CULTURE AND HISTORY Nr. 01
Maj 2025

SPACE AND QUEER IDENTITY

Vela Gay Bar in Copenhagen as an Example of the Significance of Female-Oriented Space and Queer Community

By:
Clara Rieger
History

ABSTRACT: This article examines the critical role of queer spaces in shaping queer identity formations, charting a historical progression from essentialist conceptions to more pluralistic understandings. Focusing on how and why queer women claim and engage with space, the analysis draws on a series of ethnographic studies and a semi-structured interview with the owner of Copenhagen's sole female-oriented venue, *Vela Gay Bar*. The findings underscore the cultural significance of nighttime leisure spaces in fostering visibility and solidarity. However, contemporary queer women increasingly locate community across broader queer or even within heteronormative spaces, presenting new challenges for maintaining individual identity constructions while expanding community over the borders of queer subgroups.

KEY WORDS: Space, Queer, Lesbian, Identity, Queer Community, Queer Nightlife.

Introduction

> The creation of queer space is "a necessary part of gaining political and social power as well as vital in creating various spaces to meet the needs of the community and help individuals develop their identity" (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684).

Every kind of community requires places to congregate. The queer community, having been historically excluded from hegemonic community centers, has a heightened need for such places which have evolved and transformed over the decades. The article explores this development through a collection of ethnographic studies, namely research concerned with cultural and social geography. The geographical diversity of the source material precludes the creation of a grand narrative but permits the identification of certain parallels. The aim of this paper is not to create a false sense of unity or even a global narrative, but rather to highlight common trajectories or a "shared sense of historical and political connection" (Megarry et al. 2022: 54). The initial motivation for this research project was the recognition that female-centered nighttime leisure spaces in Copenhagen were only marginally represented. An example of this is *Vela Gay Bar,* which is the only bar that primarily accommodates, though does not exclusively cater to, queer women. The academic field offers a variety of divergent analytical frameworks which partially explain this underrepresentation. This research project addresses a research gap that applies to Copenhagen's female-oriented queer spaces, foregrounding an insider perspective of the queer community.

The central question of the article is: What is the significance of space regarding the formation and consolidation of queer identity and community? To answer this question the structure proceeds as follows: I will begin with the emergence of lesbian and gay bars in the mid-20th century, then discuss the establishment of the umbrella term LGBTQ+ and its various expansions; subsequently, I will examine *Vela Gay Bar* as an example of a queer community space followed by an interrogation of the ways in which diverse queer identities are articulated today. The paper is concluded by an evaluation of the spatial practices, namely how contemporary queer women engage with space in the queer community and how related identity constructions are constantly evolving. This segment addresses intersectionality, diversity, and fluidity to reflect increasingly varied and flexible articulations of gender identity and sexual orientation. The intention of this narrative is not to establish a linear developmental trajectory but to depict the diversity of queer people and the social processes through which identity is constructed.

The relevance of this research links to visibility and how it is closely tied with identity articulation. Visibility refers to the degree of sociopolitical influence a particular (sub-)group has in the larger societal context, namely whether their voices are acknowledged, their needs are addressed, and their rights are defended. Asserting spatial entitlement is integral to the development of collective identity and consequently, to the creation of visibility. Maxine Wolfe states that "people are active creators of their own identities and environments rather than mere bearers of dominant social relations or passive absorbers of dominant ideology" (1992: 138). Hence, a spatial analysis proves to be informative about the identity constructions of the people within it. The significance of ethnographic studies on queer nighttime leisure spaces stems from this recognition. The qualitative dimensions of the created environment influence people's awareness of their own identities and their group identity in relation to society (cf. Fobear 2012: 724). Such processes create a sense of community through the establishment of spatial boundaries, namely the creation of a space only being accessible to a specific group of people.

Both space and community exhibit a dual function as "geographic" (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684) and "institutionalized" (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3) or as "imagined" and metaphorical (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684; cf. Esterberg 1994: 427 cit. after cf. di Leonardo 1984: 133). Hence, space exceeds the significance of a physical meeting place and acquires a symbolic quality, capable of holding conceptions of identity. Therefore, these spaces serve as sites of identity inscription and community formation and places where shared culture may be articulated, hence, space can be conceived as "an *experience* rather than just a place" (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684) further underlining its significance. The concept of "locational 'inter-identity'" (Lo & Healy 2000: 33) relates to community formation that is partially decoupled from geographical location and follows identity demarcation lines. However, space – apart from its symbolic quality – actually possesses tangible spatial implications in the political struggle of feminists, lesbians, and queer people in general.

The focus of this article on nighttime leisure spaces draws upon Wolfe's conceptualization of (queer) bars as "significant sociophysical environment[s]" (1992: 142). Bars serve as crucial sites of congregation where people can find community and foster a shared cultural identity. They have served as a place to recognize and be recognized by peers as like-minded. Therefore, I highlight *Vela Gay Bar* as an example of a female-centered lesbian[1] bar in Copenhagen which is operationalized through a semi-structured interview with the owner of said venue. The choice is predicated on the fact that female-oriented

[1] Defined in the context of this article as a venue that is predominantly run by lesbians and has a significant female, lesbian clientele.

nighttime leisure spaces are historically underrepresented in gay nightlife. Furthermore, these spaces have undergone numerous reconfigurations in relation to identity politics. My proposed explanation for the marginal visibility of female-oriented nighttime leisure spaces is that the need for exclusive and identity specific spaces has decreased in the broader societal context. This shift is partly due to attenuation of societal stigma as well as evolving identity formations (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 1-3). Instead, many establishments in the queer community cater to a variety of gender and sexual orientations. These inclusive practices have engendered hybrid spaces where everyone is included yet not necessarily affirmed in their particular identity.

The paper focuses on female-oriented queer spaces which include, but are not limited to, lesbian women. The terminological scope is not intended to be exclusionary, but rather to include a spectrum of identities. However, such a broad interpretation may result in the obfuscation of identity delineations, resulting in an ambiguous or diffuse demographic focus. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the different female, queer subgroups tend to navigate lesbian-oriented environments in comparable ways and can therefore be thematically consolidated for analytical clarity. The intention is not to erase identity differences but rather to promote an identity category that is inclusive of a variety of identities and experiences. Hence, the word 'queer' is used in this article referring to its reclaimed meaning within post-structuralist discourse (see e.g., Jagose 1996: 78) referring to a life experience that challenges hegemonic and normative socio-cultural paradigms.

Historical Context

The three different waves of feminism and how they shaped and informed today's feminism(s) and queer activism constitute a point of departure for the historical contextualization of my research. This pertains to shifts in identity, community, and visibility in the context of queer (night-)life and activism grounded in identity politics. These changes are linked to the articulation of a collective struggle and the emergence of a unified queer identity notably during the AIDS crisis. Furthermore, they are also correlated with the reconfiguration of lesbian bar culture.

Following the historical framework proposed by Charlotte Kroløkke and Anne Scott Sørensen I begin my historical scaffolding at the turn of the 20th century with the first wave of feminism. Its proponents' primary objectives were equal rights and opportunities for women while contesting some aspects of prevailing gender norms. The suffragettes were emblematic of this wave. In the mid- to late 20th century,

second-wave feminists expanded on these demands to emphasize collective empowerment. They critically interrogated the structural subjugation of women and critiqued patriarchal systems. The third wave and its version of queer feminism(s), centered on intersectionality, diversity, multiplicity, and fluidity. This aims to deconstruct hegemonic discourses about women and femininity, irrespective of their origin. All of these waves have had varying approaches to the questions: *What is a woman? and What is a lesbian*? However, modern feminisms have increasingly destabilized categorical boundaries.

Women-centered spaces or primarily women-only spaces were revived[2] in the activism of the 1960s and 1970s, cultivating communal cohesion and solidarity within the lesbian community (cf. Wolfe 1992: 144). The exclusivity of lesbian-only bars was a subversion of hegemonic power dynamics and "freedom from heterosexual norms" (Megarry et al. 2022: 60), as well as protesting the heteropatriarchy. For (lesbian) women, asserting spatial presence and establishing their own rules and boundaries was essential for amplifying their voices and liberating them from restrictive and essentialized gender frameworks. There was a need for exclusive spaces for women to be able to assert power in self-determined areas (cf. Podmore 2006: 612). This practice not only imbued those places with the capacity for identity articulation and affirmation, but further established them as literal safe spaces, where sociality, collective identity and cultural practices could be negotiated and cultivated. Julie A. Podmore notes that "these bars were embedded in a lesbian-feminist culture that was committed to increasing lesbian visibility by building 'women's' culture" (2006: 612). "[L]esbian tradition was often framed in terms of a history of resistance and struggle" (Megarry et al. 2022: 59). These collective elements were thereby foundational to a sense of lesbian identity and community that was safeguarded both ideologically and materially.

With the advent of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, the previously relatively divergent lived experiences of gay men and lesbian women coalesced around a common struggle (cf. Wolfe 1992: 154). The formation of direct-action groups such as *ACT UP* saw the mobilization of individuals across diverse sexual and gender identities to protest their shared sociopolitical marginalization. According to Anna-Maria Jagose activism during the AIDS epidemic reconceptualized "identity in terms of affinity rather than essence" (1996: 94), progressing toward a collective activism based on similar experiences and a common struggle. The term 'queer' as a "potent and enabling term" (Jagose 1996: 94) was reclaimed in this context because it allowed for a coalition predicated on shared marginalization. Discrimination that was specific to certain sexual orientations or gender expression was synthesized into the collective

2 The first lesbian bars existed already in the U.S around 1920s' (see cf. Wolfe 1992:144).

experience of the oppression of queer people. The transformation of the lesbian community entailed a paradigmatic shift from the "radical lesbian feminism of the 20th century to the LGBTQ and trans revolution" (Ben Hagai 2023: 1).

Considering the historical context, the establishment of queer spaces is inherently political. Beverly Skeggs notes: "The claim over space is a claim over political recognition" (1999: 227), which is why these spaces were often fiercely protected. In many studies, there seems to be a consensus on a narrative of decline concerning lesbian bars from 1980 onwards (e.g., Lützen 1998; Forstie 2020) which is correlated with a shift in queer identity politics within the lesbian community (e.g., Fobear 2012; Ben Hagai 2023). Hence, identity constructions prompted lesbian bars to evolve into female-oriented, or mixed bars, or to discontinue operations. The narrative of dispossession refers not only to the pursuit of sociopolitical recognition in society as a whole but also in the queer community in particular. Lesbian issues and needs are frequently marginalized, and their voices seem to fall on deaf ears. The construction of a common struggle and the subsumption of many different gender identities and sexualities under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella engendered the erasure of identity-specific concerns. Megarry et al. mention "competing political interests" (2022: 60) inside of the queer community as a counter-narrative to the proposed unity under the queer umbrella. Proponents of this view interpreted the collective term 'queer' as a presupposition of homogeneity which would obfuscate the multifaceted realities of LGBTQIA+ people (cf. *ibid*. 60). The problems arising from this framing are the formulation of a reductive narrative and a false dichotomy between lesbian women, gay men, and other members of the queer community. Such framing leads to a narrative of a zero-sum game, namely a competitive framework of visibility politics in which the visibility of one group engenders the invisibility of another.

The limitation inherent in the queer politics of the 1990s and the unifying movement of the LGBTQIA+ community is that it persists in adversely affecting lesbian visibility today (cf. Podmore 2006: 598). As queer politics were foregrounded, the acknowledgement of lesbian issues seemed to recede from the discourse. While political engagement to cultivate and protect collective queer spaces is valuable, it fails to adequately address the specificities of queer subgroups. One example is that the issue of lesbian visibility remains insufficiently problematized within queer discourses. Despite the unifying umbrella terminology, the queer community resembles a "mosaic" rather than a "melting pot" (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 682). While there are some shared experiences and agendas, individuals tend to form social affiliations within their identity-specific groups. In particular, when it comes to finding community,

people orient themselves toward those with congruent sexual identities as opposed to forming solidarity based solely on a generalized queer identity (cf. Easterbrook et al. 2014: 689).

Vela Gay Bar as an Example of the Significance of Queer Space in Copenhagen

> Space is a platform to create new social identities, an opportunity to exhibit group identities to the rest of society, as well as a method for creating social boundaries, exclusion of certain groups, or fostering the visibility or invisibility of certain members of society (Fobear 2012: 723).

Beverly Skeggs associates space with "the performance of sexual identities and the way they are inscribed on the body *and* the landscape" (Skeggs 1999: 214) highlighting the link between identity and space. To assert spatial presence, then, is to claim an identity. When a person's identity is not manifested within public spaces, they become marginalized in the public sphere. Therefore, to constitute space is to assert visibility, both for the individual and for a collective identity. Conversely, advocating for visibility inherently entails advocating for the acknowledgment of identity (cf. Skeggs 1999: 220). The political activism of lesbian feminists and the establishment of lesbian community spaces embody this principle. Similarly, the foundation of *Vela Gay Bar* aimed at enhancing visibility of the needs of queer women.

The interview I conducted with the owner of *Vela*, Isabel Laier[3], centers on the conceptualization and establishment of the bar, as well as its transformation throughout its operational history. Isabel was born in 1971 and self-identifies as a lesbian. She is the owner of *Vela Gay Bar* and is further engaged in the queer community through event planning. The focus of the interview was to chart ideological and cultural shifts in the queer community – as evidenced in *Vela's* policies and clientele – over the years. Key discussions included the reasons for the founding of the bar and its ideological framework. I follow Kathrine Fobear's pivotal inquiry into "what meanings are attached to lesbian social spaces and how these meanings are connected to queer women's sense of identity, visibility, and social position" (2012: 724).

When asked about the primary reasons for opening *Vela*, the owner replied that she was motivated by a desire for active engagement in the queer community and to work in opposition to perceived "unfairness

[3] The interview was conducted by me via video call on December the 13th of 2023. The video call was recorded and later transcribed and edited for the purpose of this paper. The recording and transcription are not publicly available.

against lesbians" (Laier 2023: 2:00-2:04) within the community. This unfairness revolved around lesbian women often being disregarded or treated as an afterthought at prominent LGBTQIA+ events such as the Copenhagen Pride at the end of the 20th century (cf. *ibid.* 5:07-5:47). This is a situation that, Isabel contends, remains largely unchanged in numerous contexts globally (cf. *ibid.* 10:34-10:39) to the present day (cf. *ibid.* 3:50-4:00). The owner recognized the necessity for women to have a designated space, or at least a space where their needs were paramount. "They needed some space like mine [*Vela*]" (*ibid.* 23:34-23:37). This realization was coupled with an empowering sentiment of: "Why don't we just do it ourselves?" (*ibid.* 6:47-6:50). Thus, the "women parties" were inaugurated and quickly gained popularity. However, even these first almost counter-protest female-oriented parties operated under the principle of: "Everybody was [and is] welcome" (*ibid.* 10:10-10:12).

From the beginning *Vela* was conceived to be a "mixed bar" (cf. *ibid.* 10:49-11:00). *Vela* was established in alignment with the owner's personal philosophy: "You are who you are, and that is acceptable" (*ibid.* 14:03-14:07). Isabel affirmed that one does not need to adhere to a specific sexual orientation or gender identity to be welcomed as a friend at *Vela* (cf. *ibid.* 13:47-14:26). The decision encountered apprehension from several women who feared that men might appropriate the space (cf. *ibid.* 14:29-14:36). "A lot of women are afraid that if you say: 'everybody is welcome', […] they […] are losing something" (*ibid.* 14:51-15:00). It could refer to the potential erosion of a safe space or community that these women felt would come with broadening the accessibility of the space. When asked about particular inclusionary policies the owner responded: "It's not like I started *Vela* wanting it to be a straight or a mixed place, no. […] [I]t's called: *Vela Gay*[4] *Club* – […]. That was the beginning. […] [People say] now I've changed it [but] I haven't changed [it]" (*ibid.* 23:59-24:20). As a result of the bar's origins and philosophy, *Vela's* customers are predominantly women, many of whom self-identify as lesbian.

The characteristic of *Vela* that sets it apart from other queer nighttime leisure spaces in Copenhagen is that it is conceptualized as a lesbian-centric, female-oriented space. This does not imply exclusivity or exclusion of other sexualities and gender expressions, but rather that it is primarily structured and managed as a lesbian establishment. It signifies a female-centered environment that welcomes all people who identify as female in some capacity, women who love women in particular, and allies wishing to offer solidarity. As the owner of *Vela* succinctly put it: "For me *Vela* is a lesbian place, because I am a

[4] In this instance the word gay refers to queer women.

lesbian owner"[5] (Laier 2023: 15:00-15:05). Thus, Isabel thinks of *Vela* as a lesbian bar but one that is inclusive of all individuals (cf. *ibid.* 25:38-25:47) as long as they are respectful of the queer community in general and queer women in particular.

Re-Framing Lesbian Identity: Towards a Queer Identity

> Therefore, while both younger and older generations can agree that space does matter, they disagree over what this space should be, who should be allowed in, and the significance attached to it (Fobear 2012: 743).

An interpretation of some of the reviewed studies suggests a generational divide regarding the significance of lesbian spaces in terms of community and visibility (cf. Lo & Healy 2000: 33; cf. Megarry et al. 2022: 54; cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3; Fobear 2012: 743). Clare Forstie characterizes this as a split between '"lesbian feminist longtimers' and 'postidentity-politics [sic] newcomers"' (Megarry et a.2022: 54 cit. after Forstie 2020: 1769). Lesbian women's internalized perceptions of their sexuality have evolved from being perceived as deviant to being recognized as a radical force (a core identity) into an intersectional identity. (cf. Lützen 1998: 236). Thus, for many lesbians growing up during the height of the feminist movement self-identifying as lesbian was intrinsically a political statement (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 2). Katherine Fobear identifies a shift in the relevance of this type of political activism in queer social institutions, towards a more lifestyle-oriented focus in contemporary queer bars (cf. 2012: 729) resulting from evolving ideas on sexuality and identity. Previously political spaces are increasingly becoming mixed and leisure-oriented as the demand for activism diminishes. Podmore contends that the "deterritorialization" (2006: 618) and decline of exclusively lesbian-only spaces can be attributed to the "disidentification with the essentialism of identity and space represented by the women-only lesbian bars of the 1980s" (*ibid.* 618). Ella Ben Hagai observes that differing constructions of identity are accompanied by "fractures in a sense of community among lesbians" (2023: 1). Hence, various approaches to female-oriented spaces are established, and the inclusion criteria are subject to ongoing debate. As a result, established lesbian bars must either revise their self-conception or their door policies or risk alienating future clientele.

Queer women themselves identify in a variety of different ways and inscribe different meanings in the category of 'lesbian' (cf. Fobear 2012: 731). Ben Hagai cites a "post-gay understanding of their sexual

[5] While the gender and sexuality of the owner of an establishment does not have to be a distinguishing factor it is, nevertheless, interesting to note that lesbian, female ownership is very rare when it comes to queer bars and clubs.

identity" (2023: 3) as constitutive of younger generations of queer people. Therefore, a queer identity is becoming less central in the construction of identity and community resulting in more flexible identity categories (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3). Ben Hagai theorizes an "emerging paradigm of fluid sexuality" (2023: 1) which restructures lesbian communities referring to an ideological divide between people ascribing to a lesbian identity and those who are veering towards the term queer. Julie Podmore refers to this process as a "transformation and multiplication of lesbian identities" (2006: 618). Consequently, contemporary lesbians are more attuned to "identity as a 'mythological' construction" (Jagose 1996: 78) which entails the recognition of the plasticity of identity formation and the abolition of essentialized notions of identity. This new configuration emphasizes a certain maneuvering room for a person to claim (or not claim) an identity, resulting in an increased freedom for an individual to associate with one or many groups of their choice. Ben Hagai frames this as a paradigm shift under the heading "[c]hoice vs. born this way" (2023: 2). Choice, in this context, refers to being more inclined towards one identity formation rather than the other.

As identity has become less of a unifying factor, there is a greater freedom to socialize beyond narrow identity circles and to more fully integrate into the broader societal context (cf. Fobear 2012: 733). This refers to mixed venues and events as well as the partial integration into heterosexual society. Younger generations of women who are attracted to women feel more comfortable going out to straight or mixed nightlife venues than previous generations (cf. *ibid.* 722). Thus, they do not necessarily foreground their lesbian identity, instead comprehending it as one of many contributing factors to their identity. Additionally, they are less interested in finding their societal niche, preferring instead to integrate into the larger societal context. That tendency entails a different perception of gendered "space, identity and being integrated or accepted in [the] mainstream" (*ibid.* 722-723). The decreased prevalence of homophobic sentiments, namely the greater recognition of diverse sexual and gender expressions in society, has allowed for the queer identity to emerge as one of many identity markers (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 2). As the stigmatization of queer individuals decreases the need for unification under a singular identity also diminishes (cf. Easterbrook et al. 2014: 697). The reduced expectation of persecution in 'mainstream' spaces renders their claim to them more natural, which is congruent with the transformation of gender-exclusive venues into more inclusive sites that welcome other queer people as well as heterosexual allies (cf. Fobear 729).

The "fiction" of a "stable identity" (Jagose 1996: 96) not only delimits but actively dispossesses those who ascribe to it (cf. *ibid.* 96). Since exclusively lesbian spaces often promote notions of an essentialized,

singular and fixed identity (cf. Fobear 2012: 745) the opening of these spaces to a more mixed clientele has the potential to fundamentally reshape our understanding of identity in general, thus dismantling the "homo-hetero binary" (Jagose 1996: 99) as well as the "monolithic identities 'lesbian' and 'gay'" (*ibid.* 99). As a non-category, 'queer' thus subverts all notions of binarism and uniformity. Ultimately, this paves the way for new conceptualizations of identity and a celebration of intersectionality[6], diversity, and fluidity – namely a construction of gender that need not adhere to a binary, and a sexual orientation capable of evolving over time. Conversely, this constructs a new interpretation of community that no longer relies on "unity and homogeneity" (Valentine 2000: 6) to feel like a collective, resulting in a community with more diverse needs and desires that need to be accommodated.

Visibility is frequently expressed to be essential to identity formation and, consequently, necessary for the recognition of a particular group. Skeggs argues that "[c]laims for recognition rely on an investment in a future belief of knowing where one's place should be and making claims for that space" (1999: 220). However, queer women today do not confront the same struggle for recognition as previous generations did, nor do they need to claim space in the same manner. This is an attitude made viable by the decades of political activism that have shaped contemporary society. Undoubtedly, there exists a tension between "'queer' as an umbrella term and the political aims of lesbian feminism" (Megarry et al. 2022: 55); however, one is not diametrically opposed to the goals of the other. Pushing identity boundaries is subversive in its own right; yet it can inadvertently result in decreased visibility within the broader societal context and greater assimilation into the 'hetero-mainstream'. Karin Lützen notes: "The radical potential of homosexuality as a manifestation of the variety of lifestyles should not be jettisoned in the name of assimilation" (1998: 233). Hence, the subversive nature of a queer identity should be preserved while simultaneously diminishing the significance of rigid identity distinctions.

Conclusion

In the present article, I discussed the significance of queer space in terms of identity formation and consolidation. My analysis included an exploration of the meaning of visibility and community in spatial contexts. I characterized female-oriented spaces within the queer community via the example of *Vela Gay Bar*. The inclusion of the interview with Isabel Laier aimed to provide a perspective from within

[6] The term was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 article titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". The concept highlights the overlapping systems of marginalization based on different identity facets like race and gender.

Copenhagen's queer community. Isabel's point of view allowed for an in-depth analysis of the significance and motivation behind the establishment of female-centered nighttime leisure spaces. The bar as the main object of study allowed for the illustration of the position of queer women in queer contexts as well as their changing identity constructions. The foundation of my research was that the establishment of space creates visibility, forms identity, and thus, results in the building of community. Hence, nighttime leisure spaces are of cultural importance to their patrons and the queer community as a whole.

In terms of identity, the category of lesbian has undergone a significant shift towards a queer conception, which entails that queer women today do not exclusively identify with the singular identity marker 'lesbian', but rather embrace a more flexible identity that can be subject to change. As a result, political activism aimed at visibility and acceptance via claims to a distinct identity has decreased. The need to advocate for visibility in a broader societal context has become less relevant because of greater tolerance for queer identities. The struggle for visibility within the queer community, however, has remained constant. The generational divide of queer women choosing a more essentialized identity construction versus one based on choice may be navigated with a more accepting approach toward diverse identity constructions.

In contemporary society interpersonal interaction and community are not confined to exclusively lesbian spaces but are increasingly found within the broader queer sphere and, in some cases, even within heterosexual spaces. The prevalence of mixed identity queer spaces offers evidence of this shift. Similarly, while *Vela Gay Bar* – though described by its owner as a lesbian bar – accommodates a range of identities; however, such an inclusive approach does not inherently increase the risk of assimilationist tendencies or contribute to the marginalization or erasure of lesbian identities. While the broader development of more inclusive spaces and the decreased need for identity distinctions is generally a favorable one, the focus should be on celebrating diversity while maintaining queer identity and specifically lesbian visibility. Nonetheless, this maintenance should not be an argument to constrain people's identity expressions.

Further exploration in the field of queer identity studies could involve examining movements trying to preserve individual identity constructions while simultaneously broadening community beyond the confines of certain queer subgroups. The non-category queer does not necessarily have to challenge more fixed identity constructions, but it undeniably has the potential to do so. In fact, all the other identity labels, e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, are still in common usage. Current developments appear to be moving

beyond those designations in favor of the inclusion of more fluid ones. For some members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the traditional labels appear to still be necessary because they signify a political identity. For others within the queer sphere, they seem outdated because they do not experience the same discrimination as the queer people that came before them. This represents a positive trend, as it reflects societal progress toward greater acceptance. While the oppression of queer identity remains a significant issue, structuring one's entire identity in opposition to it is no longer a necessity.

Bibliography

- Ben Hagai, Ella 2023: Review: "Changes in Lesbian Identity in the 21st Century". *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 49(101508), p. 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101508.
- di Leonardo, Micaela 1984: "The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender Among California Italian-Americans". Roger Sanjek (ed.). Anthropology of Contemporary Issues, Cornell University Press.
- Easterbrook, Adam., et al. 2014: "The Personal Experience of Community Among Urban Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals: Melting Pot or Mosaic?". *Social Science Quarterly*, 95(3), p. 682–700. https://doi:10.1111/ssqu.12064.
- Esterberg, Kristin G. 1994: "From Accommodation to Liberation: A Social Movement Analysis of Lesbians in the Homophile Movement". *Gender & Society*, 8 (3), p. 424–43. https://doi:10.1177/089124394008003008.
- Fobear, Katherine 2012: "Beyond a Lesbian Space? An Investigation of the Intergenerational Discourse Surrounding Lesbian Public Places in Amsterdam". *Journal of Homosexuality,* 59(5), p. 721-47. https://doi: 10.1090/00918369.2012.673942.

- Forstie, Clare 2020: "Disappearing Dykes? Post-lesbian Discourse and Shifting Identities and Communities". *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(12), p. 1760-78. https://doi: 10.1080/00918369.2019.1613857.
- Jagose, Annamarie 1996: *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. New York University Press.
- Kroløkke, Charlotte, & Anne S. Sørensen 2006: "Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls". *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: From Silence to Performance*. Sage Publications, Online via REX.
- Lo, Jennifer. & Teresa Healy 2000: "Flagrantly Flaunting it?". *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 4(1), p. 29-44. https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v04n01_03.
- Lützen, Karin 1998: "Gay and Lesbian Politics: Assimilation or Subversion?: A Danish Perspective". *Journal of Homosexuality,* 35(3-4), p. 233-43. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v35n03_10.
- Megarry, Jessica et al. 2022: "Women who Prefer 'Lesbian' to 'Queer': Generational Continuity and Discontinuity". *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 26(1), p. 53-72. https://doi: 10.1080/10894160.2021.1950271.
- Podmore, Julie A. 2006: "Gone 'Underground'?: Lesbian Visibility and the Consolidation of Queer Space in Montreal". *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7(4), p. 595–625. https://doi:10.1080/14649360600825737.
- Skeggs, Beverly 1999: "Matter out of Place: Visibility and Sexualities in Leisure Spaces". *Leisure Studies*, vol. 18(3), p. 213–33. https://doi:10.1080/026143699374934.
- Valentine, Gill 2000: "Introduction: From Nowhere to Everywhere: Lesbian Geographies". *Journal of Lesbian Studies,* 4(1), p. 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v04n01_01.
- Wolfe, Maxine 1992: "Invisible Women in Invisible Places: Lesbians, Lesbian Bars, and the Social Production of People/Environment Relationships". *Architecture & Comportement/Architecture & Behaviour*, 8(2), p. 137–57.

Unpublished Sources

- Laier, Isabel V. 2024, Dec. 14th: Interview with the owner of *Vela Gay Bar*. Conducted via video call, recorded and transcribed by Clara Rieger.