyn highlights how gendered power relationships are played out in the village.

Through various micro-aggressions, Robyn's body is read and individuals treated her as someone that does not belong; the same aggressions and discriminations felt by informant Krista. While Robyn stated that she does not use any other places on the Church and Wellesley strip, because she feels uncomfortable being in places that have an unequal male-to-female ratio and feature events that do not cater specifically to queer-identified women, she still uses various coffee shops in the village.

Summary

My research informants help to shed light on the complex nature of LGBTQ identities and identifications and how they play out in queer coffee shops and places. My informants began to discuss queer places they enjoy and the factors that make them

appealing, while others discuss the various barriers and discriminations. Ultimately, while some of my research informants describe moments of rupture, discomfort, and anxiety, other informants felt neutral or positive within these places.

While barriers are important to discuss, it is therefore also important to explore how we as individuals gravitate towards these individuals and places. What keeps us going back? Seeking it out? Or wanting more? Coffee shops become notable places to visit and explore because of the way in which we as individuals think, feel, experience, and thus use them. Krispy Toastfinger highlights how some of my research informants came to imagine coffee shops in the village and how he came to explore them:

Krispy Toastfinger: Before work, I would go to DoubleMug Café and talk with the customers. The majority of them were in their 40–50s and they didn't have anyone to talk to. But after a while, I got tired of hearing the stories. An example of a story they would tell me is, man mid-fifties went through a lot of depression and his childhood getting bullied. It is interesting to hear how people have overcome things. I am interested in hearing people's stories; I would ask if people were out or not. I met someone who was 60 but in the closet, pretty much self-denial. Then I would tell people about my story. But times have changed. That was the main reason I started working there, well I needed money. But I had never tried the gay scene, and so I tried it out. If I never worked there in the first place I wouldn't be there.

DF: Do you think you would have had these experiences and conversations if you didn't work there? Why or Why not?

Krispy Toastfinger: No, I don't think so. There is something about being in the village that allows you to speak about gay things, where you can't outside the village. All these men come not just for coffee but to be together as well.

Similarly, François talks about the ability for a coffee shop to be more than just a place to grab coffee. Adding to Will and other informants' conversations, François was looking for a place where he did not have to worry about his sexuality.

DF: Do you use coffee shops other than to get coffee? And why?

François: Coffee or something to do, nice environment with the presence of others make me more productive, if I feel more social today and I will talk on the phone and use Wi-Fi or I will go talk to someone beside me, or if I am sad or rejected and need a safe space so I write in my journal and the space and presence of people around me, which allows me to process my emotions

DF: What makes it a safe space?

François: *I don't have to be aware of my sexuality or homophobia, I can just be myself* (emphasis added). I can just sit down and not modify my body language.

Queer coffee shops are not just places LGBTQ individuals go to get coffee, nor are they simply LGBTQ cafés located in a queer geographical area. My conversations with my research informants regarding queer coffee shops open up the conversation about the ruptures, slippages, overlaps, and movements within these places. Ultimately, the coffee shops provide a place for some LGBTQ individuals *in the community* to come together individually or in groups. Interestingly, it seems that the coffee shops in the area provide a snapshot of the LGBTQ community of Toronto, Ontario. In other words, the coffee shops are a reflection of the larger space that they are located in. Like the broader Church and Wellesley Street area in general, the queer coffee shops within it at times operate as a queer departure from a heterosexualized world that surrounds it, while at other times, they work within homonormative discourses and practices that are deeply embedded in that very same world.

By exploring coffee shops, I have been able to piece together a better understanding of how queer coffee shops contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities, through the understandings and experiences of LGBTQ identities by my research informants. As I noted earlier, the link between sexual orientation and gender to

coffee is important. Coffee shops highlight and reflect what is happening within the microcosm of their built environments. My informants described moments of inclusion, uneasiness, and heightened sexuality. My LGBTQ research informants do not build their queer identities and understandings solely around the Church and Wellesley Street area and the narratives that are produced from the places in the area, yet it is important to note that these places act as a focal point for many of their references. Their understandings of who belongs and who does not in the area based on experiences and understandings formulate imaginaries and realities of being LGBTQ. Homonormative discourses and narratives form real built environments that my research informants feel like they can or cannot occupy and use. Some research informants who did were still able to discuss their engagements with moments that were at time uneasy. The coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area reflect large issues such as, racism, discrimination, barriers, and sexism to name a few. Coffee shops, based on the “openness” and fluidity to facilitate as many individuals to occupy the place, make it easier to see the reflection of inclusion and exclusion of particular LGBTQ identities and bodies. The lack of particular queer bodies and identities makes it so that more places are built around homonormative discourses of who uses the area – a cycle that keeps feeding itself.

Chapter 5 – Down to the Last Drop: Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Throughout this thesis, I provided an in-depth analysis of how the construction of LGBTQ identities contributes to an understanding of queer places in the Church and Wellesley Street area in general, and how the construction of queer coffee shops in particular contributes to an understanding of LGBTQ identities. I have discussed how some of my research informants' identities become understood, imagined, and negotiated in the Church and Wellesley Street area, and how those identities are complex. My informants have at all times driven the conversation throughout my thesis. It is no secret that some of my research informants felt that they didn't have control over how their bodies were interpreted/judged in certain spaces, both in the gay village in general and in coffee shops in particular. We as individuals sometimes have multiple meanings and work our identities in various ways; we find places and travel to them, stay in them, and look to them to generate meaning about ourselves and for ourselves. For some of my research informants they were able to find a queer community in multiple places, and for others in no places at all. Through my research informants conversations around queer identities, their queer identities, I was able to flush out how coffee shops in the area are a reflection in the microcosm of the Church and Wellesley Street area of the larger macrocosm of the Village and Toronto.

Toronto's Gay Village

While some queer individuals examined had feelings of restriction, invisibility, or being "limited" in Toronto's gay village, others discussed their ability to openly engage with homonormative identities, practices, and imaginaries there. "Queerness" in this

neighbourhood is produced through various signifiers located outside the body (using Church and Wellesley Street area services, consuming products and having a lavish lifestyle, living in condos, not having children, sporting a rainbow flag, not sporting the flag, drinking, and fitness to name a few) that produce the identity categories of the fag, the lesbian, and the queer.

The LGBTQ community of the Church and Wellesley Street area is built around consumerism and homonormative ideologies, practices, and representations, which leave only certain LGBTQ bodies to feel included and able to access the space and places of the area. While such queer places uphold homonormative power relations (having some feel welcomed and others not), they do also provide a place where some can access the places, network, and feel a part of a larger community and cause, while feeling represented. These places (whether coffee shops, community centres, parks, etc.) are important for community-building, and the longevity of an area because they are open to all, and so individuals feel included. As Dennis Altman argues, “commercial space, that is, of entertainment venues, restaurants and shops that cater to a distinctly homosexual clientele ... provides important opportunities for gay men and lesbians to meet and to develop social and political ties” (1996:78).

Ultimately, the lived experiences and realities that normative queer identities (homonormative) generate and reproduce ensure that some spaces and places are easy terrain to navigate for some. Exploring the ways in which transactions (identities, money, and places) are constructed and maneuvered in particular ways, and how to better those processes, is therefore important. It is crucial to generate and sustain better urban

planning which does not only cater to commercial interests, and includes diverse public spaces that are welcoming/ inclusive to diverse publics.

Queer Coffee shops: A Microcosm of the Gay Village

Coffee shops are important sites to begin understanding complex and intersectional LGBTQ cultural meanings, representations, practices, and identities within Toronto, Ontario. Using the coffee shops at Church and Wellesley Street area as an example, my research found that many individuals view these places as more than just places to get coffee. For some, these places were inclusive and offered refuge from the hectic world around them, while at times others felt unsafe and unwelcome. Queer coffee shops open up and highlight the possibilities for engagements with homonormative identities and practices in the Church and Wellesley Street area more generally. For instance, some of my research informants found themselves at times trying to “fit in” to ideals, categories, and normative representations of their queer identities; subsequently, some felt well represented, included, and able to fully participate within the coffee culture. Similarly, in the gay village at large, some of my LGBTQ research informants were able to find places to explore, feel welcome, and construct their own worlds, while others found moments of tensions and conflict in the Church and Wellesley neighbourhood. Coffee shops can thus begin to highlight how representations of normative LGBTQ identities are generated through imagery and place-making practices in general, and they can help academics begin to understand how this facet of community is constructed.

Conclusion:

How does the construction of queer coffee shops contribute to an understanding of LGBTQ identities, and how does the construction of LGBTQ identities contribute to an understanding of queer places in the “gay village” of Toronto?

In summary, coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area worked on a micro level of the larger space of the “gay village.” By investigating into the moments where my research informants felt included and excluded from particular LGBTQ places, such as coffee shops in the Village, we can begin to see how these moments contribute to larger inclusion and exclusions of individuals through place-making practices. The Village is not a closed off bubble that operates under the pretenses of inclusion and freedom for all. Rather, there is a façade that masks the area and like a mask, it hides beneath it the subversive discourses and narratives that silence and hide those who wear it. The Church and Wellesley Street area is built up around homonormative discourses, which are embedded in commercial interests. The combination provides places where some can ultimately access and other do not feel welcomed or comfortable. This relationship further hides and silences non-homonormative LGBTQ identities and bodies, leaving them further in the perimeter of the gay Village (literally and figuratively). While coffee shops are built and act on commercial interests, coffee culture at times, works against this and provides an avenue where sometimes my LGBTQ research informants can and do feel welcomed. These places, in these moments become places unlike other places in the area where they can occupy. Ultimately, what we can begin to see happen is that if individuals feel as if they can occupy places, then they can occupy spaces. By occupying spaces, their bodies become visible, their movements and activities within

these areas become recognized and encouraged, and communities can be built. Coffee culture is by no means the solution or answer to homonormative discourses and rhetoric that produce homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and racism, but the elements of coffee culture that aim to produce open and inviting places for all to occupy and for a multitude of activities to take place is important to take note of.

There is something to be said about coffee shops that allow queer persons to partake in a consumerist lifestyle. My exploration of LGBTQ coffee shops highlights some of the complex social, political, and economic power relationships that exist within the LGBTQ community of Toronto. The enactments of particular queer identities are juxtaposed and engage with power relations of other queer individuals and places. It is my hope that further research will help to shed light to how we as a community can change for more inclusionary places and practices. To do this, it is important to acknowledge the concepts of identity categories, place-making, and community and their relationship to one another. Once each is taken into careful consideration, only then can we move spaces to places, where all can access, enjoy, and feel included.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Informant Pseudo-Name and Preferred Pronoun:

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your sexual orientation?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your occupation?
5. Where do you live? If Toronto - How long have you lived in Toronto?
6. Do you travel if outside of Toronto, to any specific coffee shops in Toronto? Why or why not?
7. Does a coffee shop have to be friendly to all persons (ex. gay and lesbians) for you to use a coffee shop? Why or why not?
8. Would you continuing going to a coffee shop if you heard homophobic comments within the place, or heard of bad experiences from your friends or other people in your life? Why or why not?
9. How often do you frequent the Church and Wellesley Street area? Would you go to one of the coffee shops located in the area? Why or why not?
10. How would you define the C/W area?
11. What were your first impressions and experiences of C?W?
12. After your first experiences, what were some of the encounters and other experiences you had at C/W? Did they differ or were they the same? What were they?
13. Would you get your beverage from a queer friendly coffee shop that is not located in the Church and Wellesley Street area? Why or why not? What about a queer friendly shop outside the village? Is that important to you?
14. Do you ever feel like you have to alter your identity when you interact with individuals upon entering certain coffee shops?
15. How often would you say you come to these coffee places?
16. Who do you feel uses these places and why?

17. Do you use coffee shops other than to get coffee? And why? What else do you do there? Would you do these activities somewhere else? Why or why not?
18. What pushes you to choose one coffee shop over another? And how important is this to you?
19. What do you like most about your favorite coffee shop? What do you like least about your worst like coffee shop?
20. How important is it to have a “welcoming or home like” feeling within a certain coffee shop? Why or why not? Can you provide me with a time you felt this way?
21. If you use coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area, why do you pick these over others, if you do? Are these coffee shops any different from similar ones located in other areas of the city?
22. If you do not use coffee shops in the Church and Wellesley Street area, why do you pick these coffee places over the ones at Church and Wellesley Street?
23. How do you currently feel about the coffee place we are in? Why?
24. What does this place mean to you? Or what does this place represent?
25. Do you use any other gay places, and why or why not?
26. Why do you pick one coffee shop over others?
27. What would you say is different or unique about the Church and Wellesley Street area?
28. What is your favorite coffee shop and why?
29. How well do you feel the Church and Wellesley area accurately represents the entire queer community? How well do you feel it represents your identity?
30. What does community mean to you? Do you feel the Church and Wellesley area has a community?