LGBTQ+ Venues in London: An investigation into the socio-economic, technological, and cultural drivers of nightlife decline.

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Abstract. Following numerous accounts lamenting the closure of over half of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues in the last decade alone, this research paper sought to investigate the underlying factors leading to the permanent closure of many of the capital's cherished queer spaces. I contextualise this paper in connection with a recent report commissioned by the Mayor of London that found that 58 percent of London's LGBTQ+ venues had closed between 2006 and 2017. Building on these findings, my research constitutes of three overarching research questions that examine: how are processes of gentrification impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues, how are LGBTQ+ dating apps and online spaces impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues, and how are changing attitudes and habits within and towards London's LGBTQ+ communities impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues? In order to develop a nuanced understanding of the multitude of factors which contributed to the closures, this paper utilised over a dozen semi-structured interviews with managers, event organisers of London's LGBTQ+ venues, and notable members of London's LGBTQ+ communities, which included: activists, artists, and performers.The study's findings indicated that processes of gentrification were largely responsible for these closures, and presented a plethora of challenges for London's existing LGBTQ+ venues struggling to adapt to these changing socio-economic dynamics in the city. The increasing popularity of online LGBTQ+ dating apps as a means of camaraderie as opposed to frequenting physical spaces of LGBTQ+ venues raised further questions surrounding the viability of certain LGBTQ+ venues in the future. This paper further suggests that certain younger LGBTQ+ generations wish to construct and frequent new forms of queer nightlife, beyond the confines of the homonormative gay neighbourhood.

Introduction

Nightlife venues that cater to London's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other gender and sexual minorities (LGBTQ+) are struggling and facing an imminent threat of closure. Following numerous media accounts lamenting the closure of many of London's renowned and historical LGBTQ+ venues, it seems that the capital's LGBTQ+ nightlife scenes are in turmoil. Over the last several years, London's gay neighbourhoods and the many gay bars and clubs that anchor them, have been receding in "size, scope and function" (Brown, 2014, p. 1). Issues accompanying the recent intensity of the closures to many LGBTQ+ venues in London have been a significant source of discussion amongst academics, journalists and London's LGBTQ+ communities. The causes behind the permanent closures of London's gay bars and clubs have been subject to intense speculation; many have argued that a tide of increasing pressures on LGBTQ+ venues have intensified the number of closures (Campkin and Marshall, 2018, p. 91). Some would suggest that this phenomenon has disproportionately impacted LGBTQ+ venues, in comparison to other nightlife venues in the city (ibid., p. 82). These discussions have produced numerous proliferating lines of academic inquiry for urban researchers and served as the fundamental motivation behind this research.

Discussions surrounding the closures of LGBTQ+ venues has laid a foundation for a handful of scholars that investigated these trends. Existing academic literature studying the decline of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife remained scarce, until recently. The UCL Urban Laboratory (2017, p. 6), a university research institute, was commissioned to conduct a report to inform the Mayor of London's Cultural Infrastructure Plan for 2030 to investigate the number of closures of London's LGBTQ+ venues and the consequent repercussions for London's LGBTQ+ communities.

UCL Urban Laboratory's (2017) report found that London witnessed a total net loss of 58 percent of its LGBTQ+ nightlife venues as of July 2017. It was reported that the number of LGBTQ+ venues fell from 125 to a mere 53 between 2006 and mid-2017 (ibid., p. 6). This figure included bars, clubs and venues that regularly host LGBTQ+ nightlife events (ibid. p. 6). The report contextualised the decline of London's LGBTQ+ venues in connection with the wider loss of 44 percent of bars and clubs throughout the entire United Kingdom between 2005 and 2015 (ibid., p. 6). The map below (figure 1) is adapted from the report's findings and shows a spatial representation of the decline of LGBTQ+ venues across London's boroughs. The report indicated a significant decline in LGBTQ+ venues in London's central and inner-city boroughs, despite being home to the highest percentages of LGBTQ+ populations in the city (figure 2). As such, the inner-city boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Islington, and Lambeth are amongst the worst affected by closures of LGBTQ+ venues.
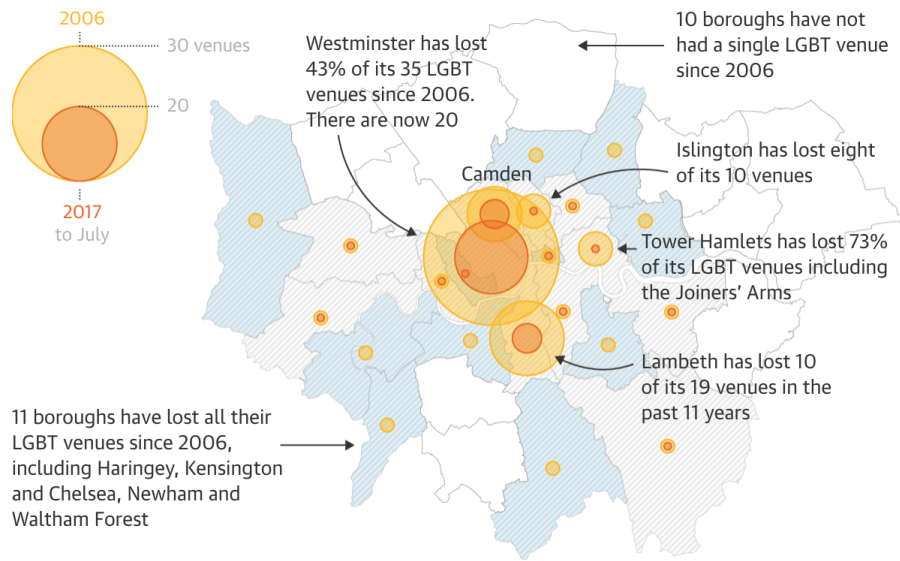
Figure 1: Map showing the intensity of closures of LGBTQ+ venues between 2006 and 2017 in London's boroughs (Neate, 2017).
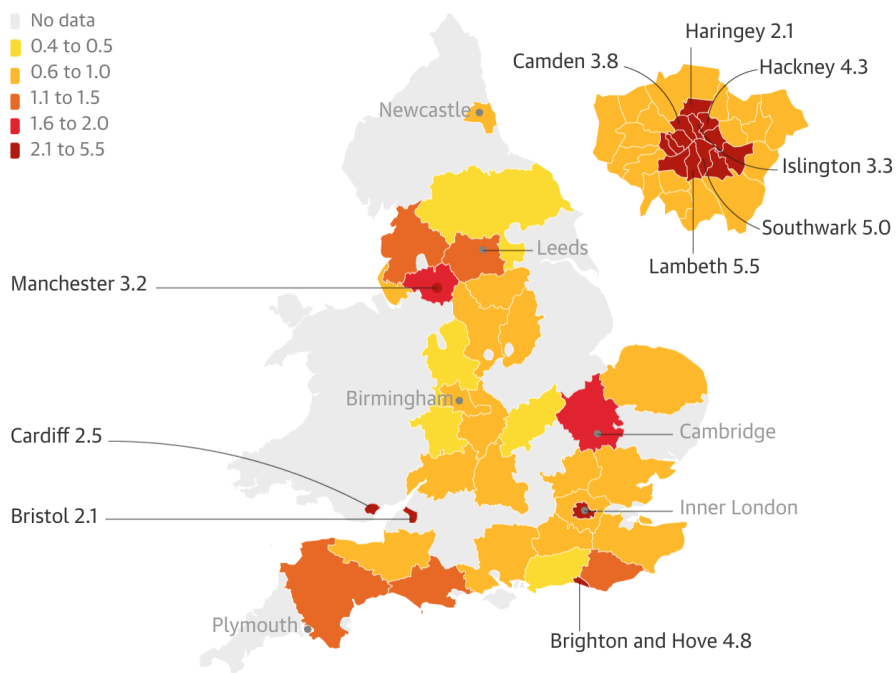

Figure 2: Map showing percentage of population whom identify as either "gay" or "lesbian" across England and Wales between 2013 and 2015 (Ross, 2017).

Despite London's reputation for having some of Europe's most diverse nightlife, UCL Urban Laboratory's (2017) report, which indicates the decline of over half of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues in the last decade alone, may suggest otherwise. Where the report revealed a stark decline in the number of closures of LGBTQ+ venues in the city and the consequent repercussions for London's different LGBTQ+ communities, the report left certain questions unexplored. Evident from the proliferation in media coverage however, journalists (figure 3) have theorised many of the underlying socio-economic, socio-technological and socio-cultural phenomena responsible for the decline of LGBTQ+ venues in London.

Figure 3: Recent media accounts speculating the causes for the decline of LGBTQ+ venues in London (Google News, 2017).

Inquiries into the causes of the closures of LGBTQ+ venues have been manifold. Some accounts link the closures to the overriding forces of gentrification in London (O'Sullivan, 2016; Shariatmadari, 2019). Over the last few years alone, entire neighbourhoods have been "regenerated" to make way for new housing developments for the wealthy. In some inner-city and central neighbourhoods, property prices have exceeded 13 times the average London household income (Reades, 2014).

Further inquiries link the closures to LGBTQ+ venues to changing shifts in how people socialise, specifically in connection with the rise of dating apps and social media. Nowadays virtually anywhere with a 3G mobile signal can be transformed into an LGBTQ+ virtual meeting space. Lucas (2016) suggests that online platforms, aimed at
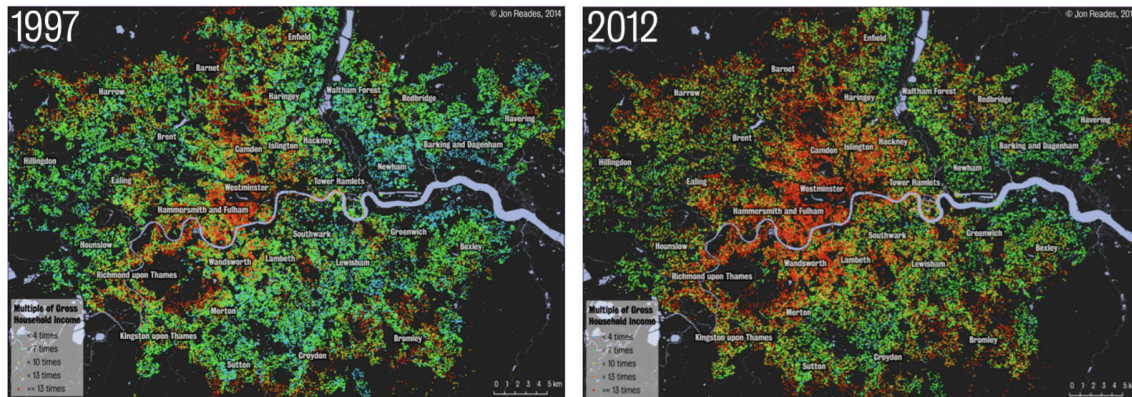
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Figure 4: Unaffordability of London. Red areas: property prices over 13 times the average household income. Green areas: 4 times the average household income (Reades, 2014).

LGBTQ+ communities, reduce the need to meet conventionally in LGBTQ+ venues. These include GPS location-based dating apps like Grindr, a social networking app which historically is aimed towards gay men, but since has expanded to include "gay, bisexual, trans and queer people", in which users can find other users in the near vicinity (Clay, 2018; Grindr, 2019). As such, Grindr markets itself as "a modern LGBTQ+ lifestyle that's expanding into new platforms... We've created a safe space where you can discover, navigate, and get zero feet away from the queer world around you" (Grindr, 2019). London alone claims the highest number of registered users globally, with nearly "700,000 users" (Grindr, 2015).
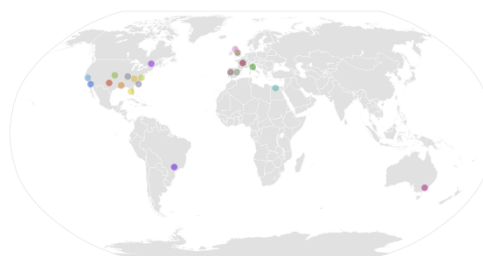
Figure 5: Number of active Grindr users in cities. (Grindr, 2015).

Lastly, other accounts link the closures of LGBTQ+ venues in connection with the growing acceptance and normalisation of gay and lesbian identities in British society. Trends at the individual level show that nearly half of young people in British society do not identify as exclusively heterosexual (YouGov, 2015). Although this is disputable, some accounts speculate that the growing normalisation of non-heterosexual identities, particularly changes in habits and improving attitudes towards homosexuality, is partly responsible for reducing pressure and demand for certain LGBTQ+ communities to congregate exclusively in predominantly gay nightlife spaces. This is particularly true of a wave of younger LGBTQ+ generations and queer collectives that have recently established new, more mixed forms of queer nightlife spaces in London which cater to specific community needs over the last five years (Abraham, 2017; Hansen, 2018; Lucas, 2016; Nicolov, 2016; Nylander, 2017).

1 in 2 young people not 100% heterosexual
British adults were asked to place themselves on the Kinsey scale, ranging from 0 (completely heterosexual) to 6 (completely homosexual)

All GB adults   18-24 year olds

Exclusively heterosexual

72%   46%   9%   22%   6%   13%   2%   3%   1%   4%   1%   1%   4%   6%

0   1   2   3   4   5   6

Varying bisexual responses

Exclusively homosexual
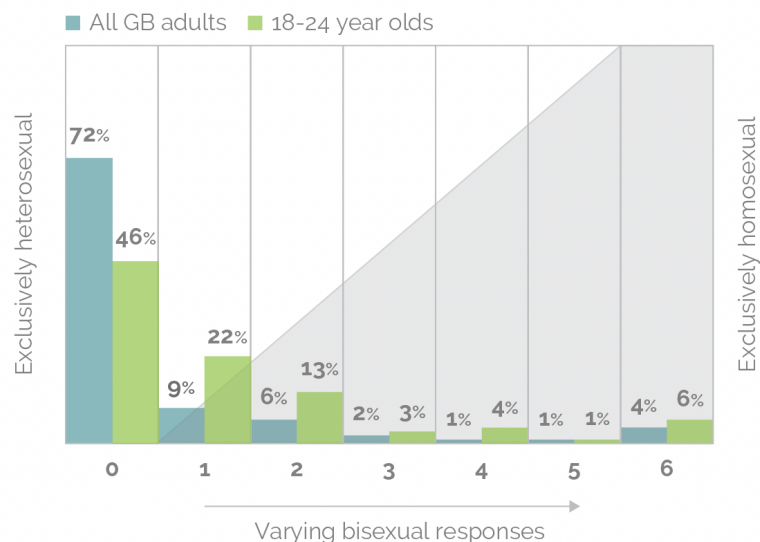
YouGov | yougov.com   August 13-14 2015

Figure 6: In 2015, 50% of 18-24 year did not identify as exclusively heterosexual (YouGov, 2015).

This paper drew inspiration from these media accounts, in conjunction with previous academic literature, to form the basis of the following three overarching research questions: With regard to socio-economic drivers, how are processes of gentrification impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues? With regard to socio-technological drivers, how are dating apps and online meeting spaces impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues? And with regard to socio-cultural drivers, how are changing attitudes and habits within and towards London's LGBTQ+ communities impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues?

Literature Review

In order to contextualise this research, this section explores, engages and evaluates relevant literature pertaining to the recent intensity in closures to London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues. It does so in three parts. First, by discussing the wider significance of gay neighbourhoods and how these neighbourhoods emerged after the Second World War. Second, by relating this issue to scholarship on gay and lesbian geographies and queer geographies. Third, by discussing recent claims of LGBTQ+ neighbourhood decline, by relating this with the impacts of socio-economic, socio-technological and socio-cultural shifts across the West.

The emergence of gay neighbourhoods and LGBTQ+ communities in the West

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and other sexual and gender minorities throughout the West, have accumulated a great degree of collective social, economic, cultural and political power, partly through the emergence of gay neighbourhoods (Castells, 1983; Knopp, 1987, 1990; Lauria and Knopp, 1985). To date, a substantial body of literature analyses how LGBTQ+ people fleeing discrimination elsewhere initially gentrified and settled in marginal inner-city neighbourhoods in large urban areas after the Second World War. In the United States, many gay and lesbian people were discharged from the military for their real or perceived sexuality (Ghaziani, 2014a). Instead of returning elsewhere, many chose to remain in the various port cities from which they were discharged to and established new communities (D'Emilio, 1983, 1989; Ghaziani, 2015b).

Efforts to establish gay neighbourhoods in cities gained momentum with the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 in New York City, which some have argued gave way to the LGBTQ+ rights movements across the United States (Carter, 2004; Duberman, 1993). To accelerate these efforts, processes of deindustrialisation and white-flight from inner-cities during the 1970s, provided the right prerequisites for what has been named the "Great Gay Migration" (Ghaziani, 2014a, 373; Newton, 1993, 44; Weston, 1995, p. 255). LGBTQ+ migrants settled in many inner-cities that embraced these identities, with the intention of "coming out" to the wider society.

The migration of tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ people from rural to urban areas lasted until the 1990s, although it is contested that this is a phenomenon still true today. Vacant buildings and low rents provided crucial "preconditions" (Collins, 2004, p. 1802) and enabled LGBTQ+ communities to establish businesses, including bars and clubs, which ultimately established the presence of gay neighbourhoods in many cities across the West (Knopp, 1992; Ruting, 2008). These "preconditions" gave LGBTQ+ communities

spaces to thrive alongside other marginal communities in inner-cities (Bell and Binnie, 2004; Collins, 2004; Short, 2017). Although many neighbourhoods like San Francisco's Castro District were first described as a "refugee camp for homosexuals" (Wittman, 1970, p. 3), by the early 1980s the city was considered the "gay capital" of the world (Castells, 1983, p. 138). These neighbourhoods took centre stage in what eventually became a movement across the entire West (D'Emilio, 1989).

> "Many of these once derelict neighbourhoods, such as the Castro in San Francisco, West Hollywood in Los Angeles, Boys Town in Chicago, the South End in Boston, Chelsea in New York, the Gaybourhood in Philadelphia, and Midtown in Atlanta, have developed reputations as desirable places for LGBTQ+ people to live and recreate." (Doan and Higgins, 2011, p. 6)

While cities have historically welcomed difference, since the 1970s onwards, gay neighbourhoods across the West served as beacons of freedom in the city. Traditionally, gay neighbourhoods functioned as inclusive spaces for people with non-conforming sexual and gender identities felt "liberated" (Alder and Brenner, 1992; Ingram et al., 1997; Wittman, 1970). In other words, gay neighbourhoods first emerged as a "spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression" (Lauria and Knopp, 1985, p. 152). Gay neighbourhoods functioned as spaces where sexual and gender minorities sought solace from the heterosexual world and found "friendships, sex and love" (Ghaziani, 2015b, p. 757). Furthermore, gay neighbourhoods were a significant promise of safety in which LGBTQ+ people sought sanctuary from daily "discrimination, bigotry and bias" (ibid., p. 757). Gay neighbourhoods have not only the fostered the development of unique cultures and camaraderie, but a touchstone for different LGBTQ+ communities across the West.

However, claims that gay neighbourhoods have always been spaces of inclusion for all LGBTQ+ communities is rigorously contested amongst academics (Andersson, 2018; Doan, 2015; Nero, 2005). Some argued that gay neighbourhoods have become commercialised and increasingly cater only towards white, middle-class gay men by largely excluding LGBTQ+ people of colour (PoC) (Nast, 2002; Nero, 2005; Ruez, 2017; Visser, 2008; Walcott, 2007), women (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Brown, 2014) and trans people (Nash, 2011). As such, Walcott (2007, p. 237) argued that LGBTQ+ PoC are often "caught between Eurocentric queer histories and homophobic communities that seek to deny their presence" (Doan, 2015). These marginalised communities increasingly find themselves amongst the "queer unwanted" (Bell and Binnie, 2004, p. 1810).

Academics who first studied gay neighbourhoods noted their unique traits and argued that these neighbourhoods could be easily identified by their "distinctive culture" (Levine, 1979, p. 364). LGBTQ+ communities "set the tone" (Chauncey, 1994, p. 228), in doing so, gay neighbourhoods challenge dominant notions of heterosexuality in the city. Rainbow flags and murals facilitate a 'sense of belonging' for LGBTQ+ communities (Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009). Levine (1979) and Murray (1979) were amongst

the first academics who recognised the concentration of gay establishments distinguished gay neighbourhoods from surrounding neighbourhoods in the city (Brown, 2014; Mattson, 2015; Knopp, 1992, 1995; Sibalis, 2004; Podmore, 2001, 2006). These gay establishments included bars, clubs, book shops, bathhouses and sex shops tailored towards LGBTQ+ communities.

The emergence of LGBTQ+ nightlife

Earlier academic efforts studying the emergence of LGBTQ+ nightlife primarily studied gay neighbourhoods in the United States (Brown, 2008). Many of these earlier studies focused on locating where gay men resided (Castells, 1983; Levine, 1979). However for the large part, initial investigations ignored the lives of LGBTQ+ women (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Castells and Murphy, 1982; Lauria and Knopp, 1985). Despite their residential focus, these studies often relied on information about the location of gay bars and clubs in order to establish the spatial boundaries of these unique neighbourhoods (Bell and Valentine, 1995). As such, the role of gay bars and clubs play in the development of gay neighbourhoods cannot be understated.

Nightlife played a fundamental role in the overall development of gay neighbourhoods (Collins, 2004), although this is not to suggest that LGBTQ+ communities constantly frequent bars and clubs. Ghaziani (2014a, p. 373) argued LGBTQ+ venues, are "anchor institutions" and played a crucial role in the material and cultural grounding of gay neighbourhoods (Miller, 1987; Mukerji, 1994). Holt and Griffin (2003) further stressed that gay bars and clubs are commonly the only spaces in the city where LGBTQ+ communities feel safe enough to openly express their identities without fear of retribution for simply existing. Thus, the value of nightlife spaces for LGBTQ+ communities is significant (Polletta, 1999; Weston, 1995). Collins' (2004) four-stage model of the development of gay neighbourhoods (figure 7) theorised that the strategic clustering of gay bars and clubs acted as an important catalyst for attracting LGBTQ+ communities to initially migrate to cities and concentrate in these neighbourhoods.

The emergence of LGBTQ+ nightlife in London

London has a long history of nightlife catering to a diversity of different LGBTQ+ communities. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the first gay enterprises named "molly houses", served as meeting spaces for gay men. These were widespread across London (Collins, 2004, p. 1795). Soon after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in the United Kingdom under the Sexual Offences Act of 1967, London's first major gay club, "Bang!", opened in 1972 in Charing Cross (Evans and Cook, 2014, p. 41). London's

Stage 1: 'Pre-conditions'—urban area in decline: location of sexual and legal liminal activities and behaviour
Key features
1. Twilight/marginal area showing extensive physical urban decay
2. Presence of street-based and/or near off-street (predominantly heterosexual) prostitution
3. Significant stock of vacant commercial premises
4. Low property prices/rental values
5. Typical presence of at least one gay licenced public house

Stage 2: 'Emergence'—clustering of gay male social and recreational opportunities
Key features
1. Conversion of some other nearby licensed public houses into 'gay run' pubs
2. Increase in applications made for liquor licences to support conversion of some other existing commercial premises into gay nightclub or additional licensed public houses
3. Upgrading or renovation of existing gay pub(s) in the area
4. Substantial increase in gay male customer base and pub revenue stream

Stage 3: 'Expansion and diversification'—widening gay enterprise service-sector base
Key features
1. Conversion of some other existing commercial premises for gay service-sector enterprises: gay health clubs/saunas, gay retail lifestyle accessory stores, gay café-bars
2. Further applications for liquor licences and planning permission for additional gay nightclubs
3. Increasing gay household density in the existing stock of residential units in the gay village locale
4. Increasing physical visibility and public awareness of the urban gay village to mainstream society
5. Growth of gay tradespersons and professional practices operating in or near the gay village, or via its community media
6. Increasingly significant and sustained contribution to the gay service-sector enterprises' revenue streams from visiting gay tourists

Stage 4: 'Integration'—assimilation into the fashionable mainstream
Key features
1. Increasing presence of heterosexual custom in ostensibly gay pubs/bars
2. Conversion of some existing commercial premises for new mainstream society service-sector enterprises (bars, clubs, restaurants)
3. Influx of young urban professionals to the existing stock of residential units in the gay village environs
4. Outflow and suburbanisation of early gay residential colonisers
5. Increasing applications and construction of new-build (apartment) residential units in the gay village environs
6. Increasingly significant and sustained contribution to gay service-sector enterprises' revenue streams from the heterosexual community

Figure 7: Collins (2004) four-stage model of the development of gay neighbour-hoods in England. (Collins, 2004, p. 1802).

LGBTQ+ nightlife has since concentrated and dispersed from multiple areas in London.

During the 1970s, LGBTQ+ nightlife venues concentrated around Earl's Court and Shepherd's Bush in West London (Collins, 2004). By the 1980s and 1990s, this scene dispersed to the then more affordable King's Cross in Central London. By then, Soho began emerging as London's commercialised gay tourism and nightlife hub (ibid.). The scene in King's Cross eventually dispersed to Vauxhall by the late 1990s until present (Andersson, 2010). By the early 2000s until present, clusters of gay bars and clubs in East London emerged as an alternative to Soho and Vauxhall. These include Shoreditch (Andersson, 2009), Dalston, Bethnal Green and Haggerston (UCL Urban Laboratory, 2016; 2017). Since the 2010s, some new clusters of queer bars and clubs have emerged

in Deptford, Hackney Wick, Lewisham, Clapham and Peckham (ibid.).

From geographies of gay and lesbian neighbourhoods to queer neighbourhoods

Past scholarship in urban geography neglected the notion that sexuality can be equally influential in the formation of social dynamics in the city, alongside factors such as class, race or gender (Bell, 1991; DeLamater and Plante, 2015; Knopp, 1992; McNee, 1984; Oswin, 2015). The increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ communities in Australia, Europe and North America brought differing sexualities to the attention of geographers and legitimised the study of gay neighbourhoods (Short, 2017, p. 69-70). Binnie (1997), Knopp (1992) and McNee (1984) highlighted a certain prudishness and enduring "heterosexism" in the discipline meant that the study of sexualities in the city was not embraced by geographers until much later, in relation to other disciplines (Johnson et al., 2013, p. 105). Since the early 1980s however, a significant body of literature examining the lives of gay men and women in the city has emerged, particularly with a strong focus on the spatiality of gay neighbourhoods.

Geography's engagements with post-structuralist, queer and intersectional feminist theories led to the inception of the 'queer geographies' field in the 1990s and sought to question dominant narratives produced within earlier work in 'gay and lesbian geographies'. This paved the way for critical discussions about homonormativity within LGBTQ+ communities. This intellectual shift was overtly political and challenged prevailing notions of heterosexuality as 'normal' and homosexuality as 'abnormal' (Bell and Valentine, 1995). Although often conflated as the same field, an academic divide developed amongst academics between gay and lesbian geographies and queer geographies (Knopp, 2007; Browne et al., 2009).

Geographies of gay neighbourhoods

Preliminary work in gay and lesbian geographies placed a strong emphasis on the spatiality of gay neighbourhoods in North America and sought to map these neighbourhoods. Levine (1979) produced a series of maps, with the aid of the national directory of gay gathering places, in the effort to chart the concentration of the United States' gay communities. Levine represented such places including gay bars, clubs, cruising spaces and public bathrooms as markers on maps. This investigation revealed that the spatial distribution of gay male communities was almost exclusively located in inner-cities across the United States.
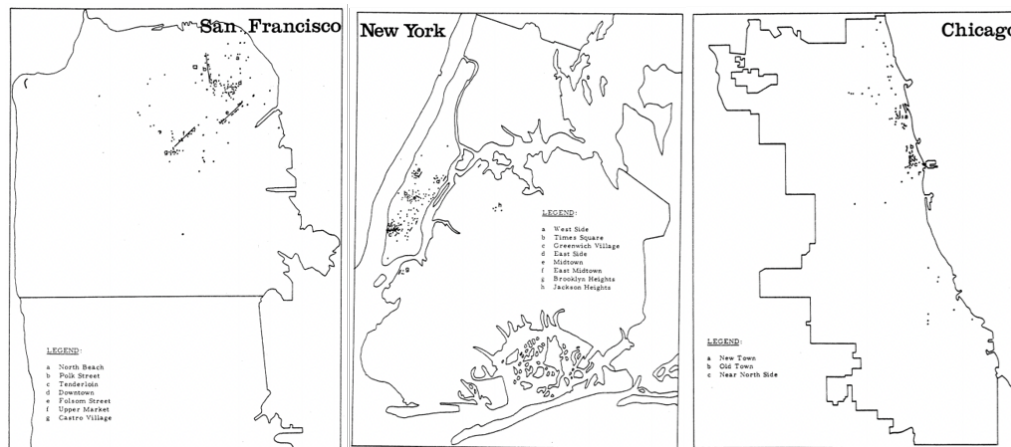
Figure 8: Spatial concentrations of gay communities in the inner-cities of San Francisco, New York and Chicago (Levine, 1979, p. 368-370).

Figure 9: Left: gay bars and clubs where gay men congregated from 1964 to 1980 in San Francisco. Right: gay residential areas from 1950 to 1980 in San Francisco (Castells, 1983, p. 146-148).

Levine (1979) theorised that gay men led distinct lives in the city, separated from the rest of society, by virtue of being gay. Drawing on earlier theories by Wirth (1928), Levine (1979) likened gay neighbourhoods in major American cities (Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco) to segregated "immigrant ghettos". Levine's (1979, p. 364) comparison of gay neighbourhoods with ethnic enclaves suggested that gay communities existed "socially isolated" in the city, having minimal or no interaction with the surrounding society.

Levine's (1979) work, along with other initial efforts to locate the "gay landscape" (Bell and Valentine, 1995, p. 175) including Harry (1974), Loyd and Rowntree (1978)

and Weightman (1981), inspired numerous other attempts to map the presence of gay neighbourhoods in other cities. The most notable work remains Castells' (1983), *The City and the Grassroots*. Castells' (1983) work is the most cited and often regarded amongst the largest bodies of work to examine the lives of those who fell outside the "heterosexual norm" (Short, 2017, p. 69). In order to establish the spatial boundaries of San Francisco's gay communities, Castells' (1983, p. 355-362) methodology consisted of a series of mapping exercises similar to Levine's (1979) research and relied on information from gay nightlife listings and business directories. Obtaining census data on same-sex households enabled Castells (1983) to document the spatial concentrations of gay male populations in the city over time.

Castells (1983, p. 138) argued that the spatial concentration, or "clustering" of gay men mainly in the Castro District, was a means by which they could achieve social, economic, and cultural significance in the city. Castells (1983) further argued that by leading an "alternative lifestyle", gay men were able to establish a "city within the city" (ibid., p. 139-140). The clustering of gay establishments, including gay bars and clubs, enabled gay men to overcome the obstacle of finding other gay friends, sexual partners and the chance to lead an openly "gay life" (ibid., p. 145). Lauria and Knopp (1985) furthered argued that the concentration of San Francisco's gay communities enabled individuals to amass a degree of political clout in the pursuit of civil rights. This phenomenon was particularly true for the election of the first openly gay American politician, Harvey Milk, in 1977 (Brown, 2014, p. 2).

Although Levine's (1979) research and similar studies opened a dialogue amongst geographers about the significance of sexuality on the spatial dynamics in the city, these studies have come under strong criticism for their descriptive and deterministic conclusions (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014). Levine's (1979) oversimplified study, I would argue, perpetuated notions that that gay men merely lived in 'ghettos'; leading segregated lives with no social, economic or political agency. Castells (1983, p. 140), rather problematically suggested that the absence of lesbian visibility in San Francisco was due to the lack of "territorial ambitions" of women in relation to men (Whittemore and Smart, 2016). These simplistic arguments failed to develop a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ+ communities. They failed to recognise the homonormative privileges that are bestowed on white, middle-class gay men in relation to LGBTQ+ PoC communities (Nast, 2002; Nero, 2005), whilst completely ignored the lives of lesbian and trans populations in the city (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Ghaziani, 2015a; Podmore, 2006).

Where one can acknowledge that these studies were conducted when homosexuality was criminalised across the large majority of the United States, early discussions in gay and lesbian geographies has been widely criticised by queer geographers for promoting heterosexist, racist and gendered conclusions about LGBTQ+ communities (Bell and Valentine, 1995, p. 4). These attempts failed to develop more realistic understandings

of gay communities, let alone other LGBTQ+ communities in the United States and did not develop more intersectional and encompassing approaches to studying these different groups in the city. As such, these mapping attempts largely developed essentialist and generalised conclusions about gay men, whilst the language, admittedly somewhat offensive to LGBTQ+ communities today, misconstrued and perpetuated invalid assumptions about LGBTQ+ communities as a whole (Duggan, 2003).

Geographies of queer neighbourhoods

Despite that Castells' (1983) study was noted as 'ground-breaking', this body of work broadly defined within gay and lesbian geographies has been criticised by queer geographers for its structuralism (Oswin, 2008; 2015). Queer geographies emerged in the effort to destabilise fixed notions of sexuality and gender within the discipline and much of the homonormative assumptions that were produced in earlier literature (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Browne et al., 2009). Since the early 1990s, queer geographers' interdisciplinary engagement with queer and feminist theories has brought about critical perspectives within geography. Most recently, queer geographers sought to develop greater intersectionality in their approach to investigating LGBTQ+ communities (Irazábal and Huerta, 2015).

While this section does not seek to give a comprehensive account of literature within queer geographies, one important critical concept that is essential to this investigation to have emerged is homonormativity, and therefore must be addressed.

Homonormativity and homonormative aesthetics

Post the Stonewall Uprising of 1969, the increasing equality for LGBTQ+ communities across the West, which includes the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and other LGBTQ+ rights, has been criticised for upholding, rather than challenging heteronormative institutions and values (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 330). Duggan (2002) challenged this prevailing phenomenon:

> "A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumption and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption." (Duggan, 2002, p. 179)

Developing on this assimilationist phenomenon, Nast (2002) critiqued the patriarchal structures amongst LGBTQ+ communities, particularly the privilege bestowed on younger gay white men and how most gay institutions (including bars and clubs) accommodate

mostly to these communities. In turn, LGBTQ+ PoC communities across the West find themselves increasingly marginalised under what Nast (2002) named as the "queer patriarchy". Nast (2002, p. 874) contended that "certain gay white men benefit from post-industrial sectors that depend structurally and implicitly upon white supremacy and heteropatriarchy".

Some scholars further argued that homonormative aesthetics, rooted in consumption, has increasingly manifested itself in the built environment of gay neighbourhoods – in tandem with the growth of the pink economy of the 1990s across the West. Andersson's (2018, p. 14) study of London's Soho, argued the neighbourhood has become associated with the "de-radicalisation and commodification of gay culture". Soho's gay bars and clubs place an emphasis on 'cool', 'minimalist' and 'clean' designs that, in time, has come to epitomise the "bland and generic" culture of the neighbourhood (ibid., p. 11). Many of the neighbourhood's establishments celebrate and prioritise a very narrow set of homonormative and Eurocentric ideals; most notable of which is the "clean-cut" "gay gym body" (ibid., p. 12-14). As such, any expressions which fall outside these narrow parameters of homonormative ideals are largely unwelcomed by Soho's establishments, as they are deemed "less marketable" (ibid., p. 14).

Duggan's (2002) theories of homonormativity and other assimilationist critiques of LGBTQ+ communities, along with changing social norms, attitudes and habits, has been recognised as one of the key causes for the recent trends in the decline of commercialised gay neighbourhoods across the West.

Socio-economic drivers: gentrification

Gentrification remains one of the most enduring topics in urban geography (Lees et al., 2008). Gentrification is a process concerned with the settlement of middle and upper-income people and businesses in renovated housing formerly inhabited by lower-income communities (Gregory et al., 2009, p. 273-274). Glass (1964) was amongst the first sociologists of her time to recognise this class restructuring of inner-city London in the early 1960s. Glass (1964, p. xviii-xix) described this urban change as an invasion of working-class quarters by the middle-class, or the gentry, naming it a "process of gentrification". Glass (1964, p. xviii) argued that this process continued to the extent that "working-class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed". Since Glass' (1964) initial findings, a vast body of literature emerged pertaining to the process of gentrification concerned with the class restructuring of neighbourhoods across cities around the world. Few academic studies have investigated the displacement of LGBTQ+ communities from gay neighbourhoods by gentrification (Doan and Higgins, 2011, p. 6).

Gay neighbourhoods and the bars and clubs that anchor them are under threat from

the socio-economic pressures of gentrification. Increasingly, gay neighbourhoods are experiencing what Bell and Binnie (2004, p. 1815) argue is a "colonisation" of heterosexual populations seeking "cool" and "cosmopolitan" inner-city life (Rushbrook, 2002, p. 183; Ruting, 2008, p. 263). Usher and Morrison (2010, p. 271) argued many gay neighbourhoods across the United States are being displaced by an influx of heterosexual residents. This type of heterosexual gentrification presented multiple challenges for gay neighbourhoods to maintain their unique cultural traits and identities. As such, the influx of heterosexual communities arguably threatens the overall long-term LGBTQ+ presence in these unique neighbourhoods. Where Collins (2004, p. 1802) argued that the gentrification of gay neighbourhoods is an inevitable process of "assimilation into the fashionable mainstream", Ruting (2008, p. 264) contested this, arguing that many LGBTQ+ residents are in reality being "priced out" by this process.
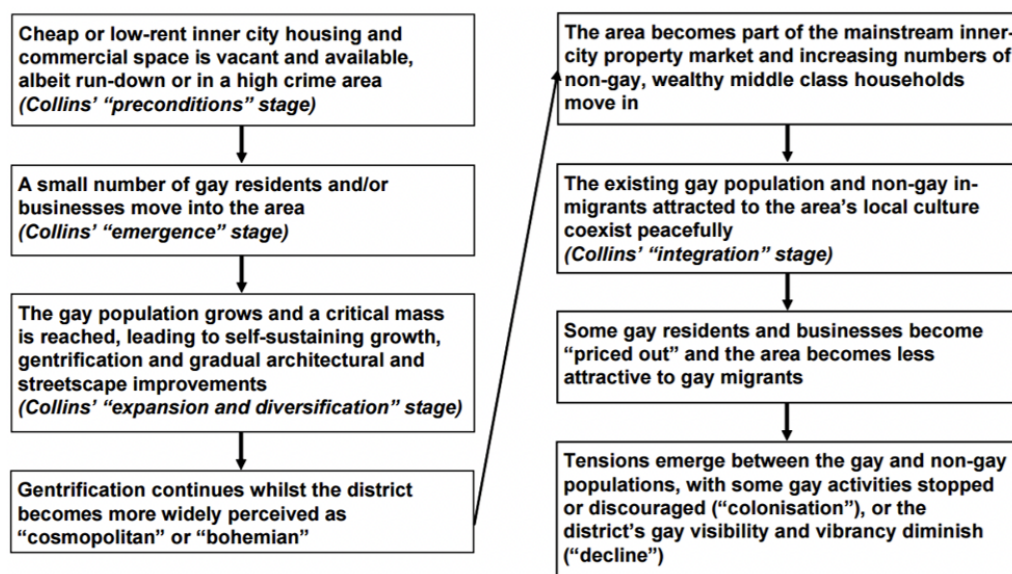
Cheap or low-rent inner city housing and commercial space is vacant and available, albeit run-down or in a high crime area *(Collins' "preconditions" stage)*	The area becomes part of the mainstream inner-city property market and increasing numbers of non-gay, wealthy middle class households move in
A small number of gay residents and/or businesses move into the area *(Collins' "emergence" stage)*	The existing gay population and non-gay in-migrants attracted to the area's local culture coexist peacefully *(Collins' "integration" stage)*
The gay population grows and a critical mass is reached, leading to self-sustaining growth, gentrification and gradual architectural and streetscape improvements *(Collins' "expansion and diversification" stage)*	Some gay residents and businesses become "priced out" and the area becomes less attractive to gay migrants
Gentrification continues whilst the district becomes more widely perceived as "cosmopolitan" or "bohemian"	Tensions emerge between the gay and non-gay populations, with some gay activities stopped or discouraged ("colonisation"), or the district's gay visibility and vibrancy diminish ("decline")

Figure 10: Stages of gentrification to gay neighbourhoods (Ruting, 2008, p. 264) adapted from Collin's (2004) model.

Socio-technological drivers: dating apps

The decline of gay neighbourhoods, specifically the closures of LGBTQ+ meeting spaces including gay bars and clubs, has been linked with the increasing popularity of online LGBTQ+ meeting spaces (Ashford, 2006; Batiste, 2013; Clay, 2018; Collins and Drinkwater, 2016; Gudelunas, 2012; Usher and Morrison, 2010). The sustained growth of online meeting platforms, in particular, dating apps like Grindr, has arguably reduced the physical need for venues and the need for LGBTQ+ communities to concentrate in gay neighbourhoods. Collins and Drinkwater (2016) argued that this trend will ultimately render

such spaces redundant in the future. Where an LGBTQ+ venue would have previously facilitated opportunities to meet new friends, sexual partners, or a sense of belonging, LGBTQ+ communities are increasingly using the Internet to mediate this (Campbell, 2004). The growth of the internet and increasing popularity of dating apps and other LGBTQ+-orientated online meeting platforms presents a significant challenge for the future of gay neighbourhoods.

> "An LGBTQ+ person no longer needs to escape to the world of the Castro or to Christopher Street to find people like himself or herself; instead, all the LGBTQ+ person has to do is go online. In other words, being tied to a specific neighbourhood is no longer necessary for the gay experience." (Usher and Morrison, 2010, p. 280)

Collins and Drinkwater (2016, p. 767-782) argued the appeal and ease of dating apps reduce the motivation and frequency of travelling long distances to gay establishments for LGBTQ+ people. In other words, dating apps essentially "erode" the need to be physically present in a gay neighbourhood (ibid., p. 782). Today, meeting other LGBTQ+ people, particularly with preferred niche characteristics and interests, has never been easier (ibid., p. 767). This phenomenon was especially noted in Copenhagen, where Rosser et al. (2008a) found that the total number of gay bars had declined, while online platform use has increased. Batiste (2013) further argued that for users of dating apps such as Grindr, which allow its users to see other gay men in the near vicinity, challenges the assumption that the public sphere is entirely heterosexual. This contributes to a greater sense of belonging to a 'virtual LGBTQ+ community'.

Although LGBTQ+ communities will undoubtedly continue to frequent gay bars and clubs, the popularity of the internet as a means of interaction will continue to increase (Ashford, 2006; Gudelunas 2012). While dating apps may perhaps not replace nightlife venues altogether, online platforms allow LGBTQ+ communities an opportunity to socialise beyond physical queer spaces (Collins and Drinkwater, 2016, p. 775). The decline of LGBTQ+ nightlife spaces in cities across the West can at least, in part, be attributed to the rise of online LGBTQ+ spaces.

Socio-cultural drivers: changing habits and attitudes

"Post-gay" attitudes

A handful of academics anticipate that while Western societies become increasingly "post-gay", gay neighbourhoods and the institutions that anchor them, will be rendered obsolete (Brown, 2014; Ghaziani, 2011; Gorman-Murray and Nash 2017; Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Nash 2013; Reynolds 2009). Since the Stonewall Uprising of 1969,

LGBTQ+ identities have become increasingly normalised across the West. In relation to gay neighbourhoods, Collins (2004, p. 1802) argued this phenomenon to be the "assimilation" into the heterosexual mainstream. Greater legal status for LGBTQ+ people, including equal marriage and rights in the workplace, has produced a set of homonormative practices, notably amongst cisgender gay, lesbian and bisexual communities in the West (Duggan, 2003; Seidman, 2002; Warner, 1993).

It must be noted that this process of 'homonormalisation', or 'assimilation into the fashionable mainstream', has primarily benefitted those at the expense of sexual and gender minorities that include but are not limited to, transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming and queer communities; although attitudes are slowly improving. In the United States, Ghaziani (2010) emphasised that this integration generated feelings of acceptance and safety for certain LGBTQ+ communities at the expense of others.

In the United Kingdom, Collins and Drinkwater's (2016, p. 770) study of the British Social Attitudes survey demonstrated that trends in attitudes towards homosexuality in British society have progressively improved since 1983. This change in societal attitudes has gradually reduced the pressure for LGBTQ+ people to migrate from rural areas to large urban areas where most LGBTQ+ establishments are located (ibid., p. 782). These changes in attitudes would suggest that there is less pressure for LGBTQ+ people to congregate in nightlife spaces that cater specifically to these sexual and gender minorities

Towards queer-friendly neighbourhoods and new forms of LGBTQ+ nightlife

Since the late 1990s, academics predicted that increased social acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities will eventually see a collapse of the homosexual-heterosexual binary (Archer, 1999; Podmore, 2013; Sullivan 2003). However, the desire amongst certain LGBTQ+ communities to move beyond the homonormative gay neighbourhood, towards a more mixed and queer-friendly neighbourhood has also been recognised as a contributing factor for the decline of gay neighbourhoods and businesses (Ghaziani, 2019a; Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009; Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2014). Nast (2002) and Podmore (2013) argued that queer identities which fall outside the white, middle-class, homonormative mainstream are increasingly seeking to construct queer spaces beyond commercialised gay neighbourhoods. As such, this begs the question: if younger LGBTQ+ generations are no longer inhabiting traditional gay neighbourhoods, then where have they gone?

In the bid to answer this question, Ghaziani (2019a) offers one framework for thinking about space and LGBTQ+ populations in the city. Noting that urban researchers must avoid the pitfalls of understanding LGBTQ+ communities through the lens of "spatial singularity" (ibid., p. 15) but instead must adopt a framework of "spatial plurality" when understanding LGBTQ+ populations in the city. As such, it is crucial to recognise that LGBTQ+ communities are dispersed throughout the city and are not confined to the ge-

ographical boundaries of one neighbourhood. In their study of various cities across the Global North, Ghaziani (2019a, p. 16) argued that spatial expressions of sexuality and gender in the city are becoming increasingly plural; particularly with regards to the place-making efforts of queer PoC communities across American cities, that have constructed queer-friendly spaces beyond the confines of the predominantly white, homonormative gay neighbourhoods.

In the context of Toronto, Nash (2013, p. 244), argued that a "generational gap" developed between younger and the older LGBTQ+ communities. Younger LGBTQ+ generations in their twenties are actively seeking spaces to socialise outside Toronto's mainstream gay nightlife, whilst older generations lament the loss of longstanding gay establishments. Further studies such as Browne and Bakshi's (2011) argued that the fate of Ottawa's gay neighbourhood remains uncertain in a post-gay landscape, where younger gay and lesbian generations increasingly desire to seek nightlife spaces that cater to a more mixed clientele. The decline of gay nightlife in cities across the West can at least, in part, be attributed to increasing "post-gay" attitudes and shifts in habits amongst younger LGBTQ+ populations.

Methodology

It was imperative to employ appropriate research methods to effectively research how socio-economic, socio-technological and socio-cultural changes are impacting specifically on the closures of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues (Browne and Nash, 2010; Clifford et al., 2010; Gomez and Jones 2010). I employed similar approaches that were feasible within the scope of the undergraduate research paper, on which this research is based, by drawing on the methodologies of previous studies on the decline of gay neighbourhoods. As such, this study utilised semi-structured interviews as the primary method of research.

Rationale

Whittemore and Smart (2016, p. 194) stressed that research on LGBTQ+ spaces is heavily dependent on "anecdotal evidence" and "indirect indicators", mainly through interviews with LGBTQ+ residents and figureheads. This is partly due to the lack of statistical measurements of LGBTQ+ identity in census data (Bell, 1991). This is particularly true regarding the census in the United Kingdom, which does not allow citizens to express gender identity beyond simple categories such as "man" and "woman", let alone sexual identity (ONS, 2011). This limitation proves difficult for researchers to discern shifting spatial concentrations of LGBTQ+ populations in the city. Similarly, the constantly

changing and often underground nature of nightlife means no regular statistical data is collected concerning the number of nightlife venues catering to LGBTQ+ populations, besides gay nightlife listing magazines and websites such as London's *QX Magazine*. Such sources primarily list venues catering to gay men exclusively can be unreliable in the effort to determine an accurate, representative understanding of LGBTQ+ nightlife in a major city like London. Thus, it was imperative during my research to accept and embrace both the subjectivity and difficulty of investigating claims of LGBTQ+ nightlife decline in London (Ghaziani and Brim, 2019, p. 109). These factors prompted me to favour an intensive qualitative approach, as opposed to an extensive quantitative approach (Hoggart et al., 2001; Kitchin and Tate, 2013).

Earlier attempts to establish the spatial boundaries of gay neighbourhoods including Castells' (1983), Lauria and Knopp's (1985) or Levine's (1979) for instance overcame this operational challenge by favouring an intensive approach, which heavily relied on interviews with LGBTQ+ residents and managers of LGBTQ+ nightlife venues. More recent academic studies which have investigated claims concerning the decline of gay neighbourhoods, including Browne and Bakshi's (2011), Kanai and Kenttamaa's (2015) or Rosser et al's. (2008b) used in-depth interviews with both LGBTQ+ communities and venues as the primary research method in their investigations. Consequently, the methodologies from these studies of gay neighbourhood decline in other cities formed the basis of my own research in London.

Interviews

In order to investigate the impacts and concerns of gentrification, dating apps and changes in attitudes and habits on the current state of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife, semi-structured interviews were conducted on interviewees categorised in two groups: Group 1 being London's LGBTQ+ identifying residents, and Group 2 being Managers of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues and event organizers.

I designed two separate sets of interview prompts for these two groups. I felt that speaking to the communities who frequent London's LGBTQ+ bars and clubs were equally important as speaking to managers/event organisers, to determine a more holistic understanding of the issues at hand. This further entailed the need to speak to LGBTQ+ event organisers who host events in non-LGBTQ+ specific venues too (UCL Urban Laboratory, 2017, p. 9).

Interviewees were sampled through my personal contacts, but also through opportunity and snowball sampling by going to several LGBTQ+ establishments and approaching both LGBTQ+ residents and venue managers face-to-face. This proactive sampling method gained me access to notable members of London's different LGBTQ+ scenes,

including activists, performers and older LGBTQ+ residents. The prompt questions were broken into three themes which were directly centred on the three research aims as outlined in the introduction section.

Table 1: Summary of London's LGBTQ+ identifying residents group interviewees.

Interviewee	Description	LGBTQ+	Age
A	Student	Queer	20-24
D	Student	Bisexual	20-24
E	Student	Gay	20-24
G	Artist and performer	Queer	40-44
I	Musician	Gay	25-29
K	N/A	Gay	60-64
L	Retired	Lesbian	65-69
N	Poet, performer and trans rights activist	Trans	25-29

Table 2: Summary of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venue managers/event organisers group interviewees.

Interviewee	Description	LGBTQ+	Age
B	Gay bar manager in Soho	Gay	35-39
C	Gay bar manager in Soho	Gay	50-54
F	Queer club manager in Dalston	Queer	25-29
H	LGBTQ+ nightlife event organiser	Queer	25-29
J	Gay bar manager in Vauxhall	Gay	45-49
M	LGBTQ+ rights activist and events organizer	Gay	30-34

Adopting semi-structured interviews with a predetermined set of questions best suited the nature of my research, as this method allowed me to ask interviewees relevant and constructive questions at any point throughout interviewing. Anderson (2015) noted that this flexible method allows interviewees to build on discussions beyond the knowledge of the researcher. This allowed me to uncover issues and ideas that I had not initially anticipated. This proved crucial to my research as I attempted to discern the interviewees' views on the current state of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife.

The loose conversational structure that I maintained during these interviews additionally allowed the interviewees to proceed at their own pace. Ghaziani and Brim (2019, p. 108-109) underscored the merits of interviewing in such a manner, and noted specifically that it is the ability to "capture interactional tones" when entering into dialogue with specific groups that identify under the umbrella of LGBTQ+ that enables researchers to gain fruitful insights into individual lived experiences (ibid., p. 108).

Adopting this methodological flexibility allowed for greater opportunities to engage in in-depth interviews with specific groups and provided the opportunity to further nuance my questions. This approach allowed me to build reflexive two-way discussions around the three overarching research questions. Anderson (2015) further argued that this approach allows for the opportunity to build rapport between the researcher and the respondent. Building rapport was a crucial component; I adopted this approach to gain unique and detailed perspectives from interviewees to further enrich my understanding. I used a relaxed, personable approach towards my interviewees. This was important, given the personal nature of many of the questions, particularly concerning questions related to dating apps, lived experiences and discussing emotional topics surrounding closures to much cherished LGBTQ+ venues.

Limitations

The nature of this investigation meant that I had to accept and embrace that it would be both difficult and impractical to research London's LGBTQ+ nightlife decline objectively through quantitative approaches (UCL Urban Laboratory, 2016; 2017). This encouraged me instead to adopt a qualitative approach. This approach, however, did not come without its limitations.

It is important to underscore that this project is only representative of the views of the interviewees' perspectives who consented to taking part in this research and therefore, speaks only to their experiences.

Previous popular discourse on the decline of LGBTQ+ nightlife regularly paints LGBTQ+ communities as one monolithic "community" and has not investigated these communities with greater care, thought and consideration. I particularly take issue with these simplistic approaches and must stress that London's LGBTQ+ communities are vastly diverse and represent a multitude of intersecting identities and backgrounds. Given the scope of my research, I spoke to interviewees of a variety of different backgrounds and was mindful that I did so in a variety of venues which cater to a variety of London's LGBTQ+ communities – including venues with wheelchair access in the effort to avoid the pitfalls of previous essentialist studies.

Although it was especially important for me to gain a variety of different views from people of different backgrounds, upon conducting the research, I found that the large majority of interviewees self-identified as either gay or queer. Highlighted in table 1 and 2, I found it to be particularly difficult to come into contact with London's bisexual, lesbian, trans and non-binary communities (amongst other sexual and gender minority groups) and this is reflected in the discussion section. I tried my best to mitigate this by approaching interviewees in a variety of different venues at different times on different

weekdays and weekends. I view this to be a major drawback as it meant that my research disproportionately represents the opinions of self-identifying cisgender gay interviewees in comparison to those who may have differing sexual and gender identities.

Positionality

As a young, cisgender, gay/queer person who was raised in London and comes from a mixed Arab-European ethnic and cultural background, and someone who has frequented many of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues and events, I cannot deny that this research may have been informed by own lived experience along with my own biases and prejudices (Browne and Nash, 2010).

In the effort to deconstruct my own reality in relation to others whom identify as LGBTQ+, it was imperative to employ queer methodologies while carrying out this investigation (Blackwood, 1995). As other, more conventional approaches would constrain both the "multiplicity and fluidity" of the research (Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt, 2010, p. 97). Ghaziani and Brim (2019, p. 104) highlighted the importance of embracing fluidity in approaches to studying LGBTQ+ populations in the city; noting that gay neighbourhoods are not "tightly and walled-off districts", but instead must be understood as permeable, fuzzy spaces.

It was crucial to recognise that "critical reflexivity is the most appropriate strategy for dealing with subjectivity" (Dowling, 2005, p. 25), specifically concerning the subjectivities around the three research questions. Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt (2010, p. 97-99) emphasised the need for researchers to engage in queer dialogue through the act of 'queering communication' when convening with sexual and gender minorities. This further meant the need to recognise how minorities are "sculpted not only by sexuality and gender, but also race, ethnicity, post-coloniality and class" (ibid., p. 99).

As such, this meant that I was conscious of my own position in relation to the position of the interviewees and how these interlocking factors and structures of power could interact while interviewing. Using these ideas as a framework for my approach enabled me to build rapport with many of the interviewees. I found in many instances that my positionality enabled me to lead thorough and nuanced discussions surrounding the three research questions (Thomas, 2009). Therefore many interviewees were very enthusiastic to participate in this research.

Findings and Discussion

This following section presents and discusses the findings from the 14 in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted on the two research groups outlined in the methodology section. The structure of this section follows the three main research questions that were presented in the introduction section and discusses each in isolation.

How are processes of gentrification impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues?

The research revealed that processes of gentrification have largely negatively impacted upon nightlife venues that cater specifically to London's LGBTQ+ communities. Gentrification has presented many different social and economic pressures on both venues and those who regularly frequent these venues. A recurring theme amongst a majority of interviewees was the fear that ongoing processes of gentrification would contribute to further closures of LGBTQ+ venues, especially historically significant venues. Interviewees expressed strong concerns over the impacts of gentrification on the state of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife scene and the harmful consequences of having fewer nightlife spaces for London's LGBTQ+ communities. Building on the literature in sections one and two, this research further reinforced arguments that underpin gentrification to be a leading cause for the decline of over half of London's LGBTQ+ venues (UCL Urban Laboratory, 2017).

Increasing Rents

Interviewees frequently raised concerns over the rising rent costs of property in London in recent years and cited this to be a major contribution to the closures of LGBTQ+ venues in the city. LGBTQ+ venue managers and event organisers noted the increasing difficulty in generating enough profit that captures these dynamics of gentrification (Doan and Higgins, 2011). Several venue managers stressed that they felt that their venues were being "priced out" by landlords from their local neighbourhoods, due to rising rents in the city (Ruting, 2008, p. 260-264). Rising rents in the many central and inner-city neighbourhoods across the city have made it increasingly difficult for LGBTQ+ venues to operate profiting business models, in an already competitive nightlife economy.

> "Our business is part of a wider company who set our profit targets and expect us to meet these. Recently, the owners of this property have significantly increased the rent to £6,000 per month. How can we make that much every month to cover the rent, let alone pay performers and our employees, whilst

providing for our customers? The increasing rent costs in the area over the last several years has made it hard for gay bars like ours to stay and remain open here in Soho... We don't feel welcome here anymore..." (Interviewee B, manager of a popular gay bar in Soho)

Interviewee B, the manager of a popular gay bar in Soho that caters mostly towards gay and bisexual men, argued how the rent increases in Soho have many damaging repercussions on many LGBTQ+ venues in the neighbourhood. Venues have struggled to stay in business in the face of these increasing rents, despite being clustered in one of the world's most famous "gaybourhoods". Moreover, the manager stressed how the rent increase has made it especially difficult for their business to operate to the degree as before, given the pressures of meeting these ever-increasing financial pressures. They stressed how any further potential economic strains to their business, such as a significant increase in rent, could be detrimental and would lead to the venue's imminent closure. They further highlighted how their business found it difficult to uphold essential functions, including on-site entertainment and employees' wages, in light of the bar's rent increase. The manager anticipated that customer prices would need to be increased in the future, in order to generate enough profit, despite recognising how this would inevitably reduce the incentive for their regular clientele base to return to the venue in the long term.

Ruting (2008, p. 264) identified such economic pressures on LGBTQ+ venues, including increasing rents, to be a consequence of gentrification; resulting inevitably with the displacement of LGBTQ+ venues from their original "gaybourhoods". Developing on Collins' (2004) evolutionary "gaybourhood" model, Ruting (2008) contested Collins' (2004, p. 1789) claim that these economic pressures are a sign of LGBTQ+ venues "assimilating" or "integrating" into the "fashionable mainstream". Instead, Ruting contended that increasing rents, faced by many "gaybourhoods" like Soho, cause LGBTQ+ businesses to be "priced out" from their property. Interviewee B's fears and anxieties both resonate and reflect the overall process of "de-gaying" of Soho's "visibility" and "vibrancy" and further suggested that LGBTQ+ venues in Soho are faced with an imminent threat of being "priced out" due to these mounting economic forces in the city (ibid., p. 260).

Failures in local governance and planning for LGBTQ+ venues

Venue managers and event organisers repeatedly underpinned the growing economic pressures for LGBTQ+ venues, partly due to the lack of planning and policies by local governmental authorities to support struggling LGBTQ+ venues in the city. Although interviewees acknowledged that the reasons for the many closures in recent years as a result of a multitude of factors, interviewees frequently condemned the lack of legislation designed to protect LGBTQ+ venues and an uncontrolled rental market to be responsible for the

"decline" of LGBTQ+ venues in the city.

> "Because the queer scenes in London are in many ways quite separate, so the impact of gentrification is different in different areas. Money is a massive factor; all these spaces have to operate as a business of course in the capitalist system we live in, so rising rent costs in the city make it difficult for these spaces to stay open. However, it is so easy to get a venue closed down, a few noise complaints and have someone found with drugs in the venue and the place is gone. The law is so stringent. People don't understand how far a complaint can really go... It's an attitude of entitlement. It could mean that a person loses their livelihood when a venue is shut down. New people moving into an area like Dalston don't think about this at all, they just think that they're entitled to complain without thinking. Queer nightlife culture is such an easy thing to attack because it has booze and drugs, because it has music that isn't widely liked, venues and spaces that not everyone goes to." (Interviewee H, LGBTQ+ event organiser in East London)

Interviewee H, a queer LGBTQ+ event organiser who mainly operates queer nights in the East London scene, criticised the simple legal procedures involved with permanently closing a nightlife venue by local authorities. They noted that these laws commonly give developers and tenants the upper-hand against nightlife venues and are unsupportive of LGBTQ+ venues. The event organiser argued that there merely needs to be a "few noise complaints" from local residents nearby to the venue and an incident of drug usage on the premises of the venue, in order for local authorities to have the mandate to shut a venue permanently. Interviewee H further suggested that this phenomenon has disproportionately impacted on LGBTQ+ venues in the city because LGBTQ+ people and cultures are an "easy thing to attack". They further argued that the self-interested social attitudes of the new gentrifying populations seeking these inner-city neighbourhoods have frequently complained about nightlife noise-levels. This has further contributed to the decline of LGBTQ+ venues in the city, as these new gentrifying populations are often completely oblivious to the existing cultures and communities in neighbourhoods like East London's Dalston.

> "Local authorities could help with soundproofing, to stop complaints from people moving into the area." (Interviewee J, manager of a gay bar in Vauxhall)

Interviewee J, the manager of one of London's longest-standing gay bars in Vauxhall, South London, further echoed interviewee H's opinions and argued that local authorities should contribute financially to help soundproof LGBTQ+ venues in the area, to reduce the noise levels. In turn, the manager argued this would help reduce conflict and increasing social tensions between the gentrifying populations moving into London's gaybourhoods like Vauxhall.

Interviewee J and H's arguments further compounded and reinforced Brown's (2014) and Ghaziani's (2015b) research on gaybourhoods in Australia and North America, who recognised the struggles faced by LGBTQ+ venues, in light of the ongoing gentrification to gay neighbourhoods. Brown (2014, p. 2) argued that uncontrolled rents and lack of legislation designed to support LGBTQ+ venues are partly a result of the "relentless gentrification" to gay neighbourhoods in major cities across the Global North. Although Ghaziani (2015b, p. 757) acknowledged that LGBTQ+ populations were the initial populations who gentrified inner-city neighbourhoods and transformed them into gay neighbourhoods, he noted that the new influx of white, middle-class, mostly heterosexual people today into gay neighbourhoods to be a process of "super-gentrification".

Social tensions

The closure and displacement of LGBTQ+ venues from historically important and culturally significant "gaybourhoods" has created negative social tensions with the arrival of heterosexual populations and businesses in gay neighbourhoods (Rushbrook, 2002, p. 183). These tensions were widely articulated by interviewees. In Soho, a neighbourhood which has a cluster of several well-established LGBTQ+ bars and clubs, tensions with new heterosexual businesses have emerged. The manager of one of London's longest-standing cabaret bars in Soho, that caters mostly to an older LGBTQ+ clientele, emphasised these changing social dynamics in their neighbourhood:

> "On Archer Street, there used to be a gay nightclub called Barcode, now it's a straight restaurant. There was the Box on Seven Dials, which was a really unique and friendly gay bar to go out, now it's a straight restaurant. Whilst I think it's okay that restaurants open up here in Soho, there needs to be a limit. How many straight restaurants does London really need?" (Interviewee C, manager of a longstanding cabaret bar in Soho)

In a global capitalist market economy like London's, the increasing competition of businesses for commercial property, seeking central neighbourhoods like Soho, has caused rents to rise drastically in the city over the last several years (Whittemore and Smart, 2016, p. 195). Such economic forces have played to the disadvantage of longstanding LGBTQ+ venues that have had a historical presence in Soho, as they no longer can afford to operate in the neighbourhood as it has become too unaffordable (Doan and Higgins, 2011; Lewis, 2013).

The closure of many LGBTQ+ venues has angered many LGBTQ+ residents interviewed during this research. Many interviewees expressed resentment towards the increasing number of "straight restaurants" that have opened up in the place of former LGBTQ+ venues. Interviewee A, a queer university student, perceived this to be part of a wider agenda to "cleanse and normalise" the city:

"In gay neighbourhoods like Soho, you can see how places have been swept away in favour of a heteronormative aesthetic. It feels like there is less and less explicit promotion of gay spaces. Everything has been toned down... There is some kind of hegemonic force which is trying to cleanse and normalise things." (Interviewee A, queer university student)

Bell and Binnie (2004, p. 1815-1816) argued the restructuring of gay neighbourhoods and processes of gentrification to be a "colonisation" of heterosexual people seeking "cool" and "cosmopolitan" inner-city neighbourhoods in which to open their businesses. Their research concluded that such a phenomenon was the driving force behind the increasing pressures for gaybourhoods, and the bars and clubs that anchor them, which inevitably drives out LGBTQ+ venues of the city (ibid.; Ghaziani, 2014b; 2015b).

This research found that the growing resentment between longstanding LGBTQ+ venues and newly opened heterosexual establishments was not isolated exclusively to "gaybourhoods" in Central London, but was equally observed in Dalston, East London.

"I have noticed a clientele change at Dalston Superstore and how the passing trade that we get is a lot straighter, and a lot more 'yuppie' than what it was even last year. Since working here, I have noticed three separate luxury apartment blocks going up in the last year, that are within two minutes of the venue. The advertising campaigns for these developments mentioned nothing about the local area. There was even a video which just showed straight white people walking down the street and emphasised how easy it is getting to Paris from King's Cross from here. The people who buy into these campaigns have no idea what kind of area they are coming to. When they move here they start making complaints about the noise from the nightlife because that was something they were not made aware of." (Interviewee F, manager of a queer club in Dalston)

"I remember when a trans woman of colour came in and was at the bar, she was having a drink by herself. Then this group of straight lads came in and I could see how uncomfortable she looked. She just left the drink on the bar and didn't come back." (Interviewee I, gay musician based in East London)

"It's a group of people that just a few years ago wouldn't have been coming into a bar in Dalston, but now they come in, now that Dalston is the cool place to go and they turn up on mass. It's when you have a group of straight people come in and act as if it's their venue, this really makes me furious. This is something I wouldn't have seen until quite recently in Dalston." (Interviewee G, queer artist and performer based in East London)

The manager of a well-established queer club in Dalston (interviewee F), which caters to

a variety of different LGBTQ+ and QTIPoC (queer, trans and intersex people of colour) communities, stressed how new housing developments in Dalston have largely ignored the social dynamics in the neighbourhood. In particular the neighbourhood's large LGBTQ+ presence and the different ethnic communities in Dalston. They further underlined that these new housing developments have attracted new, upwardly mobile and predominantly heterosexual populations to the area, seeking Dalston's attractive location (Doan and Higgins, 2011). These changing social dynamics in Dalston have negatively impacted on the social atmosphere in LGBTQ+ venues in the area. Under certain conditions, it has undermined the safety and well-being of certain LGBTQ+ communities, particularly trans women and women of colour, as large groups of straight "lads" have begun to frequent these venues in search of "cool" and "cosmopolitan" nightlife (interviewee F) (Nast, 2002; Nero, 2005).

How are dating apps and other online meeting spaces impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues?

This research produced many differing opinions concerning dating apps and other online meeting spaces which cater specifically for LGBTQ+ communities and their perceived impacts on venues. The interviewees offered a wide range of responses to questions surrounding the effects of these online platforms on the social dynamics of LGBTQ+ nightlife. Furthermore, interviewees underlined the perceived implications of such platforms on their own personal lives and London's LGBTQ+ communities at large (Collins and Drinkwater, 2016). Where some venue managers and event organisers argued that the growth of online platforms has negatively impacted on their businesses, others argued that platforms have impacted their businesses positively. Similarly, residents discussed the conflicting ways in which online platforms have impacted their own habits and the differing experiences of frequenting online spaces as opposed to the physical space of an LGBTQ+ venue.

Online spaces creating new meeting spaces for LGBTQ+ communities

Numerous venue managers expressed pessimistic views about the impact of online meeting platforms on their businesses, particularly what they perceived to be a decline in the number of regular clientele as a result of the increasing use of dating apps like Grindr.

> "There is no need to go to gay bars like ours anymore when you've got Grindr... In the 17 years I've been working here, I've noticed more and more that people don't come to our bar looking for friends or sex the same way. People's intentions for going out have changed, when you can just sit at home

for free with an app..." (Interviewee C, manager of a longstanding cabaret bar in Soho)

"Only five years ago, if you wanted to meet someone you would go out to a bar in Soho, East London or Vauxhall. Now you can just stay home and meet someone... You are part of the new generation; Grindr has always been an option for you. It's changed the way you approach a partner and your approach to sex. Your generation can find someone to have sex with straight away. When I was younger, the only way I could meet another woman was in a lesbian bar... This has all changed today though." (Interviewee L, retired lesbian resident)

"It looks like a catch-22 scenario. The fewer places there are to go out, the more people will just go on apps. The more people go on apps, there'll be fewer places to go out." (Interviewee J, manager of a gay bar in Vauxhall)

The manager of a cabaret bar in Soho (interviewee C) raised specific concerns over the ways in which dating apps have changed the social functionality of their venue over time. Comparing the past with the present day, the manager argued that in the past, their clientele would frequently visit the bar with the intention of finding new friends and potential sexual partners. However, in the present day, they perceived that dating apps had largely removed the incentive of their clientele to use the venue in this same manner (Whittemore and Smart, 2016). Similarly, interviewee L, an older lesbian resident, expressed the changes she had witnessed between older and younger LGBTQ+ generations, noting how younger LGBTQ+ people frequently prefer to meet online as opposed to meeting in the traditional social settings of an LGBTQ+ venue (Lewis, 2013; Podmore, 2013).

Interviewee J, the manager of a gay bar in Vauxhall, echoed interviewee C's views and further argued that the increasing popularity of dating apps had created a reciprocal "catch-22" scenario for gay bars like theirs in London. The manager underpinned the recent intensity in the closure of LGBTQ+ venues in London partly due to the increasing incentive for LGBTQ+ communities to socialise beyond the physical spaces of LGBTQ+ venues (Campbell, 2004). In turn, they argued that the trend of using online platforms has reduced the total number of regular clientele, which has ultimately led to the further closures of venues in the city.

This research found that in some isolated instances, younger interviewees noted the merits of using dating apps and online platforms as opposed to socialising in LGBTQ+ venues:

"I prefer the control that I have online. In a club, going up to someone is always so awkward. I'm quite introverted, so I find going out to meet people harder than online. Queer spaces online offer a level of safety, comfort and

> security that a bar or club sometimes doesn't. You just have to be careful with
> who you talk and meet of course." (Interviewee E, gay university student)

Interviewee E, a gay university student argued, in the context of their own personal life, that they felt a greater inclination towards socialising on online platforms as opposed to physical spaces. In this isolated example, Interviewee E argued that such platforms offered a greater degree of "safety" and "comfort" in comparison with frequenting LGBTQ+ nightlife venues, especially in the experience of making friendships. These findings reinforced the conclusions drawn from Collins and Drinkwater's (2016) recent investigation into the impacts of mobile technology on gay neighbourhoods. With the growth of online friend and partner search apps on smartphones designed for LGBTQ+ communities, the need for LGBTQ+ people to congregate in physical spaces has "reduced". Collins and Drinkwater (2016, p. 770) further noted that such "micro-level individual behavioural changes" would contribute towards wider "macro-level changes", in the context of the decline of LGBTQ+ venues.

Dangers of online spaces for LGBTQ+ communities

Despite this perceived increasing social trend within London's LGBTQ+ communities, other interviewees argued the dangers and harmful impacts of migrating to the internet instead of physical queer spaces. Interviewee N, a trans woman, noted how in her experience, online dating apps have cultivated a divisive and insipid culture within London's LGBTQ+ communities. Where apps are designed to make it easier for LGBTQ+ people to find one another, she argued that online platforms have paradoxically intensified feelings of alienation amongst LGBTQ+ communities. She further argued that these virtual spaces become largely exclusionary for the communities that frequent them. In her view, apps have reduced the act of socialising to a mere exchange of intimate images, and has encouraged anonymity. Her arguments were further supported by interviewee M, a queer activist and LGBTQ+ event organiser, who described the experience of meeting LGBTQ+ people online to be "vacuous". The activist further underscored a phenomenon in which gay men are mediating the Internet to meet up for organised parties beyond the physical spaces of LGBTQ+ venues.

> "As someone who has been on multiple apps, where it's meant to be a meeting
> space, it always comes back down the reduction of a person. You are reducible
> to your preferences. Are you a top, a bottom, slim, can you host or can you not
> host? There are more and more blank profiles on these apps. People introduce
> themselves with a face pic and then a dick pic. It's like we want to anonymise
> ourselves. In a physical space, you can approach someone and they'll see a
> human. However, on an app, you just become a common denominator. This
> culture is so insipid. The art of conversation is dying." (Interviewee N, trans

woman, LGBTQ+ activist, performer and artist)

"Dating apps make meeting new people feel vacuous. Sex becomes transactional... Especially with the many organised chem-sex parties and chill outs...

As gay men, for a long time, society has had this assumption that we are sex-mad robots, and in some ways, we are moving in this direction." (Interviewee M, LGBTQ+ activist and event organiser)

How are changing habits and attitudes within and towards London's LGBTQ+ communities impacting London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues?

The interviewees' responses to questions surrounding changes in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities were very mixed and unique to each interviewee's respective positionality. A small number of venue managers had remarked that greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities in Britain had produced a set of norms for LGBTQ+ communities where they perceived that their venue served no purpose anymore (Duggan, 2003).

> "There really is no need for gay bars like our anymore when everyone's metrosexual these days..." (Interviewee J, manager of a gay bar in Vauxhall)

Where older interviewees lamented the loss of LGBTQ+ venues in London (interviewee J), other younger LGBTQ+ residents expressed that they felt no pressure to frequent nightlife spaces that cater predominantly towards gay men, but preferred frequenting mixed venues (Podmore, 2013). The research revealed that it was difficult to determine whether improved attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people and changes in habits within LGBTQ+ communities, has contributed towards the decline of London's gay bars and clubs. This was due to the small, unrepresentative sample of interviewees that were researched and the subjective nature of many of the questions that were posed during the interviews.

Improving attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in London

> "Straight people don't need permission to occupy spaces. There is still a heterosexual default that still brings you back to the question: if queer people aren't inhabiting queer spaces, where are they going? The younger generations don't have the Gloria Gaynors...you don't have the same musical icons that represent your freedom and emancipation. Today, you can go listen to the music you want to listen to anywhere. Everyone loves Rihanna, everyone loves Beyoncé; everyone has the permission today to love these people. But

Beyoncé no longer belongs to black gay men; she belongs to straight white women. There are multiple possessions of Beyoncé today, Beyoncé wouldn't be where she is if it wasn't for black gay men. Back in the day, they weren't listening to Beyoncé on regular nights in regular clubs; they were listening to Beyoncé in their clubs, playing it the way they wanted to play it; with a whole culture around it...

"Young queer people today need to figure out what their culture is. You aren't activists as much as you need to be... It's young queer people that sooner would rather be, without having any politic about being. We keep on celebrating people who are perceived to be heterosexual, as opposed to celebrating people that are just openly queer. We are celebrating people who had been mediocre examples of heterosexuality and celebrating them as exemplary examples of queerness when they come out. That is at our disservice. We are not celebrating all the trans supermodels, who are out there fucking it up. For all the people that colour their hair purple, blue and pink and call that being queer; you're queering spaces, but you're not being queer. Is the younger generation killing queer nightlife culture? Potentially..." (Interviewee N, trans woman, LGBTQ+ activist, performer and artist).

In the context of British society, interviewee N criticised the continued assimilation of queer cultures into the heterosexual mainstream, describing it to be a "disservice" (Collins, 2004). In her experience, she argued that younger British LGBTQ+ generations no longer had the same animus and passion to "be queer", as LGBTQ+ generations had in the past. (Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009)

Interviewee N further noted that the continued assimilation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people disproportionately benefited these communities, at the disadvantage to queer and transgender communities like her own, in particular, her peers that belong to London's QTIPoC communities (UCL Urban Laboratory, 2017). These arguments further resonated with Nast's (2002) and Nero's (2005) theories which argued that, in the context of Western societies, white and middle-class cisgender lesbian, gay and bisexual-identifying communities are commonly bestowed with homonormative privilege that earns them greater acceptance in society over transgender and queer PoC. Using the anecdote of Beyoncé however, interviewee N highlighted a growing phenomenon whereby she felt that identities which fall outside this 'norm', have increasingly fallen victim to the appropriation of queer PoC cultures into the homonormative mainstream (Duggan, 2003). Questioning this phenomenon, interviewee N remarked that younger generations no longer felt the pressure to celebrate explicitly queer cultures, but instead champion the heterosexual mainstream. She concluded that this breakdown of the heterosexual/homosexual binary would potentially cause the demise of queer nightlife culture in the future (Archer, 1999; Podmore, 2013; Sullivan, 2005).

Queer nightlife spaces beyond the homonormative gay neighbourhood

Where certain venue managers and residents lamented the ongoing closures to the capital's established LGBTQ+ nightlife venues, other younger interviewees underscored the rise of new and sporadic queer nightlife events taking place in DIY venues in the capital.

> "I don't feel welcome in gay nightlife spaces in Soho. For the most part, these spaces cater to cis gay men, and I get stared at by these men… I've found my community in QTIPoC nightlife events outside Soho." (Interviewee A, queer university student)

The rise of sporadic, or monthly, queer nightlife events that take place in DIY nightlife venues has provided London's LGBTQ+ communities nightlife offerings beyond the capital's homonormative gay neighbourhoods. Interviewee A, a young, queer university student, champions the value of these nightlife spaces, underscoring the role these events have served in their sense of belonging. These queer nightlife offerings take place in nightlife venues which may not strictly position themselves as established or purpose-built LGBTQ+ nightlife venues. As such, this proves difficult for urban researchers to discern the shifting, fast-changing and "fuzzy" nature (Ghaziani and Brim, 2019, p. 104) of the capital's spatial (de)concentrations of LGBTQ+ nightlife venues over time. I would further suggest that the underground and evolving landscape of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues and spaces is rather challenging to objectively 'quantify', and cannot simply be mapped. While London's established LGBTQ+ nightlife venues have been subject to an intensity of permanent closures over the last several years, I believe the rise of LGBTQ+ nightlife collectives and events marks a new era in the city's nightlife.

Conclusion

Why are London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues closing?

This investigation was prompted following numerous media accounts which have reported that London's nightlife venues that cater specifically to London's LGBTQ+ communities have suffered an intensity of closures in recent years. UCL Urban Laboratory's (2017) study found that London had lost over half of its LGBTQ+ nightlife venues in the last decade alone. In conjunction with these reports, this study was urged by these claims and aimed to investigate the underlying socio-economic, socio-technological and socio-cultural causes that threaten the city's vibrant LGBTQ+ nightlife. This study utilised semi-structured interviews with a select number of managers of London's LGBTQ+ nightlife venues and event organisers, as well as London's LGBTQ+ identifying residents.

Socio-economic drivers: gentrification

This research demonstrated that processes of gentrification were amongst the greatest drivers for the closures to LGBTQ+ venues in recent years. LGBTQ+ venues have raised many concerns over being "priced out" of their neighbourhoods because they no longer can compete with the property rental market. Rising rents have contributed to the displacement of many LGBTQ+ venues and presented greater economic burdens for many LGBTQ+ venues, as they struggle to adapt to these changing socio-economic dynamics in the city.

The influx of predominantly heterosexual, high-income residents and businesses caused resentment and intensified social tensions in gay neighbourhoods like Dalston, Soho and Vauxhall with existing LGBTQ+ venues and residents. In some cases, the new gentrifying residents have issued complaints to local authorities about the noise levels coming from LGBTQ+ venues in these areas, which has further contributed to tensions in these neighbourhoods. The "super-gentrification" of many of London's gay neighbourhoods has further spoiled the social dynamics in existing LGBTQ+ venues clustered in these neighbourhoods, as new heterosexual gentrifying populations are increasingly seeking "cool" and "cosmopolitan" nightlife spaces in neighbourhoods like Dalston.

The failure of local authorities in implementing policies designed to protect LGBTQ+ venues against relentless gentrification in London was further cited as a contributing factor for the closures of LGBTQ+ venues. Many managers of LGBTQ+ venues expressed that local authorities have commonly given the new, gentrifying housing developments and businesses near their venues, the upper-hand over LGBTQ+ venues. They further cited that the legal procedures involved in order to close a nightlife venue permanently were unfairly in favour of these gentrifying forces.

Socio-technological drivers: rise in online LGBTQ+ spaces

This research found that it was difficult to determine the impact of dating apps and other online meeting platforms aimed at LGBTQ+ communities on London's LGBTQ+ venues. The perceived impacts of LGBTQ+ communities using online spaces instead of frequenting physical spaces remains uncertain and is deserving of greater attention by urban researchers. Some venue managers highlighted how they felt their businesses had suffered as a result of the growing popularity of these online spaces; noting how the traditional function of venues had changed in recent years to accommodate for this shift in changing habits amongst their clientele who no longer use their venue in this same manner. This was further compounded by some residents who expressed a preference for frequenting online LGBTQ+ spaces over LGBTQ+ venues.

Socio-cultural drivers: shifting habits and attitudes

Efforts by this research project to determine how changes in attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities in recent years have impacted on London's LGBTQ+ venues were very limited. Although given the constraints of this research, it found that some transgender and queer participants felt that improving attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities has only benefit ted cisgender gay and bisexual men and women; excluding sexual and gender minorities beyond these identities.

The research also further found that certain younger LGBTQ+ interviewees have the desire to frequent nightlife spaces beyond commercialised gay spaces, with an appetite to frequent more mixed queer nightlife spaces and monthly events. This phenomenon reflects a change in younger LGBTQ+ communities who frequent sporadic queer nightlife events that may not strictly take place in established LGBTQ+ venues, but rather nightlife venues that host queer events. This opens new lines of academic inquiry and is deserving of greater attention from urban researchers.

What can be done to save LGBTQ+ spaces in the future?

This research paper has highlighted that London's LGBTQ+ nightlife is under severe threat by the pressures of gentrification; whilst the rise of online meeting spaces poses more questions surrounding the functionality and future viability that physical LGBTQ+ spaces serve to their respective clientele. Although research on the decline of LGBTQ+ nightlife in London remains limited, this research paper contributes to existing literature that suggests that gay neighbourhoods in London are in decline.

Where we increasingly favour capital gains over people and have increasingly become dependent on our mobile phones, this paper emphasises the need for urban scholars to further investigate the impacts of gentrification and the increasing use of online platforms on LGBTQ+ neighbourhoods. Although recent efforts show that London's local authorities have managed to successfully protect a small handful of LGBTQ+ venues against rampant gentrification in the city (Neate, 2017; Ghaziani 2019b), the appointment of London's first 'Night Czar', along with the creation of an LGBTQ+ 'Venues Charter' (Campkin and Marshall, 2018, p. 94) – this paper further evidences the need for London's local authorities to take greater action to save the city's LGBTQ+ nightlife for future generations to come.

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